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Eveline Mandeville

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EVELINE MANDEVILLE.

Or, The Horse Thief Rival

by

ALVIN ADDISON

Author of "The Rival Hunters."

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1837

CHAPTER I.

"Why do you persist in refusing to receive the addresses of Willard Duffel, when you know my preference for him?"

"Because I do not like him."

"Do not like him,' forsooth! And pray, are you going to reject the best offer in the county because of a simple whim? the mere fancy of a vain-headed, foolish and inexperienced girl? I did not before suppose that a daughter of mine would manifest such a want of common sense."

"Whether my opinions of men are made up of that rare article so inappropriately called 'common sense' or not, is a question I shall not attempt to decide; it is sufficient for me to know that I have my 'likes and my dislikes,' as well as other folks, and that it is my *right* to have them."

"Oh, yes! *you* have rights, but a *parent* has not, I suppose!"

"You know very well, father, that I do not deserve an insinuation of that kind from you: I have always regarded your wishes, when expressed, save in this one instance, and I have too much at stake, in so serious a matter, to lightly throw aside my own opinions."

"Yes, yes, you have been the most obliging of daughters, to hear your own story; but no sooner does a point of any moment come up, upon which we happen to disagree, than my wishes are as nothing--a mere school-girl whim is set up in opposition to them, and that, too, without even a shadow of reason! A *very* dutiful child, truly."

"Father, how *can* you talk so? You surely are but trying me; for you *know* I do not merit the rebuke conveyed by your words and manner."

"Why not?"

"Why do I?"

"Because you are willfully disobedient."

"No, not *willfully* but *sorrowfully* disobedient to your wishes. Glad, indeed, would I be if I could comply with them, but I cannot. Nor should you expect me to, until you show some good grounds why you entertain them."

"Have I not already done so repeatedly? Have I not told you that Duffel's prospects are fairer than those of any other young man of your acquaintance? Is he not wealthy? Has he not one of the best farms in the country? What more do you want?"

"A man of principle, not of property."

"And is not Duffel a man of principle? Is he not strictly honorable in all his dealings?"

"He may or may not be honest in his dealings; I do not allude to business, but *moral* principle, and in this I think he is decidedly wanting."

"Why do you think so?"

"His actions and manners impress me with such a belief; I *feel* it more than *see* it, yet I am as fully satisfied on that point as if he had told me in so many words that he had no regard for the restraints of morality and religion, save such as a decent respect for the customs and opinion of society enjoins."

"Mere fancy again! I'd like to know if you expect to live in any of the air-castles you are building?"

"I think there is not quite as much probability of my inhabiting one of them as there is of Duffel's incarceration in the penitentiary."

"What do you mean, girl?"

"To be plain, I do not believe Duffel's wealth was honestly obtained, or is honestly held. You have heard of the Secret Gang of Horse Thieves, I suppose. Well, I overheard this immaculate Duffel of yours, without any intention on my part, conversing with a 'hale fellow well met,'--no other than the stranger you yourself suspected of being a villain--and from the tenor of their remarks, they belong to some clique of rascals. I could not gather a very distinct idea as to what the organization was formed to accomplish, for I could not hear all that was said; but I learned enough to satisfy myself that all was not right. I had not mentioned the circumstance before, for the simple reason that I wished to obtain stronger evidence against the parties, but

you have my secret--act upon it as you think best."

This conversation will sufficiently explain itself. A father desires his daughter to marry against her will, because a wealthy suitor proposes for her hand, but she cannot accede to his wishes, because, we presume, she has a romantic notion that *love* ought to have something to do, in making matrimonial connections.

The father was somewhat taken aback by the revelations of the daughter at the close of their interview, and left her to ponder on the subject, and, if possible, to ascertain the truth as to the guilt or innocence of the parties suspected.

Duffel, from some source, obtained an inkling of how matters stood, and seeing the father, had a long interview with him in private. What was the purport of his part of the conference, and the object he had in view, may be gathered from the following passage between father and daughter.

"So, ho, my girl, you thought to deceive me concerning young Duffel, did you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You would have me believe him a horse-thief and a bird for the penitentiary?" he went on, without seeming to notice her interposition. "Well, your well-devised scheme has failed of its object, and I have at once revealed to me its purpose and end, and its originator."

"I do not understand you, sir!"

"Oh, no! very ignorant all of a sudden! You forgot one of the most material portions of your revelation to me the other day, and that was *the name of your confederate* in concocting that story of the guilty associations of Willard Duffel."

"I had no associate, and I have never mentioned the circumstance to a living soul except yourself. Now, please be equally frank, and tell who your confederate is in this plot to make your daughter out a hypocrite and a liar?"

The father was startled by this bold demand, which, indeed, opened his eyes to the enormity of his child's wickedness, if his charges against her were true; but he had set his face to one point, and not being easily turned aside from a purpose, proceeded:

"I am not to be deceived by a show of indignation and virtue, when it is assumed for effect. You need not put yourself to the trouble of a denial or confession; I know who is associated with you to traduce Duffel; it is no other than the one who stands between you and the man of my choice--a poor beggarly fellow, to whom you have taken a fancy because of his worthlessness, I suppose. You understand who I mean. Well, he shall stand between me and my wishes--or rather between you and good fortune--no longer."

Indignation, surprise, wonder, fear, resentment, and a hundred other emotions filled the mind of the daughter during the delivery of this address; but amid them all, there was a purpose as fixed as that of her sire's to have a voice in the matter of her own disposal. But before anything further transpired, the father cast his eyes out of the open window, and seeing a gentleman approaching, said:

"There comes that beggarly dog now! I must go and meet him."

And without further ceremony or explanation, he immediately left the house.

It would be a difficult task to portray the feelings of the daughter at this moment. She saw that her father was

incensed, but the sorrow that this circumstance would otherwise have engendered in her bosom, was lost in the feeling that an outrage had been perpetrated upon her rights and sensibilities, and she felt the blood of indignation coursing through her veins, and mounting her temples and brow. How could she help these emotions, when she *knew* that injustice had been done--that she had been insulted by an implication of falsehood, when she was conscious of a free, full and honorable rectitude of purpose, and that, too, by her own father! These thoughts rushed through her mind with lightning speed, and the tears forced themselves to her eyes--tears half of sorrow, half of anger.

But now a new source of anxiety, mixed with alarming apprehensions, took possession of her distracted mind. Her father had left the house abruptly, and looking in the direction he had taken, she beheld him in violent conversation with Charles Hadley, the only man for whom she had ever entertained sentiments of tender regard, the only one to whose "tale of love" she had listened with quickened pulses and beating heart, the only one to whom she had plighted her faith, with whom exchanged vows of love and constancy. And her parent had just termed him beggarly! What could be the cause of his dislike? and for what purpose had he sought the young man in so strange and unaccountable a mood? and what was the nature of the interview between them?

Such were the thoughts that hurried across the mind of the young girl; and, hardly knowing what she did, she stole up to her chamber-window, which was in full view of the gentlemen, and placing her ear in a listening attitude, bent all her energies to gain a knowledge of what was said; and, having so much at stake, we must excuse the exceptionable act.

"It is not worth while for you to deny it, Hadley, as I have the most positive proof of your designs."

These were the first words that greeted the daughter's ears, and they sent a chill to her heart. She knew that her lover was impetuous, and feared the charge made against him, which she could not but perceive was a grave one, would cause him to commit some rash or unguarded act, the results of which, in the existing state of affairs, would be unfortunate. His reply, however, was calm, and his manner cool and self-possessed, and she listened to the remainder of the conversation with breathless attention and intensely absorbed interest.

"Pray, sir, will you be so kind as to give me the name of the individual who has dared to accuse me of a base plot? You certainly cannot refuse so small a request, and yet of such great importance to me, as it gives me the only possible chance of clearing myself from the groundless charges preferred against me so invidiously."

"I do not feel disposed to reveal the name of my informant, as it would lead to an unpleasant rencounter, and result in no good. Suffice it to say, he enjoys my entire confidence, and that I give to his words the fullest credit."

"Sir, I must consider this a very strange course for a gentleman to pursue. You are evidently laboring under a serious mistake, and it would give me the greatest pleasure to convince you of the fact, would you allow me to do so; but as I cannot do that, will you permit me to hold a moment's conversation with your daughter?"

"Why, sir, it was to prevent that very thing that I met you here. No, I cannot grant your request; and hereafter you will please consider my daughter as a stranger, and my door as closed against you! Not a word, sir; not a word--my resolution is taken unchangeably. I can not and will not permit my child to associate with those whom I know to be unworthy. Sir, I will hear no word of explanation! Go!"

Hadley felt the unkindness and injustice of Mandeville's remarks, and had he merely consulted his own feelings, he would have retired at once, and never again intruded himself upon the society of one who could show himself so destitute of the characteristics of a gentleman. But there was another than himself that must suffer should he go, as his feelings prompted, from the premises of her father forever. Love was all-powerful in his breast at that hour, and choking down the rising emotions of anger and excitement, he attempted to reason with the stern man before him.

"But you surely," he commenced, "do not mean to drive me from your door without a hearing? You certainly are too much of a gentleman for that."

"I mean, sir, that I will allow no base, thieving miscreant to enter my house; nor will I permit a daughter of mine to hold intercourse with such villains! And more than that, I will tell you, sir, that I am not to be dictated to, as to whose company I shall keep, or whom admit to my house, by any such worthless, gallows-deserving scamp as yourself!"

This was more than Hadley could bear. He had resolved not to become excited, but anger rose in his bosom in spite of his will, and he answered in deep, excited tones:

"Sir, no man can apply such epithets to me and go unchastised. I demand a recantation of your unfounded charges, and an apology for their utterance."

And as he spoke he assumed a menacing attitude. Rage at once filled the breast of Mandeville, and instantly rendered him altogether ungovernable. He raised his clenched fist, as if to strike the young man, and hissed savagely between his set teeth:

"Insolent villain! do you dare to insult me thus at my own door! Away in a moment, or I'll smite you to the earth without another word!"

Hadley stood still.

"Go, vile dog! I say; go!" and he drew back his arm to strike.

At this moment, a piercing shriek arrested the attention of both gentlemen. It was a deep wail of agony, as though it came from a crushed heart. It emanated from the house, and the first motion of the two in conversation was to start forward in that direction; but recalling the words of the proprietor, that he was never to enter his dwelling again, Hadley paused and turned away, but loitered about the premises till he saw the father ride off in great haste toward the nearest village, and speedily return, quickly followed by a physician; then he left, with a vague feeling of dread laboring at his heart.

CHAPTER II.

THE EAVESDROPPER.

As Eveline Mandeville had mentioned the circumstance of having overheard the conversation between the two worthies, related, in the first chapter, to no one but her father, it becomes a matter of curiosity to know how Duffel had come in possession of the secret. A very few words will explain the matter. Like most persons who feel a consciousness of want of rectitude of purpose, he felt desirous to learn what other people thought of him, fearing his evil intentions might possibly manifest themselves in some manner unnoticed by himself; and as he had most at stake with the Mandevilles, he was proportionally more interested in the opinions they might entertain respecting his life and character, than in those of any others. He accordingly resorted to the mean and cowardly expedient of eavesdropping, in order to gain a knowledge of the standing he occupied in the estimation of this family, particularly with regard to the father and daughter. He would approach the house unobserved and listen at some point, to overhear the conversations that took place in the family circle!

He was thus occupied during the conference of parent and child, above referred to, and learned, to his great joy, that in the father he had a warm advocate, but with equal chagrin that the daughter had no good-will toward him; a fact, however, that he had more than suspected before; but, having taken a fancy to her, and the prospect of obtaining with her hand a good property being a still stronger motive, he had set his heart upon making her his bride, even though she might detest him as a companion.

But when he heard the revelation made by the daughter to her father, at the close of their interview, concerning his association with the suspicious stranger and probable connection with some secret body of villains, and perceived the marked effect it had upon the latter, he became alarmed for the success of his schemes, and seeing the conversation was ended, hastened away, ere he should be discovered, to invent some plan whereby to counteract the effects likely to produce a permanent feeling against him.

After long and deep thought, during which scheme after scheme was suggested to his mind, turned over, examined, and abandoned, he finally hit upon an expedient that suited his purpose exactly, and at once resolved to act upon it. For this purpose he sought and obtained a private interview with Mr. Mandeville, as already intimated, in which he began the development of his plot as follows:

"I have sought this interview with no idle purpose, Mr. Mandeville," he began. "You are already aware of the deep interest I feel in your daughter, and how intimately my future happiness is interwoven with her good opinion. That good opinion, I have the best of evidence to believe, is being undermined by one to whom you have ever been kind, but who, I am sure, you would not wish to become your son-in-law, though he has the audacity--if I may be allowed so strong an expression--to aspire after your daughter's hand! Having nothing of his own to recommend him, and knowing that I am in his way, he does not cease to traduce me to your daughter on every occasion, and I fear the insidious poison of his oily tongue has already had a serious effect on her mind, which, if not put an end to, will turn her good opinion of me into dislike or even aversion. Why it was but a few days ago that he and another fellow, a stranger in these parts, and a very suspicious-looking chap, had a conference in private, of, to say the best of it, a very sinister character; and, would you believe it, this fellow disguised himself so as to appear the very personation of myself?"

"I was struck dumb, sir, when these facts were put in my possession by one of my workmen, who happened to see the villains and overhear a part of their talk. But the worst of the story remains to be told. Either by chance or design--and with the facts in the case I leave you to determine which--these confederates placed themselves near a bower to which your daughter had resorted but a few minutes previously, so that she, however unwillingly, must have heard a good portion of what passed between them! Only think of it! She for whom I would sacrifice all else, beholding me, as she must suppose, under such criminal aspects!"

This most artfully told tale was not without its effect upon the father. He believed it: how could he help it when so strongly corroborated by what his daughter had previously told him? At the conclusion of it, he demanded, with something of vehemence in his manner:

"Who was the despicable villain that thus dared to plot against the interest of my family?"

"Ah, there is the difficulty," said Duffel, craftily. "I fear to divulge names for several reasons. In the first place, I know you cannot but feel highly indignant, and will desire to punish the criminal as he deserves; but I have no proof that will stand in law, and--!"

"Will not the testimony of my daughter added to yours be sufficient to convict the rascal, I'd like to know?"

"You forget that your daughter's testimony would criminate me--that she must fully believe it was I, and no other, that was in conversation with the stranger; for I am told that the disguise was perfect, so much so that it is impossible your daughter should not be deceived."

"I see the difficulty."

"Well, as I was going to say, being unable to substantiate my charges, I would lay myself liable to prosecution for slander, which must be far from pleasant, beside giving my adversary a decided advantage over me. In the next place, my name would be coupled with those of blacklegs and secret villains, a circumstance far more to be dreaded than the other. But I have a still higher motive for wishing this affair to be kept quiet--your

daughter's welfare and fair name. Pardon me for being compelled to speak of her in this connection; it is, I assure you, sorely afflicting to me; but I shall strive to do my duty, even with the fear of offending before my eyes. As already shown, your daughter's evidence, either publicly or privately given, must lay upon me the weight of crime; in addition to this, I must now undertake the formidable task of informing you that my enemy, who I have already told you has an eye to your daughter's hand, is regarded by her with favor. Do not be startled; I am but telling you the plain truth, which, unless a stop can be put to the plotting now on foot, you will but too soon find out to your sorrow. This fellow, who desires to rival me in the affections of your daughter, has been pouring into her ear tales of every sort to prejudice her against me--and I fear with but too much success. Lately, she avoids me whenever it is convenient to do so, while she often walks out with my--no, he is too contemptible to be called a rival.

"You now see the state of the case; you see on what a slippery place I stand, and how much need there is of being wary and cautious where and how I step. My fair name is in danger of being tarnished; my prospects for life blighted; my hopes destroyed and myself suspected of being the associate of villains. And all this has been so artfully contrived, I find myself in the meshes of the net woven to entrap me, ere I had become aware of any designs being formed against me, or that I had enemies who were endeavoring to compass my ruin; and, worse than all, when these overwhelming truths are made manifest to me, and my very soul burns to extricate myself from the difficulties that surround me, and fasten the crime where it belongs, and crush the miscreant with his own guilt, I am tied. So encircled am I, that every attempt I might make to escape the toils of the cowardly foe who has laid his plans so deep and darkly, will only add to the horrors of my situation. Pardon me, then, for withholding the name of him who is striving to ruin me; but oh, if possible, save your daughter from his grasp!"

"How can I without knowing his name? Eveline has much company and many admirers; but of all the number, I can fix upon no one to suspect."

"There it is again! My God! what am I to do?"--and with these words, Duffel paced up and down in the greatest apparent distress.

"You surely can trust *me* with his name?" suggested Mr. Mandeville.

"True, I can trust you with anything, only that I fear your indignation will betray me."

"Never fear; for once I will keep cool at all hazards."

"I make one solemn condition: you must never, under any circumstances, reveal the name of your informant to either your daughter or my enemy."

"Why this restriction?"

"I have already explained why as far as *he* is concerned."

"But Eveline?"

"Oh, I have a different reason for desiring her to be kept ignorant of my connection with her friend's exposure,"--and as he said this, the fellow actually blushed and seemed much embarrassed.

"I do not understand you."

"Well, you see this friend of hers--I must again ask pardon for associating her name with his so frequently, be reassured I do it with pain--as I have already remarked, has ingratiated himself into her good opinion, and knowing me to be in the way of the accomplishment of his wishes, he has prejudiced her against me, and done

so in such a manner as to induce the belief in her mind that I am his bitterest enemy, and would use any means to do him an injury or blacken his character. Hence, if she were to know that anything came through me, she would at once set it down as false and slanderous, which would drive her farther from me and nearer to the other, thereby hastening the very calamity we would avert."

"I see you are right, having given more attention to the subject than I have. I will never mention your name in connection with this matter, to either my daughter or any other, without your permission."

"Thank you. Leaving all after action on your part to be as your judgment shall dictate, I have nothing more left me to do in this trying interview, than to reveal the name of the intriguer--it is Charles Hadley."

"_Charles Hadley!_" exclaimed the father in astonishment.

"It is none other than he."

"I could hardly have believed it of him."

"Nor I. Such depth of depravity is truly inconceivable to an honorable mind."

"I remember now, he has been somewhat familiar with Eveline; but I had no idea the beggarly dog would dare think of marrying her. I must see to this immediately."

"Remember to be cautious for my sake."

"Don't fear on that ground."

Thus the interview ended, Duffel having accomplished more by it than he had expected. The more Mr. Mandeville thought on the subject, the more thoroughly he became convinced of Hadley's guilt. Did not Duffel's statement correspond precisely with that of his daughter? and how could it be so without being true? It was an impossibility. The more he reflected, the deeper became his conviction of the guilt of Hadley and of the existence of a plot to defame Duffel. Another idea suggested itself: "Was his daughter an intentional or an unintentional party to these transactions? Might not her dislike of Duffel and her preference for Hadley induce her to seek for some means to accomplish the disgrace of the former?" While he was weighing this supposition in the balance of his mind, he chanced to see his daughter walking with Hadley, and their manner of conversation and the evident good-will existing between them, led him, in his bewildered state, to conclude that Eveline was not as free from implication as she might be. After harboring this thought for a day or two longer, he charged her with the crime of confederating to injure Duffel, as already related. Had he known that Duffel's story was made so fitly apt, simply because he had basely eavesdropped and sacrilegiously listened to the sanctitude of a conversation at the domestic hearth, how different would have been the result!

CHAPTER III.

THE INVALID.

When Mr. Mandeville entered the house, as related at the close of the first chapter, he found Eveline lying on the floor of her room, in a state of insensibility. All his efforts to arouse her were unavailing, and leaving her in the care of the distracted housemaid, he hastened off for the doctor. When the stunning influence was removed, Eveline was still unconscious. A burning fever was in her veins, and delirium in her brain. All night long the doctor remained by her bedside, and when morning at length compelled him to visit other patients, he left with an expression on his countenance, which caused anything but a hopeful sensation in the father's breast.

Days of anxiety and nights of sleepless watching passed away, and yet the father, with pale cheeks and heavy heart, sat by the bedside of the afflicted. No mother had she, that kind parent having several years before been laid in the cold grave; and the father strove to make up for the loss as far as he could understand the necessities of a sick-room; and, indeed, he became wonderfully gentle in his attentions. His touch was trained to be light and soft as a woman's, his step quiet, and his manner subdued. He would leave the room only for a few minutes at a time, and then return with an air of impatience, but it often happened that for hours together he would allow no one to share the duties of nurse with him, though the best of aid was always at hand. And he had a reason for this singular course of conduct. Eveline frequently raved in her delirium, and words would then fall from her lips which he would not have others to hear for the wealth of India. Why? Listen for a few moments:

"Oh, how dark! all dark! Nothing but clouds! No sun, no moon, no stars! When *will* morning come? Who made it dark? Oh, God! that my father, my own father, should do this!"

Thus would the unconscious child talk into the very ear of her parent, often wringing her hands and manifesting the utmost distress. Then her thoughts would take another direction, on this wise:

"What a load is on my heart; oh, so heavy! It weighs me down to the earth. Who will take it away? Alas, there is no one to pity me! No one will come to me and lift this great burden from my bosom; and it is crushing the life-blood from my heart! Hark! don't you hear the drops fall as they are pressed out? Patter, patter, patter! Well, it will soon be over; they will see the blood; yes, and *he*, my once good, dear, kind father; oh, may he never know that *his* hand wrung it out and wrenched my heart in twain! Poor father! he knew not that he was killing me--me his only daughter. May he never be wiser! Ah, I am going."

She would sink down exhausted, and lay sometimes for hours in a stupor, after these paroxysms of excitement, and the heavy-hearted father often feared she would never rouse again. But a higher stage of fever would awaken her from the state of lethargy, and then the ears of the agonized parent would be greeted and his heart pierced by words like these:

"Oh, hear him, father, hear him! I know he can explain it to your satisfaction. How can Charles bear such charges? I wonder at his patience and self-command. Father, father! How unjust! How cruel! Do let him speak! Convinced! Yes, on what grounds? Whose word is entitled to more credit than that of Charles? That's it! The name--the name of the base slanderer. I know it is some villain. Father! how *can* you deny him the only means of defense? 'Unpleasant rencounter!' yes, to the vile miscreants, no doubt. 'Confidence!' My life! isn't Charles worthy of confidence, too? His word alone is worth a thousand oaths of such heartless slanderers as those that stab in the dark! Don't get angry, Charles, he's my father. Nobly done! How respectfully he acts when so abused and insulted! All will yet be right. Ah! I'll tell him how I spurn the accusation! How my soul burns with indignation that his fair name should be assailed! I am so glad he is coming; I know he feels deeply the wrong--What!"

At this point the startled look of the poor girl alarmed the father. She bent her head, in a listening attitude, as if eager to catch every word that was spoken by some one in the distance. Ah, too well the wretched parent knew on what her thoughts were running. Too well he knew where and when the blow had fallen that smote his child to the dust--perhaps had opened to her the gate of death. A deep, stifled, half sigh, half groan escaped from her lips, and she murmured in a hoarse whisper:

"Father, father! you will kill your child. Oh, God! this is too much! Turned from our door! without a word of comfort! How deadly pale he is! My own parent to call him 'unworthy!' and then forbid him to speak!"

At this point a shriek from her lips would lift the father to his feet, the cold drops of agony on his brow. That soul-rending cry he had heard before, but it lost none of its horrors by being repeated. Alas, it told but too plainly of the wreck his cruel words had made, and he trembled lest only the beginning of sorrows was upon

him. How he blamed himself for being so rash and precipitate; and, as Eveline sunk back in exhaustion, the awful thought kept forcing itself into his mind:

"If she dies, I am her murderer!" What a reflection for a parent over an almost dying child! Who can measure the anguish it created in his breast?

There lay his precious child before him, prostrated by his own act, hovering on the very brink of the grave, life trembling on a breath--and he, oh, he might never whisper a word of comfort in her ear! Poor man! For all this there was no repentance in his soul; it was only regret and remorse--but oh, remorse how bitter! Not that his belief was changed as to the guilt and innocence of the parties, for he still had confidence in Duffel, and was fully persuaded of Hadley's evil intentions. He was glad that the designs of the latter had been frustrated, but blamed himself for the manner in which it had been done.

But the reflections of the unhappy man, whether of reproach, sorrow, or regret, were ended for the time by another phase in the ever-changing condition of the invalid. In tones expressive of the deepest wretchedness, the daughter, once more arousing from the stupor of exhaustion, would piteously exclaim, in low, sad accents, whose inexpressible woe pierced the afflicted watcher's heart as with scorpion daggers:

"Gone! gone!--gone without a parting word or look! Gone, and my aching eyes shall behold him no more! Gone, and the darkness comes over me! Oh, this horrid gloom!--this load on my heart! Father! Charles! why do you both leave me in this dreadful place?"

"Eveline, Eveline, my dear; your father is here; he has not left you; see, I am by you; give me your hand."

"Did somebody call me? Who is there?"

"It is I, my child, your father. Come with me; let me lead you from this place."

"Ah, it's a strange voice! I hoped it was dear father or Charles; but, no, no, Charles was driven away; he is gone forever! Oh, my poor heart!--and father, he has left me too: they are gone, and I shall die here. Oh, what will father say when he finds me dead? Well, it is best that he is away, for now he will not know that he has killed me. Poor, dear, kind father! I would so much like to say farewell before I go. It might be some consolation for him to know when I am gone that I love him still!"

Every word of these last sentences went to the father's heart. How strong must be that affection which could still cling to him so tenderly, though he had committed such an outrage upon her feelings with regard to another! The distressed sire bowed his head and smote his breast. Then he knelt down by the bedside and prayed. It was the first prayer he had offered up for years; but, oh! how earnestly he supplicated that his child might be spared to him. In his agonized pleading, so great was the commotion in his spirit and the emotions of his heart, that tears, the first that had bedewed his eyes since the death of his wife, streamed down his face. May we not hope that his prayer was heard? But the horrors of the sick room were not yet over. Eveline kept sleeping and waking, or rather, she lay in a state of stupor or raved in a delirium of fever, with occasional intervals of quiet, which sometimes lasted for hours, and excited delusive hopes in the heart of the father, that she was better, only to plunge him again into doubt and fear when the fever fit returned. He arose from his knees, and bending over his child, imprinted kiss after kiss, "with all a mother's tenderness," upon her brow and lips. O, how rejoiced would he have been could those kisses have conveyed to her an understanding of his feelings at that moment! How a knowledge of his affection would have gladdened her heart! But, no; for all the return manifested, he might as well have pressed his lips to cold marble. After a time, the fever returned in violence, and she resumed her distempered and broken discourse:

"Never! never! I will stay with you, if you wish me to; but marry Duffel, I never will! Force me to? No, father, you cannot! You may drive me from your house; you may turn me off and disown me, but you cannot

make me perjure myself before God at the altar. No, father, I will obey you in all else; in this I cannot, and will not. If I were to go and forswear my soul in the solemn rites of marriage, my adored mother would weep over me in sorrow, if angels *can* weep in heaven. No, never, never!"

"My child, my dear Eveline," said the father, tenderly endeavoring to quiet her, "you need not fear that your father will be so cruel"--and he laid his hand gently upon her, to assure her of his presence; but it had a contrary effect from that he intended; she seemed to apprehend violence, and cried out:

"Help! help! They are dragging me away to marry a villain! Will no one help me? Where is Charles? Leave me! help!" She began to scream very loudly, and Mr. Mandeville knew not what to do. The doctor, however, opportunely came at this moment, and administered a soothing potion, and she became quiet.

This was the recurring succession of events in the sick chamber for the first ten days of Eveline's illness; then there was a change; the violent symptoms of disease were reduced, and a state of dreamy languor succeeded, with rare intervals of excitement, and those of the mildest type; but consciousness did not return, and the father had the satisfaction of knowing that the secrets of the place were his own. He had now but little fear that others would learn them, but this gleam of comfort was overshadowed by the increased apprehensions that his child's sickness must prove fatal. Indeed, hope had almost fled from his bosom, but he clung with a death-grasp to the desire for her recovery, if for nothing else, that a good understanding might exist between them. He could not endure the thought of her leaving the world under a wrong impression of the *motives* by which he had been actuated in the course he had pursued. As his long and continued watching had worn him down, he now left the bedside frequently to snatch a little rest, and recuperate his exhausted powers.

And where was Hadley all this time? No fond mother ever hovered about the cradle of her sick darling with deeper solicitude, than did he about the residence of his beloved. He made friends of the nurse and maid, and from them and the doctor kept himself advised of her condition. Oh, how his heart ached to be by the bedside of the sufferer! How, at times, his spirit rebelled at the injustice of the father! But when he was told of his devoted attention, tireless care, and deep distress, he forgave him in his heart and blessed him for his devoted kindness to the invalid.

But where was Duffel? Let the sequel tell.

CHAPTER IV.

DUFFEL--THE SECRET CAVE AND CLAN.

For the first few days of her illness, Duffel came to inquire after Eveline. Finding that she was likely to remain sick for a length of time, if she ever recovered, he excused himself from further attentions by pleading the necessity of a previous engagement, which would probably require his absence for a week or possibly a fortnight. With apparently the deepest solicitude for the recovery of Eveline and of sympathy for Mr. Mandeville, he took his leave.

When a little way from the house, he muttered to himself:

"Well, I am free from the necessity of keeping up appearances here any longer. Now for the *cave*!"

In a short time, he was threading his way through the forest, mounted on a fine animal. A narrow path lay before him, which he followed for some miles, and then turned into the untrodden wilderness and wound his way through its trackless wastes. There were no signs indicating that the foot of man or domesticated beast had ever pressed the earth in those solitary wilds; yet Duffel seemed familiar with the place, as was evident from his unhesitating choice of ways and careless ease. He knew by marks, to others unseen, or, if seen, their significance unknown, that he was moving in the right direction. Having traveled several miles in this way, he

at length came to a beaten path, at right-angles with the course he had been going, into which he guided his noble beast. After pursuing this latter course at a rapid rate for more than an hour, he again turned off into the woods, and, guided by the same mystic signs as before, shaped his course with unerring precision, notwithstanding the forest was so dense and overgrown with underbrush as to render it almost impervious to sight, and to an utter stranger a bewildering labyrinth, from whose mazes he might labor in vain to extricate himself, unless, indeed, he possessed the almost instinctive tact of the Indian, or the thorough knowledge of the most experienced backwoodsman.

Why Duffel was so obscurely careful in selecting his way, will presently be seen. In the direction last taken, he traveled on until the sun was bending to the western horizon, when he came to a thicket of bushes and vines, so compact in growth it seemed an impossibility to enter it, even in a crawling position, without the aid of an ax and pruning-knife. Glancing this way and that, as if to assure himself that no one was near, a precaution that might almost be set down as a useless exhibition of timidity in that wild out-of-the-way place, so far from the habitation of civilised man. Duffel, when satisfied that no human eye was upon him, dismounted, and leading his steed by the bridle a short distance to the left, paused, looked around him again, and then lifting a pendant prong of a bush, with a very slight exertion of strength, he moved back a large mass of vines and branches, which had been with great care and ingenuity, and at the expense of much labor, wrought into a door or gate of living durability.

Through this gate-way he first sent his horse, then entered and passed through himself, carefully shutting the verdure-hidden door behind him, and no eye could discover the place where he had disappeared.

From this entrance, a road, some five or six feet wide had been cut out into the middle of the thicket, which was a large open area covered with grass and shaded by bushy trees, of small altitude, with wide-extended branches. Arrived at this spot, Duffel unsaddled his horse and turned him loose to crop the luxuriant grass. A dozen others were there before him, and as it was impossible that they should get there unaided, their riders were no doubt somewhere near. But this was something expected by the new-comer, as he manifested no surprise thereat, but appeared well pleased at the discovery.

After looking about to see that all was well, Duffel bent his steps toward a certain point in the environing thicket, and lifting a small bough, opened another verdant door, but this time of such small dimensions as to barely admit a single person. A narrow path led away from this artfully-contrived entrance into the dark and tangled recesses beyond. It was now growing late; twilight was over the world, but it was quite dark where the intertwined foliage of vines and branches wove their impenetrable net above and at the sides of the lonely path, and Duffel was obliged to feel his way with care. A few minutes' walk, however, brought him to the border of a stream of some considerable size, the banks of which formed the boundary of the thicket. Precisely at the spot where he reached the stream, was a projecting rock, covered with a luxuriant growth of underwood, vines and flowers, which overhung its outer edge and draped down, like a thick curtain, to the depth of eight or ten feet. This rock extended some fifty yards up the stream from the place where Duffel stood, and outwardly about an average of four feet. Its peculiar formation, however, was hid from view by carefully trained bushes at its lower extremity. This care had been taken to hide a secret passage, which led along the bank, under the table-leaf rock just described.

Duffel again took the precaution to cast wary looks about him, in all directions; then parting the bushes at its opening, he entered the secret passage under the rock and groped his way along. About midway, he came to a pillar-like rock, which entirely blocked up the path. Turning sharply to the left, he felt his way a short distance, and came to an aperture in the wall-like stone. Here he paused a moment, and bent his ear in a listening attitude; then gave three distinct raps upon some substance that filled up the gap.

"Who is there?" was demanded in a stern voice from within.

"A friend," was the reply.

"The pass-word."

"_Death to traitors!_"

"Enter!"

And a massive door was thrown back, through which Duffel passed and found himself in a dimly-lighted and damp entrance-way, which pursuing for a short distance led him to a spacious cave, which was now brilliantly illuminated by many lights that were reflected from a thousand polished surfaces of crystalline rock. So soon as he entered, a sentinel-watchman, whose duty it was to proclaim the names of all new-comers, announced him thus:

"Lieutenant Duffel!"

"Welcome to the Secret Cave!"

"Welcome is a brother brave!" was the greeting he received from a score of voices whose owners came forward and took him cordially by the hand.

Most of the band there assembled were rather good looking men; but there were a few dare-devil marked fellows, whose sinister countenances bore the imprint of crime and an expression of anything but honesty or goodness; hard-featured and hard-hearted, they had doubtless committed deeds entitling them to a familiar acquaintance with the halter.

Duffel had been in the cave but a short time, when the attention of all was arrested by the announcement:

"The captain! Let the brethren of the *Secret League* do him honor."

Every one present immediately uncovered his head and stood up, observing the most profound silence.

The captain did not enter at the place that had given ingress to Duffel, but made his appearance from an inner chamber, which communicated with the outer or large cave by a narrow passage between two pillars of rock. A door was nicely adjusted to work upon one and fasten upon the other of these pillars. When shut, the most experienced eye, unless by the closest scrutiny, could not detect its existence, so perfect was the workmanship, and so exactly perfect in match of color with the surrounding walls of the cavern. This inner room was set apart for the captain's special use, and no one dared to enter it, except by his permission or invitation. More of it hereafter.

The captain wore the same dress as the other genteel portion of the band, and there was nothing to distinguish him from the rest, except the military hat and epaulets which he wore, or omitted to wear, as circumstances or inclination dictated. As he advanced from the door of his chamber, he was respectfully saluted by all his followers, and then, by two officials, escorted to a carved seat, on a raised platform, at one end of the cave. There was very little form or ceremony used on ordinary occasions, as it was an established custom among the members of the Secret Clan to conduct all their affairs on the most republican plan. In certain cases, the captain's word was law, and the penalty of disobedience to it, death; but all the laws, rules, and regulations of the order were passed by a vote of the clan.

The captain himself was a full-sized and rather good looking man, with the exception of a sinister expression of countenance, which instantly conveyed the impression:--beware of him! Had Eveline been present, she would instantly have recognized him as the stranger whom she had seen and heard in conversation with Duffel.

After he had taken his seat, Duffel was placed in one at his right, and another of the staff in one at his left hand.

"Is there any unfinished business before the order to-night?" demanded the captain.

"None," replied an individual who acted as secretary.

"Any reports from committees?"

"I have one from the committee appointed to investigate the charge preferred against Mayhew, of treason to the order. It is brief, as follows: The committee, on whom was imposed the duty of investigating the charges entered against Philip Mayhew, beg leave to report, that they have had his case under strict advisement, and after a careful examination of all the evidence, and a patient hearing of his own allegations, found him guilty as charged. He will give the order no more trouble--his tongue is silenced!

"B. HUBBEL, _Ch'n._"

The report was accepted, and the committee discharged. No other written report was made, and the captain said:

"The secretary will burn the parchment containing the report just read, in the presence of all the brethren, that they may know nothing remains on record, which, under any possible contingency that might arise, could be used against them."

The paper was burned, as directed, in accordance with the usages of the order.

"What success have the brethren had in the way of *business* since our last meeting?"

"I have taken two horses," said one; "they are both in the stable of the order."

"I have taken one horse and fifty dollars," said another; and as he spoke, he walked up and laid down a pile of money on a salver, prepared for the purpose, in front of the captain. All moneys were placed there for distribution.

"Well done, Simon! How did you get the money? No foul play, I hope?"

"No, your honor; I was at Louisville, and saw the money paid to a 'subject.' I kept an eye on him, followed him into a crowd, and--put the money in my pocket."

This brief history of rascality brought smiles to the faces of all present.

"Here are five hundred dollars," said a third, bringing forward the cash; "it was won at the 'table.'"

Twenty others made similar reports, and when all the funds were handed over, there was more than seven thousand dollars for distribution and twenty horses in the "stable" of the clan.

"An unusually profitable month's work," said the captain, when this branch of the night's proceedings was finished. "I hope the brethren will not weary in their efforts. What other business have we to transact? Are there any cases of delinquency to report?"

"If your honor please," said one of the hard-featured fellows before mentioned, "I perceive Amos Duval is not with us to-night. Can any of the brethren give an excuse for his absence?"

In response to this inquiry, another of these ill-looking customers arose, and made known his belief, that the said Amos was not to be relied on--that, in his opinion, he was a traitor at heart, and would betray the order at the first opportunity.

"Are you aware," said the captain, "of the grave nature of the accusation you have made? Permit me to remind you, gentlemen, one and all, that it is made a crime by our laws, punishable by death, for one brother to accuse another falsely."

"I am well aware of our wholesome laws on this subject," said the insinuating accuser; "I do not charge Duval with being certainly disaffected, but I have my suspicions that all is not right, and suggest, that your honor and the brethren will do well to watch his movements. If in my over-zeal for the good of the order I go too far in this matter, I crave the forgiveness of the brethren."

"We appreciate your motives, but advise great care and the possession of very strong evidence of guilt, by the accuser, ere charges are preferred against a member of our order. The rule on this subject must and shall be enforced. Our worthy lieutenant, who often meets with our brother Duval, will see him and ascertain the cause of his absence, as, also, his feelings toward the order."

The captain was evidently not well pleased with the course pursued by these men in regard to Duval; most likely, he suspected there was a conspiracy between them, having its foundation on some ill will these desperadoes had conceived against the absentee. This was really the case, whatever were the leader's thoughts. The two had sworn to stand by each other, in all times of need and in all matters of rascality. Duval had unintentionally insulted one of them, hence the insinuation against him in the order. Perhaps their case will come up again in the course of our story. So soon as this matter was disposed of, the captain inquired:

"Are there any applications for admission into our order?"

"One, if you please," replied the secretary. "Abram Hurd wishes to become a member with us."

"Has he been adequately examined, as to his qualifications to be numbered with us?"

"He has, your honor, and the result is eminently satisfactory."

"Will the order pass upon the application of Abram Hurd?"

Voted affirmatively.

"The tellers will attend to their duty." Two men came forward; each received a box from the captain. One was empty; the other contained white and black balls. These boxes were passed to every member; that containing the balls first.

"White balls elect; black ones reject," said the captain.

When the voting was over, the result was announced: "All white."

"Abram Hurd is then elected to become a member of our order, and will be initiated at our next regular meeting. Let the brethren bear this in mind. Is there any other business to be transacted?"

"None."

"The order then stands adjourned until the first Friday night of next month."

CHAPTER V.

CONSPIRACIES.

After the adjournment of the clan, the members collected together in various little squads about the cave, and engaged in conversation, some in a loud, braggadocio, swaggering tone, others in low, murmuring voices, audible only to themselves, and still others in confidential whispers. Of those who have figured heretofore in the incidents of this story, we may mention the hard-featured, desperado-looking fellows who had conceived a dislike to Duval, as being very earnestly engaged in some matter among themselves, doubtless of a vile character; it would seem, too, from their manner, that others than themselves were not to be admitted into their counsels, or to know the nature of their scheme, be it what it might, for they kept casting wary glances about on all sides, as if with the intention of guarding their circle from intrusion, and their words from being heard by ears for which they were not intended. All the clan, however, were too busily engaged in concerns of their own, to notice others. This fact was observed by the ruffians, and they became less reserved and cautious in their movements. Had one been near them at the closing of their confab, he would have heard this fragment of a conversation among them:

"League or no League he's got to die!"

"Better be careful, or you'll have the cap'n down on you."

"---- the cap'n!"

"Beware what you say! that is treason!"

"Treason be it then! When Bill Mitchel says he'll do a thing he does it, and all the Leagues and captains in or out of h----I can't stop him!"

"Come, come! be cool and don't make a fool of yourself; it can all be done without so much bluster."

But, as we are not so deeply interested in the proceedings of these fellows as in some other of our characters, we will pass from them and their villainous plot, whatever it may be, and look after Duffel and the captain.

These two worthies had drawn aside, and were deeply absorbed in confidential intercourse. As their conversation is of considerable interest, we give a part of it:

"Well, Duffel, how is that affair with Miss Mandeville prospering?"

"Not so well as I could wish. The truth is I shall have a pretty hard time, if my suit wins at all."

"Indeed! I am sorry for that; for I was strongly in hopes of receiving a little assistance from you in the way of cash. I have been at great expense the past few months, and need a little aid just now, to finish the necessary fixtures for our south-western branch. You know it takes a mine to fit up a cave such as that was and is to be."

"I am really sorry that things have turned out as they have. I expected, when I mentioned this matter before, that ere this time I should have consummated the affair; but I am far less sanguine of success now than at any previous time. Mr. Mandeville favors my suit, but the daughter has taken a dislike to me and--"

"Ho, ho! I thought you were always victorious with the women."

"So I have been until now, and I am by no means vanquished yet, in this instance; but I have a rival in the way, one, too, that had possession of the citadel of her heart, ere I became a candidate for her hand; that

makes a great difference, you know; then, to make the matter worse, I knew nothing about the state of the case until I had spent a length of time in wooing, all to no purpose, because of my ignorance. But enough of this. If worst comes to worst, rivals must be got out of the way."

"Be guarded there, Duffel; a resort to foul means must never be had until every other method has been 'tried and found wanting.' Remember that. One murder will do more against us than fifty thefts or robberies."

"I know all that, captain, and shall not peril the existence of our organization, or even the safety of one of its members, except necessity compels to the act; but I think there will be no need of adopting extreme measures in the present case. I have a different plan of operations marked out, which, with your assistance and approval, I will first act upon, and if *it* fails, then something else afterward."

"Well, proceed; I am all attention, and will not fail to render such assistance as shall be in my power, though you know my time is limited."

"I shall not draw upon you for much aid; an hour is all the time it will require for your part of the performance. But before you can appreciate the merits of my scheme, it is necessary that I should make some explanations. You remember the conversation we held in old Marshall's garden?"

"Yes."

"Well, it turned out that Miss Mandeville was in the arbor and overheard a part of what passed between us."

"The devil she did!"

"Yes, but only enough to excite her suspicions that there was something in the wind--nothing definite or satisfactory, so that we may consider ourselves safe on that score."

"But, between you and me, Duffel, I don't like these suspicions; they are apt to lead to something worse."

"True; but in this instance I think such will not be the result. However, I must be frank with you, and I hope, if I have gone too far in any point, you will pardon me, for I did the very best that could be done under the circumstances, I think. As I said, Miss Mandeville heard a few words that passed between us at the time referred to, and when, a short time afterward, her father urged upon her the propriety of accepting me as a suitor for her hand, she must needs tell him of this little incident!"

"Worse and worse!"

"Not so fast. I know it is bad, and I knew then that something of a decisive kind must be done in order to relieve myself from the dilemma into which this little untoward circumstance had placed me. I remembered that on that occasion you were somewhat disguised, so that in your natural state, or in any other disguise you might wish to assume, it would be impossible to identify you as the same individual. Well, after long deliberation, and the formation and abandonment of many projects, I finally had to settle upon one, which, in your then appearance, compromised your character to some degree; but I hope the course I pursued, notwithstanding this unpleasant part connected with it, will meet your entire and cordial approbation. Indeed, had I not felt certain of this, I should not have adopted the measures I did."

Here Duffel gave the captain a history of the events narrated in chapter second. When he finished his recital, the captain said:

"Why, Duffel, you are the very devil at a plot! I had no idea you could act the part so well--I shall certainly use you hereafter. But now for the rest of your scheme; if it is half as well matured as the first part, I shall

certainly join you in it with all my heart."

"Well, you see, I have already deceived the old gentleman, but he must be kept deceived; it will not do to let first impressions wear off, or all will be lost. From all that I can learn, he is very tender toward his daughter since her illness, and it is not unlikely will yield to her wishes, if she recovers, more than he has done heretofore; but in order to keep his suspicions of Hadley excited, while he still retains his good opinion of your humble servant, his mind must be plied and his prejudices kept alive, so as to counteract the effect likely to be produced by a father's feelings for a suffering child. In other words, the growing sympathy for his daughter, must be met by a countervailing distrust and aversion toward Hadley. To accomplish this I have hit upon the following plan."

Here he drew the captain still further from the others, and, in low and smothered tones, imparted to him his scheme, which was no doubt a villainous one, as it drew from his auditor and confidant an exclamation to this effect:

"By my soul, Duffel, you are an adept in these matters! I never dreamed of your being so deep a plotter! The world and your friends, also, have done you injustice by not giving you credit for so ample a development of such rare ability to deceive. Success to your plans. I will gladly second them, as far as the part allotted to me is concerned, with a hearty good will. But what think you I had best do?"

"Taking everything into consideration, I think the best thing you can do for us all is to go down south, or to St. Louis, and remain for a length of time, perhaps till I send you word of what is transpiring in this part of the world."

"What will be done about our next meeting? You know we have an application on hand."

"Let the meeting be postponed; or, if you see fit, I will attend to the initiation in your absence. Choose yourself between the two measures."

"I will let you preside at the meeting, then; we have need of a few additions to our number, when we can find the right kind of fellows; and from all I can learn, this Hurd is made of the right stuff. See that everything is done strictly in order."

"I will attend to that. But had you not better announce this arrangement to the members present? They are all here yet, I believe."

In accordance with this suggestion, those of the clan present were notified of the captain's probable absence at their next meeting, and that Lieutenant Duffel would act in his place in the interim, to whom all reports must be made, and from whom all orders must emanate and be obeyed. After this was arranged, Duffel, who was highly pleased at the working of things, again drew his superior aside, and said:

"I have now a request to make of you, captain, which, if compatible with your wishes and convenience, I hope you will see fit to grant."

"I shall be most happy to grant anything in my power, be assured of that fact."

"I know your good will and generosity are great, or I should not ask the favor I am about to crave, which is, that you will allow me the use of your private room here during your absence. I have a particular reason for desiring this favor."

"I perceive so by your earnestness. I hardly know how to grant your request, without delaying my departure."

"Oh, never mind, then, I can manage to get along without it."

"No, you shall have it. I mind now of a method by which all necessary arrangements can be made to-night; and you may find it a very convenient place to tame some obstinate fair one. Oh, not a word; I understand these matters. Excuse me for a couple of hours, and I will bring you the key."

With these words, the captain went to his room, into which he had no sooner entered, than Duffel sought the presence of the desperadoes, two of whom--the ones that had taken a dislike to Duval--he engaged in conversation. When assured that no one was sufficiently near or attentive to hear what passed between them, he said:

"My good fellows, I see we are alone, and I should be pleased to have a little private and confidential conversation with you."

"We shall be happy to hear anything Lieutenant Duffel may be pleased to communicate, and feel highly flattered by his confidence," replied one of them, speaking for both.

"Thank you. I presume it is not necessary for me to pledge you to secrecy in regard to any transactions that may take place, either in word or deed, as you will feel bound by honor to look upon all confidential communications and proceedings as sacredly and faithfully to be kept in your own bosoms."

"You but do us justice in entertaining such opinions, and, without the asking on your part, we most solemnly pledge our word, even unto death, that what your honor may please to say to us shall be kept a most inviolable secret, which nothing shall extort from us."

"I have always found you faithful, and have no hesitation in trusting you again; but this time I have a peculiar request to make of you, one that may lead to business out of the ordinary line of operations to which you have been accustomed. Can I rely on you in any emergency?"

"Yes, to the very death."

"Are you easily moved by the tears and prayers of persons in distress?"

"Do we *look* tender-hearted, your honor?"

"Well, no; I can't say that you do; but then the looks are not always a true criterion by which to judge of the heart. A smooth face and a hard heart may go together, so may a rough visage and warm sympathies."

"You may rely on us in that particular."

"Even if the suppliant be a helpless and beautiful woman?"

"Well, I must confess, I don't fancy meddling with feminines much. What do you say to it, Dick; shall we pledge?"

"Dang the women! It allers looked kinder cowardly to me to see men turn agin' the weak things and abuse 'em; it don't seem nateral, but 'pears like a feller didn't remember his mother, or his sisters, if he had any. But if the lieutenant has any work to do, we'll do it, women or no women. Them's my sentiments, Bill, exactly."

"Give us your hand on it, then," said Bill. "And now, give us yours, lieutenant, and the thing's settled."

With this, they all shook hands in token of agreement, and thus their faith was pledged. But what a rebuke

Dick inadvertently administered to Duffel in his quaint remarks! How his vicious heart, bad as it was, must have felt the blow, and all the more severely that it came from such a source! However, the villain was not to be turned from his purpose, and so, pocketing the unintentional affront, he proceeded:

"As you have already heard, our most worthy captain will be absent on important business for some time to come, and during the period of his absence the duties of command will devolve on me. I have long been contemplating a measure, which, if carried out, will be of great and lasting benefit to our order. In order to conduct the affair to a successful termination, it may become necessary to imprison a female, a young lady of great beauty and accomplishments, in this cave. I do not know that it will require such extreme measures as this, I hope it will not, but should it become needful to go to this extreme, I shall desire your aid in carrying her off."

"We'll be with you, as we have already pledged ourselves; but we must ask, as a favor in return, that you allow us to settle a personal affair with Amos Duval."

"Of what nature? You know he is a member of the *League*, and that it is a crime to lift a hand against him."

"We know all about that; but Duval is a traitor at heart, and we can prove him such."

"Then proceed against him in the order, and I will stand by you."

"That's just what we want; first to prove him worthy of death by our laws, and secondly, to be allowed to execute the sentence pronounced against him."

Duffel could not but see that there was a discrepancy between the first and last request of these fellows, though they tried to make them appear as one, and he knew there was personal enmity at the bottom of the whole affair. His duty, as a member of the order, made it obligatory for him to discourage any ill feeling among the members; but he needed the services of these two rascals, and so forbore to reprove them.

"I will aid you as far as my duty to the League will permit, provided you will do me still another service."

"Name it."

"There is a fellow standing in my way in the prosecution of a scheme for the benefit of our order, and I would like to have him removed. I understand you with regard to Duval; you wish to be revenged upon him for some injury or insult, and that revenge looks to his death. You need not say, yea or nay; well, we will stand by each other all around. I will give you further instructions at another time. Hold yourselves in readiness at any moment to aid me. Meet me in the forest by the old oak, on the path to the 'Swamp,' every day, and be always prepared for either of the services I may require at your hands."

"You may rely on us."

Thus these worthies parted. What a series of villainous conspiracies had been developed in this one night, in that secret den of iniquity! Will these murderers succeed in all their plans? Alas! the wicked often triumph.

The captain soon returned, and placed the key of his room in Duffel's possession--and then the clan dispersed.

CHAPTER VI.

PLOTS DEVELOPING.

"Charles, Charles! Where is Charles?"

This name and inquiry were often repeated by Miss Mandeville as she still lay "between life and death," on her couch of fever, pain and unconsciousness, and the tones of her voice were so full of sorrow, the father's heart melted at last, and he began to relent. And when, after a pause, his daughter would continue:

"He is gone! gone!--gone forever!--ah, my poor heart!"--in accents more sadly plaintive than any words that had ever fallen upon the parent's ear, he said to himself:

"It must not be! Hadley shall be, sent for; she loves him, and his voice may call her back to consciousness. I cannot bear to think of her leaving the world in ignorance of her father's good will; better a thousand times that Hadley should be with her for a few hours. He may not be guilty after all. Why ought I to believe Duffel's word before his? Yes, and before that of my own daughter, too? and that without a word of explanation! No, it is unnatural. I wonder I have been blinded so long! Yes, Hadley shall be heard, and if he can show a clean hand, Eveline shall no longer mourn over his absence and my rashness."

This was going a step farther than Mr. Mandeville had ever gone before: for he had never been known to recede from a position once taken or to change an opinion once formed, unless the most positive evidence compelled him to do so, and then it was a silent acquiescence to the right rather than a willing change of opinion.

But a long continuance in the sick room, and the great distress of his child, had had an effect upon his mind, which no amount of reasoning could have produced--he was constrained to acknowledge himself in error, and brought his mind up to that point where he was willing to confess the wrong he had perpetrated, by "undoing what he had done amiss." This was a great achievement for one of his temperament--a conquest over self in a very selfish and stubborn nature--which gave evidence that there was yet an under strata of good, a foundation to the character of the man, which, though covered up by the rubbish and rank growth of pride and other unamiable dispositions, still existed, and was capable of exciting to good and noble deeds.

Having once gained the consent of his mind and formed a resolution to retract, he was not long in taking the initiatory step toward amendment.

He inquired of the maid and nurse if Hadley had been seen, and learned from them that he had been in the daily practice of asking after the condition of Eveline, and that for this purpose he came to a certain designated spot, where one of the two met him to impart such information as he desired. No sooner was Mr. Mandeville put in possession of this piece of news, than he resolved to meet Hadley at the place of conference himself, and then and there recall his words and invite him to the house, from which he had been excluded so unjustly. Verily this was a change!

Acting upon this resolve, he walked out in the direction of the place where Hadley was expected to make his appearance. As he leisurely sauntered down the path and neared the spot, his eye fell upon a piece of paper folded up in the shape of a letter. He picked the document up and examined it. It was directed in a bold hand to

"*Charles Hadley, ---- ----, ----.*"

On the back of the letter and above the seal were the words: "*Private and strictly confidential,*" placed in such a manner as to catch the eye at a first glance on either side of the letter. The seal was broken and the letter bore ample evidences of having been carefully and repeatedly read.

An irresistible desire to examine the contents of this paper took possession of Mr. Mandeville, and in spite of the breach of good manners, and the violation of every principle of honor, he retired to an obscure corner of his garden, opened and read so much of the epistle as was intelligible to him, which ran as follows:

"_Dear Hadley_":--According to agreement, as entered into by us at our conference in old Marshall's garden, I now impart to you the following information, which you will receive at the hands of one of our most trustworthy associates. You will please note the contents of this communication, so as not to fail in the execution of that part of the transaction assigned to you, and then burn the letter immediately, that you may prevent the possibility of its falling into other hands, which would lead to the most disastrous consequences--perhaps to the destruction of our organization. When taken, bring the horses at once to the rendezvous, with such other valuables as may come in your possession; and be sure that everything is done secretly, and in such a manner as to avoid detection. Be bold and determined in resolution, but cautious and guarded in action. Yours, ---- ----, Capt."

The captain's name was written in characters, as well as all the body of the letter, which Mr. Mandeville did not understand, and which were evidently to be intelligible only to the members of some band of villains, by whom the signs had been adopted as mediums of communication. At the bottom of all was a line to this effect:

"P.S. What will the old man say when he is gone? It will be using him right for the scaly trick he served you so recently; eh!"

What a change the perusal of this document brought about in the mind of Mr. Mandeville! The softened expression of benevolence, which had lit up his countenance with a glow, left it in a moment. A dark frown settled upon his brow and clouds of blackness over his face.

All his former prejudice against Hadley returned in ten-fold strength; for had he not the most positive proof of his villainy? Not a moment longer waited he for an interview, but with the letter carefully stowed away in a side pocket for future reference and use, he bent his steps back to his house, revolving in his mind how to proceed in the present emergency. That some great scheme of theft and robbery had been planned, with a design to be speedily executed, was evident from the contents of the letter; but where and when the act or acts were to be committed, it was impossible to tell, and consequently, a very difficult matter to decide upon a course of policy likely to thwart the designs of the rogues. After much reflection, Mr. Mandeville concluded it was best to lay the case before the magistrate and take legal advice how to proceed. He did so. In a private conference with that functionary, they talked over the matter. The justice was a worthy man and a friend to Hadley, and though the evidence was overwhelming and nearly positive of his guilt, yet he could not find it in his heart to condemn the young man without a hearing, and was equally unable to get the consent of his mind to make the matter public, thereby injuring the reputation of his friend, until he could see and converse with him on the subject. He advised Mr. Mandeville thus:

"I think the best thing we can do is to keep an eye on the movements of this young man, Hadley, as well as upon others who may be associated with him, if he is the villain he is here made to appear. If we institute proceedings against him, we have only this letter to rely upon, which is not sufficient to convict him, as there is no legible name at the bottom of it, and no witness to corroborate the statements. If he is guilty, premature action will give him all advantages, and enable him to clear himself; whereas, by instituting a strict surveillance over his acts, we may be able to get at the truth of the matter, and can then act understandingly in the case."

Mr. Mandeville coincided with the magistrate, and then they agreed to keep the matter strictly to themselves for the present.

"Shall I retain the letter?" inquired the justice.

"No, I wish to use it, first, and will then leave it with you," was the reply--and thus the matter was settled between them.

While the events just related were transpiring, and at the very hour when Mr. Mandeville was consulting the

man of law, Duffel was engaged with his two ruffian associates in a plot of villainy, which, for deep cunning and calculation, was superior to anything he had yet conceived and carried out, though it was but a link in the chain of criminal acts he had forged out and was about to follow up. The two held their consultation in the tongueless and earless solitude of a dense swamp, where none could hear their words or learn the purport of their schemes and give warning.

"You understand about the horses, do you?" queried Duffel, after he had been explaining some intended operation, in which horses were to be stolen.

"Yes, fully," was the reply.

"Well, the horses will be missed, and, of course, it will be known that *somebody* has taken them. I have a measure to propose which will throw suspicion on the wrong track and relieve us from any fear of being charged with the theft or even suspected of guilt."

"That's the sort! do the killing and get the halter around some other rascal's neck. Let us hear your proposition, lieutenant."

"You have not forgotten that I mentioned to you in the cave the other evening, that I might need your services in getting rid of a troublesome fellow who was in my way. I did not then expect to need your services so soon, if at all, in this branch of our agreement; but, as the horse business is agreed upon, and as the fellow may possibly be something of a hindrance to my plans of operation in the future, I think this will be a first-rate occasion on which to dispose of him. As I said, somebody will be accused of stealing the horses, and as it is known that you, gentlemen, have recently been in these parts, and as suspicion has long since pointed to you as having had a hand in several transactions held to be unlawful, you will, as a matter of certainty, be designated as the thieves in this instance, unless, by some master-stroke of policy, you can fairly show that you are not guilty. Do you see this?"

"It all looks mighty likely, certain."

"Don't it look more than likely? Don't it look just as if it could not be otherwise?"

"Why, yes; it does look so, that's a fact."

"Of course you would like to cast the blame somewhere else?"

"We would, that's certain."

Well, you can do it. I have already prepared the way, and if you will follow my instructions to the letter, the thing is done?"

"Give us our parts and we will act them to the life," said Bill, who had been spokesman for both, as was usual at such times.

"Ay," said Dick, "and to the death, too, I guess."

"Quite likely, quite likely!" rejoined Duffel. "Do you think you will have the nerve to perform this extreme act Should it become necessary?"

"Does Lieutenant Duffel take us to be cowards, that he makes such a white-livered insinuation?"

"By no means; I only wished to know if you were *now* prepared for any emergency that might come up?"

"Yes, any time and always. Go on."

"My plan is this: So soon as the horses are in our possession, we must convey them to the middle of the 'Swamp,' and be back by morning, or noon at furthest, *and show ourselves*. If we are about early, say as soon as possible after the animals are missed, and *take part in the search*, few, if any, will think of us as being the thieves, as they are pleased to term such operators, while we can, at the same time, turn the hunt after the horses in the direction in which they are not to be found, if we can do so without exciting suspicions of our aims. Mark that! we must be cautious and not overdo the thing, or it will be worse for us than to do nothing."

"We understand."

"Well, that is all on that point; but there is something more to be done; we must direct suspicion to some one else; some one must be accused, and *he must not be about*. You comprehend?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, I have the sheep already prepared for the sacrifice."

"Who is he, and where will we find him?"

"*Charles Hadley* is the man, and you will find him just in the right place--the dark passage in the road to C----; he passes that point every night about nine or ten o'clock. You know what to do with him."

"Would it not be as well to carry him to the save and imprison him? You know, it would not be murder, then."

"I had thought of that; but if we take him there, it will not do to let him out again, for, if we did, it would be the end of us all; so we should have to both imprison and murder him in the end, which would be much worse than to put him out of the way at once, let alone the risk attending the plan you suggest."

"Right."

"You see, then, we will have some one on whom to lay the theft?"

"Exactly! Huzza for Lieutenant Duffel!"

"Silence!"

"I beg pardon."

"Remember the time, next Thursday night, and don't fail to be at the 'dark passage' in time."

"We'll be there, don't fear; and the thing shall be done up handsomely."

"But what's to be done with the feller's body when he's dead, I'd like to know?" interposed Dick.

"Sure enough," replied Duffel; "I had forgotten to instruct you on that point. Take him to the sink in that black swamp, and be sure to make him *stay under*. We want no tell-tale carcasses showing themselves."

"You need have no fears on that point; once there and he'll never see the light again, nor the light him."

"I will now leave you to make such arrangements between yourselves as may be necessary for the work before you. Leave nothing incomplete, and be punctual to the very minute in every instance."

With this parting injunction, Duffel left his villainous companions, who began at once to prepare themselves for the dastardly business their superior had allotted to them in his schemes of rascality and black-hearted crime. This was Monday, in the afternoon, and consequently, but three days until Hadley was to be waylaid and slain, and immediately afterward somebody's horses stolen and run off, the crime of stealing which was to be laid upon the murdered man. This was a plot worthy of the wretch who conceived it, and, with the aid of villains as unscrupulous as himself, was about to be put in execution.

From the moment the command of the "_Order of the League of Independents_" (it ought have been named the Order of the League of Murderers and Horse-Thieves) was vested in him, during the captain's absence, he had resolved to make the most of his time and authority to bring all his plans to a crisis and an issue. Hadley was to be disposed of; Mandeville was to be blinded, his daughter, through him, forced to wed the rascal, or, failing in this, *she* was to be forced into measures, by fair means or foul, of which hereafter.

* * * * *

Friday morning was ushered in amid clouds and storm. The heavens were shrouded in a pall of darkness and the rain came down in torrents. Mr. Mandeville had spent most of the night with his daughter, and did not retire until some hours past midnight. Having been deprived of so much rest, during the previous two weeks and more, his slumbers were unusually heavy, and it was a late hour in the morning when he awoke, and the dismal weather adding to his drowsiness, he continued to lay and rest after consciousness had returned. His half-waking, half-dreaming meditations were broken in upon by a gentle tap at his bed-room door. In a moment he was wide awake, care for his child having quickened his senses, and demanded if Eveline was any worse.

"No, sir," was the reply, "it is only Mr. Duffel, who has called and inquired for you."

"Tell him I will be down in a few minutes."

Wondering what could bring his visitor at such an early hour, Mr. Mandeville hastily dressed and went into the parlor, where he met and was saluted by Duffel in the most cordial manner.

"I reached home at a late hour last night," said the hypocrite, "and felt so great an anxiety to hear from you and your daughter, I could not wait for the storm to abate, but hastened at this unseasonable hour to inquire after her welfare and yours. I hope I have not intruded so far but that you will pardon my unfashionable call and seeming impatience. How is Eveline?"

"You are always welcome, come at what hour you may. I can hardly answer your last question; I think Eveline is better in some respects, but she is greatly reduced, and when the fever leaves, will, doubtless, be very weak.--I both hope and fear for her. The fever will run its course, and if she has constitution enough to outlive it and recuperate, she will recover; otherwise the result will be fatal."

"It is impossible, then, for the most skillful and far-seeing to foretell the issue?"

"Quite impossible. Will you now excuse me for a short time? I have not looked after my stock this morning."

"With pleasure."

Mr. Mandeville left his guest around whose mouth a peculiar smile was playing as he passed out at the door. That smile had a meaning.

After a brief absence the host returned, and in some consternation announced that his best horse had been stolen during the night.

"Is it possible!" said Duffel, feigning the utmost surprise. "What villain could take advantage of the sickness of your daughter, to plan and execute such a cowardly act?"

"I am persuaded there are more than one connected with these thefts; indeed, I may say, I know there are numbers of thieves infesting the country. They are regularly banded together; and, would you believe it, that Hadley, of whom we were once speaking, is an officer in the band, as I have every reason to believe."

"That will exactly correspond with what I told you in the interview to which you allude."

"True."

"Have you seen him lately?"

"I have not."

"Can he be found this morning?"

"Ah, I perceive your thoughts are running in the same direction as my own. We will inquire after him."

The inquiries were instituted, but no Hadley was to be found; he had left the day previous, but no one could tell whither he had gone, or what had called him away. When these facts were ascertained, Mandeville and Duffel exchanged a significant glance, as much as to say: "Just as we expected!"

The horse stolen was one of great value, and Mr. Mandeville was resolved to make a desperate effort to recover him; and he was the more fixed in this determination, because the horse was intended as a gift to Eveline on her recovery, in case she *did* recover, and, also, because, as he believed, the detection of the culprit would expose the baseness of her lover to his daughter, and cause her to discard him at once from her thoughts.--Full of these thoughts, he offered a handsome reward for the horse, and a very large one for the apprehension of the thief. In prospect of obtaining these rewards, as well as to render a service to community, some six individuals banded themselves together with the avowed intention of ferreting out the matter, and immediately set out for that purpose.

CHAPTER VII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER--DUFFEL.

A few days after the transactions recorded in the preceding chapter, the fever left Eveline, and consciousness was restored to its empire and reason to its throne. But alas! what a wreck of her former self she was! Mr. Mandeville could scarcely restrain his tears while gazing upon her pallid countenance and wasted form. She was helpless as a child, and so weak it was feared the recuperative powers were exhausted, and she must die from prostration; but a day or two of careful nursing, aided by cordials and tonics, produced a change for the better, and in the course of ten days, she was able to walk in the open air and happy sunshine, supported by her father. How lightly his heart beat in his bosom, as the child of his pride and affection leaned upon his arm, as he gently led her whither she desired to go.

She had a little arbor in the garden, the vines about which had been carefully trained by her own hands; it had always been a favorite resort, and of late had become a thousand times more dear, because it was there that she and Hadley had spent most of their happy hours. So soon as she had sufficient strength to bear the fatigue, she requested to be taken there, and her wish was granted. What a throng of memories came crowding through her mind as she once more sat in that verdant bower! Every flower had a tongue and a reminiscence, and the entire place and scene spoke of the past in language mute but eloquent. How her heart beat with excitement, as the many associations of other days rushed over her spirit with the lightening wings of thought, and

awakened emotions of joy and grief. While with the past she was happy; but when the cheerless present occupied her mind, sadness filled her heart, while shadows gathered upon her brow, and tears in her eyes.

The father saw all this, for he watched the changes of her countenance with the deepest solicitude. When he noted the saddened expression that came over it, his heart was heavy, for he divined the cause. How his feeling of bitterness toward Hadley increased, as he saw the wreck of happiness he had made; and how he longed to expose the blackness of his character to his infatuated daughter! He felt certain that his child would cease to regard him as she had done, the moment she was put in possession of the facts which so clearly established his guilt. But it would cost her a severe struggle, and he feared she was yet too weak to sustain the shock.

At length, however, as he perceived that internal grief was preying upon her spirits, it occurred to him that the evil resulting from this eating sorrow, which was brooded over in secret, would be greater in the end than the quick pang, though it should be sharp and powerful for an hour or a day. Approaching her affectionately, and with great tenderness of manner, he said:

"You are sad, Eveline; you are not happy, I know you are not; and yet you do not confide your sorrow to me. Is this kind, my dear?"

"Oh, father!" and she burst into tears. He drew her head upon his bosom, and for a short period permitted sorrow to have its way, then inquired:

"May I share my daughter's grief?"

"Father, father, do not wound my heart afresh! I fear me now it will never heal!"

"Eveline, child, you misunderstand me. God forbid that I should add to your sorrow; my only desire is to relieve and heal!"

"May I indeed trust in my father? Oh, what a question to ask myself! Yet--"

"Yet what? Speak fully, and let us for once open our hearts to each other without reserve."

"Yet I fear I have had cause to make the inquiry."

"I fear so too, my dear; but let us now understand each other. I hope much from such an understanding."

"What would you draw from me?"

"The secret of your unhappiness."

"Do you not know it already?"

"I surmise the cause."

"And you think--"

"I *fear* it is because you love Charles Hadley."

"Why do you *fear* that is the cause?"

"Because he is unworthy of your love."

"Oh, do not say so! Is poverty a mark of unworthiness?"

"No, it is not; if he was only poor I would give my consent to your union to-day; but I am sorry to say he is wicked as well as poor."

"What mean you? You surely can allege nothing against one so noble, and possessed of such pure principles, as Charles Hadley?"

"Alas, my daughter, he has basely deceived you."

"Father!"

"I would not say so on slight grounds, but it is too sadly true."

"I must have proof, strong proof, ere I can believe that he is false."

"Could you bear such an exposure?"

"Yes."

"Then you shall have the evidence of his guilt at once."

Saying this, he produced the letter before spoken of, and placed it in her hands for perusal.

It would be impossible to describe Eveline's feelings while examining the contents of the letter. At first, the evidence appeared so conclusive and overwhelming her strong faith in her lover was shaken; but a second reading and second thoughts restored her confidence, yet she could hardly account for the change in her feelings and judgment, the evidence was just as strong as before, and she could not help acknowledging the fact; she only knew that she *felt* Hadley was innocent; and she would trust this intuitive conviction in preference to any anonymous communication that could be produced against him. But what should she say to her parent? How could she impress him with her own feelings, or even fix a doubt of Hadley's guilt in his mind? While she was revolving these things in her mind, Mr. Mandeville kept his eye upon her, and noted every change of expression that passed over her face. At length he said:

"What do you think of that?"

The question found her still in doubt as to what she should say in defense of her lover, but with the query came decision of purpose, and she readily replied:

"I think it is a forgery."

"A forgery?"

"Yes, so far as Hadley is concerned. I do not believe he has ever seen it."

"You surely do not believe I would be guilty of such baseness as your words imply."

"Oh! no, no; I do not for a moment doubt your good faith and perfect sincerity; but I think you are deceived. How did you get possession of this document?"

"Well, I must confess, not in the most upright manner, or rather, my knowledge of that portion of its contents which is intelligible, was obtained ignobly; but I cannot blame myself for the act, since it has placed such

important facts at my disposal."

Here he related the circumstance of finding and reading the letter, and then added:

"You see the whole train of circumstances renders it impossible that Hadley should not be the one to whom the letter was addressed. I found it just in the place where he was in the habit of coming, a spot that no one else frequented, and so secluded as to forbid the idea of a casual passenger dropping it. Beside, where is there another person of the same name?"

"I frankly own there is a mystery connected with the subject which I cannot explain, but that mystery does not convince me of Hadley's guilt."

"What incredulity! What stronger evidence do you want to convict him?"

"I desire positive assurance that the letter was actually written to and for him; at present I do not believe that it was."

"Love is truly blind!"

"Love?"

"Yes."

"What has that to do with the case under consideration?"

"It is not worth while for you to disguise the fact that you have loved Hadley; I know that you do or did, and your own heart knows full well how much it has suffered through that love. Alas, that I, your own father, should have caused you so much anguish!"

"Does my father really say that?"

"Yes, Eveline, and much more. If you only knew how deeply I have suffered, what anguish I endured, as your fevered and broken exclamations fell upon my ear while watching by your bedside, I think you could find it in your heart to forgive me for the unintentional wrong, it was my misfortune, and not my wish, to inflict upon you."

"Father, I have wronged you," said she, leaning forward and winding her arms about his neck. "Forgive me for accusing you of cruelty and unkindness in my thoughts."

"You had cause for such accusation, though it was farthest from my thoughts to injure you. I did, however, once think of forcing you to wed Duffel, and this is the only real wrong I meditated against you, and I was persuaded it was for your good; but I see differently now--you shall never be coerced into a union with any man against your will."

"Thank you for that assurance; it relieves me from one source of disquiet."

"I am entitled to no thanks; it is not a parent's prerogative to use violence in such cases, though I once held differently. And let me here say to you, that in all I have done my *motives* were pure. I desired your good above all else, and that I was endeavoring to procure happiness for you in the wrong way was only an error of judgment, the incorrectness of which I now see clearly."

"How much I have misunderstood you, and how much you have misconceived your own heart."

"True; the world, and the opinions of worldly men, had almost buried up the good that was in me; but the light of Heaven has shone into my spirit, the fog is dispelled, and I see where I have departed from the right way."

"Thank Heaven for that!"

"I hope, now that we understand each other, I may dare to make a request of you, which you may or may not feel free to grant."

"Name it."

"It is this, that you will hold no communication with Hadley until this matter is satisfactorily cleared up, or until he can show that he is innocent of the crimes this letter would fasten upon him."

"If it is your wish I will do so, though I should be pleased to know what he could say in his own favor. I feel strongly confident he will be able to prove himself innocent of all and any participation in the many thefts and other villainies which have of late become so common. Where is he now?"

"Ah, there it is again! I have not told you that Tom was stolen some time ago."

"Tom stolen!"

"Yes; he was taken very soon after this letter came into my possession, and Hadley has never been seen or heard of since!"

"How?"

"On the very night that Tom was taken from the stable, Hadley disappeared, and neither he nor the horse have been heard of since! Have I not strong reasons for believing him guilty, as held out in this letter?"

"I must confess, this last piece of intelligence staggers my faith."

"You will now begin to understand why I took such decided steps toward him, as a visitor here, on that memorable occasion which resulted so disastrously. I had the strongest assurance of his being associated with bad men for bad purposes, ere I forbid him the house. I only regret that I acted so precipitately. I hope, however, all will come right in the end."

"God grant that it may."

Here their intercourse was interrupted by the announcement that Duffel had called and inquired for Mr. Mandeville.--They returned to the house, and the two gentlemen had a private interview to the following effect:

"How is Eveline?" inquired Duffel.

"I am happy to say she is very much better."

"I am truly glad to hear that she is convalescing. What do you think is the state of her feelings in certain delicate matters?"

"I am persuaded her good opinion of Hadley has received a shock from which it will never recover. That letter, in connection with his present disappearance, was too much for her faith."

"And well it might be! I do not see how any one could doubt his guilt in the face of such evidence."

"Yet I think Eveline does doubt; but that the doubt will soon give place to full conviction, I am quite sure. Once you can fix a partially formed belief of crime in the mind, and if the evidence continues, especially if it accumulates, there is a moral certainty of its producing the effect we desire in the present instance."

"How long do you suppose it will take Eveline to forget any preference she may have had for Hadley?"

"I do not know."

"Do you not think the exercise of a little paternal authority would accelerate the accomplishment of your wishes? I hope you will pardon me if the suggestion is ill-timed or out of taste; it is made in accordance with a declaration to that effect you will remember to have made to me a short time previous to your daughter's illness."

"I have not forgotten the declaration to which you allude; it was made in the heat of a moment of excitement; but I am frank to own that it was then my determination to use parental authority toward Eveline, in case it became necessary to do so, in order to bend her will to my purposes. This intention I have entirely abandoned. I have reflected more dispassionately on the subject; and I now see clearly that my daughter has rights as well as myself, and that first in importance among these, is the right to bestow herself in marriage to whom she chooses. I will continue to give you my influence, but I have already pledged her my word that she shall be free to make her own selection of a husband."

"You are right, sir, right. I see wherein we have both erred in our former views; but then we were blinded, at least I was; for you know love has always been blind. I must crave your pardon, as I would the forgiveness of Eveline, were she present, for having entertained so unjust a thought toward her for a single moment. Be assured, if she cannot be won by gentleness and love, I shall never consent to make her my wife, though she is dearer to me than life itself."

"Very well; I still feel that all will come out right, and that a peaceful calm of sunshine will succeed the season of storm and clouds; but we must not hurry matters; time will do more for us than we can for ourselves, whereas haste might defeat all our hopes. At present, I do not think it would be advisable for you to urge your suit to her; her mind is not yet prepared to receive you with that degree of favor desirable."

"I shall act in the matter as your better judgment and clearer perception shall dictate, and hope for the best."

And thus the interview ended. How strange that Mr. Mandeville should be so easily deceived in regard to Duffel! and how debasingly hypocritical was the dissembling villain! Will he never be overtaken by his crimes?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "DARK PASSAGE"--THE THEFT.

On the appointed night, the two ruffians, Bill and Dick, repaired to the "dark passage," according to arrangement, and with daggers and pistols (the latter only to be used in case of necessity, as the report of firearms might lead to detection,) awaited the arrival of their victim. About nine o'clock, the sound of horses' feet, approaching at a rapid gait, gave them to understand the hour of their deadly work was at hand. Taking their stand, one on either side of the road, they silently awaited the horseman's coming.

It was a dismal place, a low, wet valley, densely shaded and overgrown by trees, whose thick foliage scarcely admitted a single sunbeam to penetrate to the earth beneath. This gloomy passage was about half a mile in

extent, and at its dark center the villains had posted themselves. Their plans were all fully matured, even down to the minute details. They were both to spring out and seize the horse by the bridle; then, while Bill held the animal, Dick was to strike the fatal blow to the heart of the rider. Not a word was to be spoken. As the man entered the passage, his pace was slackened, and he kept his eye about him, as if in fear of an attack. When within about a hundred yards of the concealed assassins, Bill whispered to his companion across the road:

"Now, Dick, make sure work of it; let the first blow tell the tale, while it silences his tongue!"

"Never fear for me; take care of your own part, and I'll do the same by mine," was Dick's reply.

In a few seconds, the horseman came abreast of the ambuscaders, both of whom sprang out at the same moment, and seizing the bridle-reins, checked the horse so suddenly as to throw him back on his haunches, to the imminent peril of the rider, who was nearly thrown from his seat. In a moment, the glittering blade of steel was at his breast. Just then, the moon broke through a rift in the clouds, and being directly in a line with the road, shone fully on the group and into the face of the traveler.

"By Jove! it's the wrong man!" exclaimed Dick, as he lowered his blade and looked at Bill inquiringly.

"So it is!" said Bill; and then, addressing the stranger, continued: "Beg pardon, sir, for our interruption. We have mistaken you for a notorious villain, thief, and robber, who was to pass this way to-night, and who, as the laws are too weak to protect us, we have determined to punish ourselves. The fact is, these, horse-thieves must be dealt with, and that speedily, too, or there will be no such thing as safety for our stock. For our parts, we have resolved to defend our property at all hazards, and others will have to do the same thing, or keep nothing of their own, for these thieves are banded together, and they are so numerous, and some of them so respectable, it is impossible to convict them before a jury; they swear each other off. Hope you will not think evil of our plans."

"To tell the truth, gentlemen, (for I take you to be gentlemen in disguise,) there is too much reality in what you say. I fear we shall have to take the law into our own hands, for these depredators are becoming so numerous and bold, there is no telling to what length their wickedness may run. These thieving operations *must* be stopped, cost what it may; but it seems to me this is a bad place to commence the work; it looks too much like secret murder. When I have recourse to the last resort in defense of my property it will be upon my own promises, and while the villains are in the act of crime."

"That is doubtless the best method in all ordinary cases; but the rascal whom we were expecting to pass this way to-night is too cunning to be caught at his work. He is well known to be guilty, and has more than once been arrested and tried; but always with the same result; his friends have sworn him clear; and now, we've sworn he shall go free no longer."

"Well, be careful, and don't kill the wrong man."

"We'll take care. Excuse the manner in which our introduction was made."

"Certainly, gentlemen, certainly; but don't miss your man again."

"We'll not."

"Good night."

"Good night, and a pleasant journey for you."

The man rode on and was soon out of hearing. He was the more easily deceived as to the character of his

assailants, because he knew that the sentiments they expressed were held almost universally by the honest portion of the community, and already several thieves had been shot at, some of whom were known to have been wounded, though not fatally. The miscreants knew this state of public feeling, and hence their ruse. When the man was beyond hearing, Bill said, exultingly:

"Didn't I wool the fellow's eyes beautifully?"

"It was well done, Bill, well done--the best job you ever bossed. But say, do you know the man?"

"No, not from the devil."

"Well, sir, it's 'Squire Williams, sure's I'm a living son of my mother!"

"Squire Williams?"

"Yes, it is. I've known him ever since I had such hard work to get off from him; I tell you, when I thought of the trial, I felt mightily like payin' him off for his advice on that occasion, after I was cleared; but, think's I, it won't do."

"It's well you come to that conclusion; we don't want over one dead man on our hands at once. But say, what shall we do?"

"Wait a while longer for that Hadley, and if he don't come, then go to meet Duffel."

This suggestion was accordingly acted upon. After remaining nearly three hours longer for their victim, who came not, they repaired to the place of rendezvous, to report to their employer and superior, and finish up the other branch of the night's business.

Arrived at the spot, they found Duffel pacing up and down in a state of impatience and disquietude. So soon as he was cognizant of their presence, he inquired:

"How now? What has kept you so late? Is all right?"

"If your honor will take breath a moment between the questions, we will endeavor to answer them," replied Bill.

"Well, proceed. Did you do the job?"

"No, not exactly as laid down in the bill, but--"

"What! did you let him go?"

"Why, no, your honor, we didn't let him go, for the very good reason that he didn't give us a chance to show him so much mercy."

"How?"

"You see the fellow didn't come himself, but sent a substitute!"

"The deuce, he did! How's that?"

"That's what we can't tell; we only know, that instead of young Hadley, we came within an ace of killing

'Squire Williams!'

"Squire Williams!"

"Yes, sir. He came along at the precise hour that should have brought the other, and it being too dark to distinguish one man from another, or from old Nick for that matter, we fell on to him, and but for the merest chance would have finished him."

Here the enactment of the early part of the evening was rehearsed in full.

"It is well you got off so easily, and I must give you credit for your ingenuity; but I am exceedingly sorry the bird we were after has escaped. However, as that cannot be helped or amended just now, we will proceed with the rest of our work."

"What hour of the night is it?"

"About one o'clock; and that reminds me of the fact that we will not have time to take all the stock to-night; we shall, therefore, confine our operations to a single item--the taking of Mandeville's horse."

"Mandeville's?"

"Yes; why not?"

"I thought your honor was playing for another stake in that quarter?"

"And if I am?"

"Why, I just thought it was a queer way of gaining the old gentleman's good will--that thing of taking his horse."

"Not so queer as you might think for."

"Oh! I remember now; excuse me; this Hadley was to be made the scapegoat; you were to get a horse and have the blame of the theft thrown on a rival, whose non-appearance should condemn him. I see it all now, though I did not perceive this delicate undercurrent in the plan of affairs. Lieutenant Duffel against the world, I say!"

"Silence! Dick, you are familiar with Mr. Mandeville's premises, I believe?"

"Yes, tolerably so."

"Well, I want you to bring Tom here in about half an hour; and do the job up nicely, too."

"I'll try, sir."

"You must *do* it. Be quick; it is going to rain soon, and we must get him away before the tracks will show; but don't so much as disturb the sleeping grasshoppers by your noise."

"All right."

"Go now, and be here again in the shortest possible time. Bill and I will arrange matters for future operations while you are gone."

Dick hastened away to do the bidding of his master, and Duffel communicated to Bill the following piece of intelligence:

"I was very much in hopes the whole of our plan for to-night would succeed, though I heard that in the evening which caused me to have misgivings on the subject. I learned that Hadley received intelligence that his mother and uncle were both sick and not expected to recover.--They live in Philadelphia: the uncle, his mother's brother, a bachelor, by the way, with whom she is living, is reputed wealthy, and, it is said, has willed his property to young Hadley. The news of these events was brought to him yesterday, and he made immediate preparations to go east, but did not expect to get off until this morning. I presume, however, he must have started yesterday in the after part of the day; but be this as it may, I wish you and Dick to follow after him, and don't fail to finish him somehow and somewhere. If you could only manage to get ahead of him and waylay him at some point in the mountains, it would be the best place for you to do the deed and conceal the commission of the act."

"Yes, if he should be alone."

"Which will most likely be the case, at least a portion of the time. But should no such opportunity occur, or should you fail to get beyond him on the way, you must watch for him in the city; follow him as closely as his shadow, and in some dark alley, or at some unseasonable hour, put him out of the way."

"Exactly."

"You understand that this *must* be done, do you?"

"If Lieutenant Duffel says so."

"Well, I do say so, most emphatically. I am more anxious than ever to have him settled, since this new phase of affairs has come up."

"I understand; but when are we to start?"

"Early in the morning. We will find out as soon as possible whether he started yesterday; then you must show yourselves for a little while, as was before determined; and as soon afterward as possible be off. Be sure to get on the right track, and don't lose it."

"Never fear on that head. We will follow him as the lion does his prey."

"Well, I leave the matter with you; see that you acquit yourself as a good soldier. Give Dick such instruction as may be needed.--Here he comes."

Dick rode up on the horse he had stolen, and they all immediately repaired to the swamp, where the scheme of villainy had been planned, in the middle of which the horse was concealed for the present, as they were unable to take him further then without incurring great risk of detection.

The next morning after mingling awhile with the indignant crowd of citizens, who were collected together on hearing of the theft, and pouring out invectives on the "villain of a thief" in no measured quantity, the two ruffians, Bill and Dick, set out on their errand of death? Learning that Hadley had started the previous afternoon, they followed after him on two of the fleetest horses in the possession of the clan.

It might be well enough to remark, that in those early days most of the traveling was done on foot or on horseback.

CHAPTER IX.

On the evening of the second day of their pursuit, Dick and Bill found themselves in the immediate presence of their victim, they having reached the same inn at which he had already put up for the night. The meeting was unexpected to them, and at first they feared it might frustrate their designs; but as they had taken the precaution to throw off their usual habiliments and character, and to assume the dress and address of gentlemen, Hadley did not recognize them, though the impression fastened itself on his mind, that he must have seen them and heard their voices before, but where and when he could not remember.

The villains, from his musing manner, half suspected that he was trying to call to mind who they were, and one remarked to the other that they had better go out and see after their horses; but it was more for the purpose of consulting about the affair they had in hand than for the good of their beasts, that they wished to leave the house. When assured that they were beyond hearing distance, said Bill to Dick:

"Well, we have treed the game at any rate."

"Yes, but I don't see as it signifies much if we have, for we can't keep him treed, nor bring him down neither, in this place."

"But we know where he is, and that is something."

"I take it, it's but little. What can we do with him?"

"Why, we can get ahead of him and select our place for the next meeting, and then--"

"How do you know that? We can't tell which road he will take."

"We'll find out, though."

"How?"

"By asking him."

"And exciting his suspicions. Yes, a pretty way of doing, certain."

"Never do you mind; leave that to me; and if we don't know all we want to know by morning, you may call Bill Mitchel a fool; and the fellow won't suspect anything, either."

"Well, go ahead, but don't make a fool of yourself, nor spoil the job we have in hand, neither."

"I'll take care for that; only you be cautious, and don't say too much, and when you do speak, throw off your rough manners and talk and act like a gentleman. I am afraid you will forget yourself, and instead of being Mr. Richard, will act the part of ruffian Dick."

"Never do you fear; 'ruffian Dick' knows what he's about, and you'll see how handsomely he can act 'Mr. Richard' to-night."

"Very well."

With this understanding between them, they returned to the inn, which, by the way, was a very primitive establishment, not only in construction, but also in the character of the entertainment.

Bill worked his card so as to draw Hadley into conversation, and incidentally, but designedly, remarked that they (himself and his companion) had passed through C---- two days before.

"Indeed!" said Hadley; "I am well acquainted in C----. Did you hear any news there?"

"Well, no, not in C----, but a little way beyond the town a horse had been stolen the night previous, which caused considerable excitement in the neighborhood."

"How far beyond was it?"

"About five or six miles, I should think."

"Did you learn any of the particulars?"

"Why, yes, pretty much all of them, I think."

"I know pretty much everybody in that region, and it may be that it was some of my friends from whom the horse was stolen. What was the owner's name, if you heard it?"

"Mandeville, I think; yes, Mandeville."

"Mandeville! I know him well. Has he any idea who took the horse?"

"I think he *suspects* some one for the theft--a young man that had been in the neighborhood, but disappeared the same night of the theft, and no one knew where he had gone."

"In the neighborhood," repeated Hadley, musingly, as if thinking aloud. "It must have been the stranger; and yet I thought he was gone some time ago."

"I don't think it was a stranger; they told us his name, but I do not know whether I can call it to mind or not. Let me see, I think it was Hardy or Hartly, or some such name."

At this juncture, Dick caught Bill's eye, and gave him a look, as much as to say: "What the d---l do you mean?--Are you going to excite his suspicions and send him back home to clear himself from imputation?" And Bill as plainly replied by looks: "Never do you mind. I'll fix it up right."

While these magnetic looks were exchanged between the murderous reprobates, Hadley was engaged in trying to think if there was anybody by either of the names mentioned in the vicinity where Mandeville lived, but he could remember no one. All at once the thought struck him that he himself might be the person accused, and the bare idea that such *might* be the case sent the blood to his heart and a cold shudder through his frame.--He was pale as marble, for a moment, and the rascals saw it. Mastering his emotions, he inquired calmly:

"The name you heard wasn't *Hadley*, was it?"

"No, that wasn't it. I heard his name mentioned, but they said he had started for Philadelphia the day before the theft."

At this announcement, in spite of himself, Hadley drew a sigh of relief, and as he did so Bill gave Dick a knowing look. Hadley replied:

"Perhaps the name was Huntly?"

"That's it!" said Bill; "that's the name; I remember it now."

"I should hardly have thought him capable of such a crime."

"Just what the people said, exactly."

"And to take advantage of the sickness of Mandeville's daughter, at that; I can hardly believe it of him."

"You talk precisely as his neighbors talked."

"I do not believe he is guilty; no, I am sure he is not. There are others I would suspect a thousand times of such an act before I would him."

"Well, I am sure I can't tell as to that. But, to change the subject, may I be so bold as to inquire which way you are traveling?"

"Certainly, sir; I am on my way to Philadelphia."

"I was in hopes you were going the same way as ourselves; perhaps you are; we are bound for Wheeling, Virginia.--Do you go that way?"

"No, I go by way of Pittsburgh."

"Do you tarry long at Pittsburgh? We may have to go there before we return."

"No sir. My mother is very sick at her brother's house in Philadelphia, and I shall hasten to her with all dispatch."

"Then, I perceive, we shall have to part company."

"I am sorry for that, as I should be pleased to have companionship on my lonely journey."

Having found out all that concerned his purpose, Bill changed the conversation, and all of them being fatigued with hard riding throughout the day, the three soon retired for the night. Bill and Dick roomed together, and when alone the former said:

"Didn't I do it up about the right way, Dick?"

"Better than I expected; but, ---- me, if I didn't think you'd got on the wrong track once."

"I knew what I was at all the time; but I saw you were scared."

"Well, what's to be done next?"

"We must get ahead of him, and do the thing up while he is crossing the mountains, as Lieutenant Duffel suggested, and as I told you before."

"We can do that easy enough; but what do you think; shan't we make Duffel side with us in the Duval affair for putting us to so much trouble?"

"Yes, and that is one reason why I wish to get through with this job as soon as possible. We must get back in time for the League meeting somehow."

"We'll have to ride like the d---l, then; for the meeting is on Friday night week."

"Well, we must be there if it is next Friday night, and we must finish our work before we go."

"I'm with you."

"And then, if Duffel don't assist us to fix Duval, or at least, if he don't let us have our own way in the matter, we will raise Hadley's ghost before his eyes, and threaten to 'blow' on him."

"He'll do it."

"He shall do it."

"Well, as that's settled, let's go to sleep."

"Yes, for we have a hard day's ride before us to-morrow."

* * * * *

The shades of evening were gathering over the rugged steeps and deep dells of the Alleghanies, as two horsemen, leaving the summit of the mountains, descended to a deep, dark valley, shaded and environed by a dense growth of pine and other wood, on the eastern slope leading to the Atlantic. As they entered this dismal looking spot, one of them broke the silence by remarking:

"This is the place."

"Shall we rob him after he is dead?" inquired the other.

"Certainly. He has a pile about him; and it was for this I was trying, when he accused me of attempting to rob him, and resenting the accusation brought on the quarrel, and with it the insult. Yes, I must have his life and his money, too."

"I'm with you. But hold! What's that? Horses' feet, as I'm alive. He's coming; we must be quick to our place of concealment."

In the briefest possible time their horses led out of sight of the road, and hid away among the bushes, while the two murderers took their stand at the side of the road in ambush, to await the arrival of their victim.

They had only a few minutes to wait, when other two horsemen made their appearance, and took their stations exactly as they had done, but about a hundred yards further up the mountain.

"What the d---l does this mean?" inquired one of the other.

"I don't know, unless some others have an eye on the gold, as well as ourselves."

"That's it, I'll warrant. Good! They may do the murdering, and we'll rush up in time to secure the booty, by frightening them away. Then we can take the body to the next tavern, and tell how we came upon the robbers and murderers, just as they had finished their work.--Good! Let us get our horses nearer at hand, and be ready to dash upon them."

While the first two villains were preparing for the new phase the affair in which they were engaged had taken, as they supposed, the two who had arrived last busied themselves in making ready for some damnable work

which required darkness and that secluded spot to hide it from the sight of man. We will look after them.

"Well, here we are at last," said Bill to Dick, for it was these that had arrived last. "How soon will he be here, think you?"

"In a few minutes. When I last saw him, I don't think he was to exceed half a mile behind us."

"He is coming now. Be sure of your aim."

"Better take that advice yourself."

"I intend to, for I don't want any botch work of the job."

"Think those men have got ahead far enough?"

"Yes, they were more than a mile ahead of us, and they will ride like Satan was after them through these wild glens."

"Yonder's Hadley!"

"Prepare! put your pistol close to his heart when you fire!"

"All right; do the same."

And the other two concealed villains were equally ready for action.

"There he comes!" said one. "Their attention will be taken up that way now: let us mount, and as soon as they fire, put spurs for the scene."

"Perhaps they will not use pistols," suggested the other.

"Then, as soon as they strike or spring upon him."

In a few seconds, Hadley came abreast of the villains who were lying in wait for him.

"Now!" said Bill in a hoarse whisper, and the two at once sprang upon the lone rider, and fired the contents of their pistols into his breast. He fell from his seat, with a deep groan. The murderers were about to rifle his pockets, when they were arrested in their work of robbery by the approach of the other two horsemen, and seeing their danger, hastened to mount, and left the scene of their bloody deed, at the top of their horses' speed. The others pursued for a mile or more, and then returned to look after the slain man and their booty.

"By heavens, it's not the man!" they exclaimed in a breath, as they knelt by the side of Hadley.

"As I live, it is our acquaintance of yesterday! Poor fellow, he deserved a better fate."

"He did, indeed. Let us return his kindness by seeing that he is decently buried; we owe him this much at least."

"So we do. If I had known it was him he should not have died in this way."

"Shall we go back or forward with him?"

"Forward; it is nearest that way to a hamlet."

"Does he breathe yet?"

"No; he is quite dead."

Gathering up the body of Hadley, they bore it along in silence toward the nearest habitations of men, some five miles ahead.

The two had proceeded with their burden but a short distance, when they were suddenly startled by a groan from the wounded man, who they had supposed was dead. They laid him down carefully, and one of them produced a flask, from which he poured a little brandy on his lips, and the stimulant penetrating his mouth, revived Hadley, and this, with the aid of other restoratives, soon brought him to consciousness. Seeing he was not dead, his companions now dressed his wounds as well as they could, under the circumstances. It was soon perceived that they were not of a very dangerous order. One bullet had struck a button and glanced off, leaving only a bruise on the breast; the other had penetrated the chest, but not in a fatal direction. The fall from his horse had stunned Hadley; there was also a mark on the side of his head, indicating that the horse had struck him with his foot, adding materially to the effect of the fall. After his wounds were properly dressed, he was assisted into his saddle, and, supported by his benefactors, was enabled to ride to the next village, where he received every attention, and was so far recovered in a week as to proceed on his journey. His escape was almost miraculous, and seemed a direct interposition of Providence. On the previous day he had assisted the two men out of a difficulty before a magistrate, where they were accused of the crime of setting fire to a man's house on the previous night. It so happened that they were not guilty of the act as charged, but had passed the night in question at the same inn with Hadley, who, fortunately for them, heard of the affair, and went before the magistrate and testified to the facts in the case, and by so doing cleared them. This kindness, volunteered on his part, was repaid by the men, as we have seen, though they were desperate characters, and ought to have been in the penitentiary, and, as we have noticed, went out to kill and rob some man at whom they had become offended.

Had not this train of circumstances led to the result we have chronicled, there would have been but one fate for Hadley, death; for even if the ruffians had left life in him, ere the lapse of three hours he would have been devoured by wild beasts, a pack of which, howling dismally, and thirsting for blood, crossed the road where he had lain, and licked up the few drops that had run from his bosom!

Bill and Dick were pursued, but escaped without the slightest clue to their whereabouts or identity being ascertained.

Perhaps we had as well remark, at this point, that Hadley's departure was known to but two personal friends and their families, in the Mandeville settlement, and by them was to be kept a secret, as he did not wish Duffel, or any of his supposed companions, to know of his absence until he had been gone long enough to reach his destination, for he believed Duffel was bad enough at heart to stop short of no wickedness to carry his ends, and felt fearful he might send some of his minions to waylay him. How nearly he guessed the truth! He, however, gave another reason for wishing the fact kept among his friends and though they thought a little singular of the request, they acted as desired.

Duffel overheard a part of the conversation between him and a young friend--hence his knowledge of Hadley's movements. Mandeville did not know anything about the matter until some time afterward, and this ignorance led him to suspect Hadley of the theft, as already recorded.

He and Duffel agreed to keep their suspicions to themselves, until they could get at some tangible evidence to prove Hadley guilty. This exactly suited Duffel's purpose, as it gave him just the time and advantage he desired, in order to perfect his own schemes.

How easily a few words would have exonerated Hadley in the eyes of Mandeville: and had he made a confidant of the magistrate in this second instance, those words would have been spoken, to his enlightenment, and the great relief and joy of his daughter. But, by an unfortunate combination of circumstances, the reverse was the case.

CHAPTER X.

When Duffel learned that Mr. Mandeville would not interpose parental authority to compel his daughter to acquiesce in his wishes for her in regard to marriage, he set his scheming wits to work for the purpose of devising some means whereby to accomplish his ends. As we have already said, Duffel had taken a fancy to Miss Mandeville, with whom he was better pleased than with any other lady of his acquaintance. He called his passion *love*, but it was too sordid and selfish to be worthy of a name so sacred. More than once he called to see Eveline, and though she treated him civilly, he saw plainly that she had an aversion for his society, and that it cost her an effort to treat him with politeness, even though it was formal; so, as we were saying, he endeavored to hit upon some more successful mode of furthering his wishes.

"If Bill and Dick were only here," he thought to himself, "the matter could be easily come at; but, as it is, I don't see my way exactly. I should not like to trust every one, even of the League, with my secret, much less with the execution of such a difficult undertaking as that of placing her there. I wish I had not sent them after Hadley; I might have accomplished all without that; and it is not the pleasantest thing in the world to have a murder laying on one's conscience. But then, I thought other means would succeed: I had no idea that old Mandeville was becoming so tender-hearted. The old devil himself must have been playing mischief with my calculations. Well, let him play away; once Bill and Dick return, and I'll try my hand at heading his sulphurous majesty, and all others that oppose me."

In this mood, Duffel found himself when the duties of his office, in the absence of the captain, required his presence at the cave, to preside over the League at the regular meeting, as already known to the reader. The night of the meeting came, and found him undecided as to the course of action to pursue. Time was short; the captain might return any day and resume command; and what was to be done must be done soon.

In this state of uncertainty, he repaired to the cave, with the vague and indefinite hope that his associates in crime might be there also. Arrived there, he began pacing up and down in a state of uneasy and restless disquiet, looking expectantly at every new-comer, but with the same result--disappointment. It was but a few minutes until the hour for business, and he retired to the captain's room to make such preparations as were necessary for the occasion.

When he returned, the members present were all masked, a rule of the order making this a duty at initiating meetings, and he could not tell whether Bill and Dick were among the number or not.

The business proceeded until the question was asked:

"Is there any one who, having knocked at the door of our order, is now waiting for admission?"

"There is, your honor, Abram Hurd, who has been found worthy of a place among us."

"Is he present?"

"He is in waiting, your honor."

"Let him be conducted into the presence of the order."

It is not our intention to enter into all the details attending the ceremony of initiation into the order, as we apprehend that a few of the leading features in the process of villain-making will be more entertaining and acceptable to the reader.

When the candidate for admission entered the cave, he found himself *_vis-a-vis_* with fifty masks, of all shapes, forms and appearances; some horrible, some odd, some commonplace, and some fantastical, and altogether, a medley of strange, undecipherable, yet impressive combination of devices, well calculated to excite a feeling of awe, and, with the timid, of terror, in the mind of the beholder. Into this singular assemblage Hurd was ushered, a wilderness of confused images before him. He was taken through a course introductory to the more serious parts of the formula of induction into the order, which were intended to increase the first bewildered impressions on entering the cave, and was then led up in front of the captain, who addressed him thus:

"Abram Hurd! by your presence here, I am to understand that you desire to become a member of our order?"

"I do."

"Have you considered well before taking this step? The duties of members are often laborious, and their performance attended with the most imminent danger! We want no unwilling hands; are you ready to incur the risks?"

"I am."

"Suppose the requirements exacted at your hands should cause you to look the penitentiary in the face, have you the courage to do so?"

"I have."

"But further yet; should the good of our order require you to take the life of a fellow-being, would you, in obedience to the commands of your superior, perform that extreme act?"

"I was not aware that *murder* was included in the catalogue of duties imposed upon members of the order."

"Nor do I say that it is; I only wish to know if you are willing to go *any lengths* for the preservation or advantage of the order, in case of necessity? You will mark the difference between murder and killing in *_self-defense_*. With this explanation, are you willing to take the required obligation?"

"I am."

"With the understanding, then, that you may have to face imprisonment or death and obligate yourself to do all that shall be required of you for the *good* of the order, even to the taking of life, including all other acts that are held criminal among men, are you still willing to proceed?"

"I am!"

"I must furthermore inform you, that if you falter in the discharge of any duty imposed upon you, or manifest the least disposition to betray the order, your life will fall an immediate sacrifice for such delinquency. Are you prepared for this?"

"I am!"

"Will you take upon yourself these obligations in the form of an oath?"

"I will!"

"The oath is a most solemn and binding one; perhaps you may consider it horrible, and we want no faltering."

"I will take it."

"It involves life and death."

"I am prepared if it does."

"You cannot release yourself from its binding force; it is for life; and whether you abide with us or not, it binds you to secrecy. No after-thought, no change of feeling, no repentance can unchain its iron links from your soul. Are you still resolved?"

"I am!"

"Let me here advise you, that one more step will place you beyond the pale of retreat. Consider well what you are about to do. Until the oath is administered, you are at liberty to retire, and, blindfolded as you came, will be escorted to a place of safety to yourself and us, where we will leave you as we found you; but once you have taken upon yourself the obligations of the oath, all is fixed and immutable. Are you yet willing to take this last step?"

"I am!"

"Enough! you are worthy to become a member of our order. Lay your right hand upon your heart, your left upon the Book, and receive the oath."

THE OATH.

"I, Abram Hurd, calling heaven, earth and hell to witness, do most solemnly swear, in presence of these, my fellow-beings, and into the ears of the spirits of the invisible world, that I now take upon myself the obligation of a member of the *Order of the League of Independents*, as laid down in the rules ordained for the government of said Order, and explained to me this night; and I also obligate myself to obey the officers of the League who shall be appointed over me for the good government of the same, in the performance of all and singular the duties that shall be required at my hands; and I furthermore obligate myself to advance the interests of the Order to the utmost of my ability, in all things and in all ways, even to the taking of property and life, if need be; and in so doing will use all the means of aid in my reach, including fire, steel and powder. And I most solemnly swear, in the presence aforesaid, of the visible and invisible worlds, that I will faithfully keep the secrets of the Order, and of all the members of the same that shall be intrusted with me, and no torture of body or mind shall extort them from me. And I hereby bind myself, in the same solemn manner, and in the same presence, that I will defend the members of the Order in all circumstances and places, as far as in me lies, even to the giving up of my own life, if such a sacrifice shall be required--that I will stand by them one and all in every emergency, and, if occasion require, will not hesitate to give false testimony in courts of justice, to clear them in suits at law, or in criminal prosecutions, choosing rather to brave the penalties of perjury than violate this my most solemn oath. And as I faithfully perform this my oath to the Order, in whole and in part, may I prosper; but if I willfully fail in anywise, to fulfill all that I have herein obligated myself to perform, may the heavens become black above me, may the earth become thorns and thistles, and a curse to me in body and in soul; may my life be devoid of peace, and harassing care be my portion, with blight and mildew on all my hopes, and all that my hand shall touch; may my friends desert me, and my own blood rise up and curse me; may I become an outcast, among men, a wanderer and a vagabond on the face of the earth, a prey to fear, and to the lashings of conscience: and, finally, when death comes, may he send me from the tortures of this life, to those of endless perdition hereafter."

After taking this horrible and blasphemous oath, the initiated was required to sign a compact with his own blood, when he was duly pronounced a member of the Order, which might truly be termed hellish. This done, the captain said:

"Brethren of the Order, remove your masks, and welcome your brother!"

In a minute the fifty masks were cast aside, and Hurd looked around him in amazement, for in that company were more than a dozen of his acquaintances and neighbors, who passed in society--most of them--for honest men; but most of all was he surprised to see *Duffel* there, in the character of first officer.

All came and shook him by the hand, and to their friendly greeting he could reply to many:

"Why, A., B., C., D., are you here? and here's 'Squire F., and Constable H., as I'm alive!" and such like expressions of recognition.

When the masks were removed, Duffel had the satisfaction of seeing Bill and Dick among those present, and so soon as the League adjourned, he drew them one side, and began a confidential conversation with them; but fearing that they might be overheard, before entering upon the secrets of their own, he conducted them into the captain's room.

This room was a curious structure. Its walls were solid rock, naturally of a brownish-gray color, but had been painted in a tasteful style of art, with graceful nymphs, winged cupids, vases of flowers, and many other embodiments of fancy, or representations from nature. The effect on the beholder was pleasant and cheering at first view, but a more critical observation would lead to the conclusion that there was too much of the voluptuous in the design and execution of the penciling. In one corner of the room was a door which opened into an inner room of small dimensions, in which was a downy couch, and all the paraphernalia of a luxurious and elegant bed-room. It was a place that contrasted very strangely with the misery and crime it had sheltered--with the tears of unavailing agony that had been wrung from eyes that sparkled above once happy hearts--alas! no longer the abode of peace, hope or joy. Ah! had those walls the power of speech, what tales of horror they could rehearse! what anguish reveal! what eloquent pleadings for mercy disregarded! what silencing of hope in despair! But they reveal not the secrets of the place, which are known to but One, from whose eye no dark dells or earth-emboweled caves can hide the transgressor; and the tears, the sighs, the blood--aye, the blood--of that solitary cavern are all known to Him, are all put down by the recording angel in the archives of heaven. But we digress.

When the three confederates were securely to themselves, Duffel inquired:

"How did you succeed in that affair. Well, I hope, as you are so soon back."

"Yes, better than we expected. We passed Hadley and awaited him in the mountains. Two pistol balls were sent through his heart, and in less than an hour his body was devoured by howling and hungry wolves, from a ravenous pack of which we escaped ourselves with difficulty, so fierce had a taste of blood rendered them!"

It will be noticed that Bill drew largely upon his imagination in this brief account of their adventures, and that he never once hinted at the real truth of the matter, and how they were driven away, and had to flee for their lives. He knew that his story had the characteristics of probability; and he had an object in view in imposing on his superior, though he had no doubt at all of Hadley's fate, believing him to be certainly dead.

"So far good," replied Duffel; "but are you sure the act was undiscovered and undiscoverable?"

"Quite sure, your honor; it was dark at the time, and no one near, and therefore impossible that any one should know of the transaction."

"Very well, I am pleased with your promptness and dispatch in the execution of this plot. You shall have your reward for the diligence and faithfulness of your labors. But just now I have another affair on hand, in which I shall need your aid."

"We are your men."

"I know I can rely upon you, and that is the reason I have chosen you from among all the other members of the League to assist me."

"And you shall never regret the choice. What is the nature of the work you would have us perform?"

"I have heretofore spoken to you concerning its principal feature. It relates to a lady, and you may remember what was formerly said in regard to the matter."

"Oh, yes, perfectly well."

"Well, I wish the young lady to be taken--kidnapped--and brought to this place. Can I rely upon you to do the deed?"

"We have already pledged ourselves to that effect."

"So you did, I had forgotten. I shall soon need your services, if all things proceed as present appearances indicate that they will. When everything is ripe for action, I will inform you of particulars, and give you the necessary instructions. Till, then, meet me every day in the 'swamp,' for I may wish your aid at any moment."

"All right; we'll be there."

And thus the conference of the villains ended.

CHAPTER XI.

THE INTERVIEW--THE PLOT--THE ABDUCTION.

Before proceeding to extremities, Duffel resolved to try the effect of smooth words and persuasive eloquence on the mind of Eveline. For this purpose he called upon her with the express intention of urging his claims to her hand in a personal interview. She received him, as she had been accustomed to do of late, with cold politeness. Had he been a real lover, actuated by pure motives, he would have been deterred from prosecuting his suit, or even mentioning the object of his visit, for he could not but perceive that he was not warmly received. But he had resolved upon a course of action, and was determined that nothing should influence him to turn aside from the line of conduct he had marked out for himself. After a little conversation on commonplace matters, he attempted to introduce the subject uppermost in his thoughts, but finding no encouragement, addressed his companion thus:

"Why this coldness, Miss Mandeville? would that I dared to call you, Eveline! You have ears for others, for me you have none; you have smiles for others, but on me you never bestow a gladdening look; and yet, of all the world, I most long for a smile, for the privilege to talk to you as a friend."

"I hope I have always treated you with kindness; it has certainly been my intention to do so."

"No, Miss Mandeville, not with *kindness*, pardon me, but it has only been with cold civility. I am sure that if you only knew how my heart yearns for a gentle and hopeful word from your adored lips, how it bleeds and recoils within my bosom when your cold words pierce it as with an arrow, you would certainly relent."

"The heart, Mr. Duffel, is not master of its own emotions; they come unbidden often, and not unfrequently remain when we would gladly have them depart."

"May I trust that in those words there is hope for me--that you would really banish old memories and old prejudices, and receive me as my heart continually pleads to be received?"

"I am not aware that any such changes as those of which you speak have taken place in my mind or memory. I have no old and dear memories that I wish to banish; and I believe my feelings toward you have not materially changed."

"Oh, what crushing words! Surely your heart cannot be so hard as to drive me away in despair, when my spirit is bleeding at the wounds your cruel words have made."

"As I was saying, when you were so impetuous as to interrupt me, a few moments ago, we cannot bid our feelings go and come as we would. The heart will not love this one or that, at the dictates of cold, calculating intellect, and the more it is urged to do so, the farther it is from yielding, especially when harsh means or commands are used to bend it. If you have permitted your feelings to rest upon me as you say they do, it is your misfortune, not my fault; and because I cannot reciprocate your feelings and wishes, you have no right to task me with cruelty or hard-heartedness; and I hope you will not forget this in any future remarks you may have to make on the subject."

"Pardon me, my dear Miss Mandeville, if, in the bitterness of my disappointment, I have spoken harsh or unguarded words. When we are in deep distress and anxiety we are apt to say and do things that we should not. It was farthest from my design to wound your gentle heart, or say one ungenerous word to you, the best beloved of my friends. Should you ever have the misfortune to endure the pangs of unrequited love, which may Heaven forbid, you will know how to feel for me, and to appreciate my situation."

"Perhaps it would be well for you to cease conversing on a subject so painful."

"Ah, there it is. Great sorrows are uppermost in the mind, and though every word brings a tear to the eye, and sends a pang to the heart, we *must* talk about them."

"I was always impressed with the idea that such griefs as lay hold upon the soul, were too deep for utterance."

"Yes, when the last ray of hope is gone, and the night of despair settles upon the soul. But, oh, must I go out into that unilluminated darkness, forever shut out from light and hope? Is there no hope that I may some day call you more than friend? that in time, even though it be years in the future, I may be able to awaken emotions of tenderness in your heart?"

"I think I have answered that question often enough and plain enough. I do not know why you wish to put me to the unpleasant necessity of repeating that answer. But if I have, by any misconception of the use of words, and the meaning of language, failed to be sufficiently definite in my speech, please now, once for all, understand me distinctly. I cannot bid you hope for any change in my feelings toward you so far as love is concerned. I never can look upon you as an accepted suitor for my hand, nor will it ever be in my power to love you."

"Perhaps you may think differently hereafter."

"Never!"

"Then my purpose is fixed. You shall not wed another! You, too, shall feel what it is to be disappointed. You love Charles Hadley. Ah, I knew you did! but mark me, you shall never wed him--*never!* I would sooner

imbrue my hands in his blood, than that you should! But he is a guilty culprit, a wandering fugitive from justice, and will never dare return."

"Mr. Duffel, I have heretofore borne your persecutions with patience; I will do so no longer. *You*, sir, are more guilty this day than Charles Hadley. Look at the blood spots on your hand."

"What! ha! said the villain, taken aback by the bold remark.

"Yes, you may well flush and turn pale when your crimes stare you in the face!"

"Crimes? Who dares to accuse me of crimes?"

"I do, sir!"

"You will repent it, madam."

"I do not fear your threats any more than I regard your hypocritical protestations of esteem."

"I will make you fear, then," and with the words he left the house in a rage.

While together, Eveline and Duffel were both defiant, though they felt internal fear of each other, she at his threats, and he in alarm lest she should know something of his secret villainies; and when alone each gave way to the feelings uppermost in the mind; she after this manner:

"God grant that no harm come to Charles from this wicked plotter! And yet I fear he has already contrived to do him mischief. How he was agitated when I threw out the accusation. Oh, my God! if his hands really are stained with innocent blood! Charles is no where to be found; what if he has fallen by the hands of his enemy? What a terrible suspicion! Would to Heaven I knew the truth!"

But the more she thought the more she feared, until the subject became so painful she tried to banish it from her mind.

Infuriated and alarmed, Duffel raged on this wise when alone:

"It's all over now! this palaver about love and money! I shall never win my way to the old man's purse in that manner; but I'll try my skill at taming that proud, free spirit! Blast the girl! I wonder if she knows anything? But pshaw! what a thought! How could she?--What a fool I was to be so startled!--Well she is shrewd, and I give her credit for her penetration; but she must not be left to surmise and publish her suspicions: I've too much on hand just now to be set upon by spies; and so the sooner I get her out of the way the better. Once in my power I'll see that she tells nothing to my hurt.--Oh, but won't I have a glorious time!--But enough of anticipation; I must be up and doing lest the captain return and spoil all my calculations; so now for my precious rascals, Bill and Dick--and then!--" And with this he started for the "swamp."

When Duffel reached the place of meeting, his accomplices were not there, and he sat himself down on the trunk of a fallen tree to ruminate until they should come. As was customary with him under such circumstances, his thoughts commenced running on schemes of villainy; and he became so deeply absorbed in fitting out the details of his present all-absorbing operation, as to be scarcely conscious of anything else, either as regarded time or place. At length his corrugated brow relaxed, a kind of sardonic smile of joy spread over his countenance, and he exclaimed in gleeful elation of spirit:

"I have it! By Jove! it's the crowning cap on the climax! I have been afraid of the consequences until now, for I know old Mandeville will raise earth and hell when he finds his daughter is missing. But now I have him!

What a glorious idea! But it is a wonder I had not thought of it before. Well, it will not be the first time a dead man has served a good purpose!"

At this moment Bill and Dick made their appearance, and he immediately opened business with them.

"Well, you are here at last! I have been waiting on you this half-hour!"

"If it please your honor we are here at the appointed time. You must have some urgent business to be done that you are in such haste?"

"I have. The time has come that I shall need your service in the matter on hand. Miss Mandeville is in the habit of visiting the spot I pointed out to you, daily. To-morrow her father is going to C---- and there will be no one at home but the daughter and the house girl. You must be in waiting as agreed upon. You, Bill, must cautiously approach her and represent yourself as the friend of Hadley, for whom you must be the bearer of a message. If that does not succeed, then you must have recourse to the other means, as already arranged. So soon as you get her fairly in your possession and secured, bear her to the cave, with all dispatch, by the secret route. I will meet you on the way."

"All right. We understand the plan, and will take good care that it be properly carried out; but afterward we shall expect your aid, or at least your non-interference in a little affair of our own."

"Oh, certainly. Go ahead; but don't make a fuss about it. Who is she?"

"Oh, dang the women, we don't meddle with them; it is with Duval that we have an account to settle."

"Be careful there! Remember your oath to the order!"

"We do; but he is a traitor, and if you expect us to work for you in such life-taking business as we have lately been engaged in, you must let us have our way in this instance."

"Very well; if you will be cautious and commit no others but yourselves I shall not oppose you."

"We'll take care on that point."

"Remember to-morrow."

"Never fear. She shall be yours before the setting of the sun."

Again the villains parted; but Duffel was not well pleased with the demand the ruffians had made of him, until a new thought struck him, and he said to himself:

"That will do. I will get all I want out of them; and then to save trouble and *to be sure of my own secret*, I will have them arraigned before the Order for killing a member, and they shall suffer the penalty, *death*. I will then be free from fear. Capital! Everything is working to suit my purposes!"

Exulting wretch! would to heaven the vengeance of an angry God could overtake you, ere your schemes of fiendish crimes and dark murders are completed. But, alas for the innocent, crime is yet in the ascendant!

* * * * *

In a pleasant grove, a part of the old forest yet standing near to the dwelling of the Mandevilles, sat Eveline, beneath the shade of a friendly tree, in a spot rendered sacred to her by endearing associations and holy

memories, musing on the past with heart cheering pleasure, on the present with sadness, and the future with hope. So absorbed had she become in her own meditations, time fled unheeded, and the world was forgotten--forgotten all, save only two beings, the loved and absent Charles--with whose well-being or misfortunes her own fate was strangely blended--and herself; but of herself in the single light in which the mysterious ties of love united her to him.

How long she had thus remained absorbed in her own reflections she knew not, when her attention was drawn from her own thoughts to outward things by the approach of a very neatly dressed gentleman, who, addressing her in the most respectful manner, inquired:

"Does Mr. Mandeville live in this vicinity?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, at the same time rising to her feet. "That is his residence yonder, which you can just distinguish through the surrounding trees."

"A beautiful place!--May I be so bold as to inquire if you know whether I will find him at home to-day?"

"No, sir, he is not at home."

"Perhaps I might still presume on your kindness, and inquire if he has not a daughter that is or has been afflicted, and if she is already convalescent, or is likely so to be soon."

"His daughter has been very sick, but has recovered."

"Would she--? But perhaps you do not know her history? Has she any friend now absent, from whom she would be pleased to hear, do you know?"

"What is the object of the question, sir?"

"I hope you will excuse me, if I should presume too far; but I am the bearer of a message from one who esteems her above all the world beside, and--"

"How! do you know Charles Hadley?" she inquired, with deepened interest.

"Ah, I perceive you are not unacquainted with the history of the young lady. Perhaps I am addressing Miss Mandeville in person?"

"Your supposition is true, my name is Mandeville. But you have not answered my question yet."

"Pardon me, fair lady, for my seeming rude neglect. Yes, I know Mr. Hadley well, and a better man does not live. He is my near and dear friend."

"Do you say so much? Then it is from him you have a message?"

"It is."

"Oh! tell me, is he well?"

"He is, but is longing to hear from you, to see you, to know that you are still spared by the hand of death."

"You speak as though he were near. Is it indeed so?"

"It is, fair lady; he awaits your presence, or such word as you may be pleased to send him, a short way from here, in the denser portion of the forest, not wishing to transgress your father's commands contrary to your wishes, or to expose himself to the displeasure of your parent, lest it bring trouble and disquiet to your own heart. But please read the note he commissioned me to bear to you; it probably explains the matter better than I can, as he only confided to me such facts as were essentially necessary for me to know, in order to an intelligent performance of the part he has allotted to me as his friend."

Saying this he presented a letter, which Eveline received with a joy-beaming countenance, and read with a wildly-throbbing heart. It ran as follows:

"DEAREST EVELINE: For some weeks past, I have been in a distant city, at the urgent call of duty, to attend the bedside of a sick mother. I left while you were yet very ill, and bore with me the heavy fear that you might never recover to bless me with a kind word or gentle look. So terrible has been the suspense, and so deep the anxiety of mind under which my spirit has labored, I could only perform my duties to a beloved mother by resolutely bending my energies to the task, and with the first hour of assured convalescence hastened to learn your fate. Oh, best beloved, may I not hope to see you again? I have learned that you are better, and the first great burden is removed, but I so long to behold you once more,--to hear you speak--to know that I am not forgotten. But you know I dare not come to you without incurring your father's deep displeasure; and I have been in doubt and perplexity how to act. This note will be borne to you by my most confidential friend, who will not betray us. If you can come to me, even if it be but for a few brief moments, I beseech you to do so; but do in this matter as your own better judgment shall determine. If you cannot come, send me a note, even though it be but a line, that I may have some precious token of remembrance to gaze upon. I am but a short distance from your home, and a few steps will bring you to me; if you come, place yourself under the guidance of my friend. Leaving you to act as prudence and your own heart shall dictate, I remain, impatiently,

"Yours, most faithfully,

"CHARLES."

"P.S. Do permit me to entreat you to come if you can. I have a thousand things to tell you, and some of them are cheering. I have not time to write more now."

As we have said, Eveline read this letter with the wildest emotions thrilling through her heart. A tumult of joy was in her bosom--joy more exquisite than had gladdened her spirit since the hour when her young heart knew that its deep love was reciprocated. Hadley was near her--he had been falsely accused, and instead of the vile criminal he was represented, he was a loving and dutiful son, fleeing to the bedside of a sick mother! What a consolation to her heart! Without a moment's hesitation, she resolved to see him, and turning to the gentleman, from whom she averted her face, while reading, to conceal her feelings, she said, deeply blushing as she did so:

"Mr. Hadley wishes me to see him, and directs me to place myself under your guidance. Will you be so kind as to show me the way to him?"

"With the greatest pleasure; for I know he will be but too happy to behold you. Pardon me, if, in my zeal for my friend, I should say aught that may be out of place."

He led the way into the deeper recesses of the forest, and she followed him. All this had been done in a moment, as it were, and without time for the slightest consideration. Under other circumstances, or with a little reflection, Eveline might have acted differently.

The two had proceeded a quarter of a mile or more, when Eveline, in passing a large tree, was suddenly seized by rude hands, and ere she had time to scream, a covering was placed over her mouth, and her hands secured.

In these operations her recent guide took an active part, and when they were completed, he said:

"You shall not be injured by us, fair lady, and we only regret that we are compelled, by the force of circumstances, to put you to the inconvenience of a journey on so short a notice. You must go with us; but we will deal tenderly with you so long as you are peaceable and quiet; but you must beware how you attempt to make any noise; for we will not suffer ourselves to be betrayed by such means."

With these remarks the two kidnapers, one on each side of their captive, started off through the wilderness at as rapid a rate as their fair prisoner could move.

To attempt a description of Eveline's feelings at this hour would be a vain task. In a moment, she was brought down from the pinnacle of hope to the depths of despair; for she saw in all this that had passed the hand of Duffel, her avowed enemy; and, indeed, as the reader has doubtless already concluded, she was in the hands of none others than Bill and Dick, who were bearing her off to the cave.

CHAPTER XII.

When Mr. Mandeville returned home in the evening, he found the maid in great trouble on account of Eveline's long continued absence, and he himself became alarmed on learning that she had not been seen since early in the forenoon. He knew that she often recreated in the grove, and, after finding her in no more likely place, he proceeded thither. No Eveline was there, and no voice answered to his repeated calls; but in his search he found two billets of paper, and hastening to the house, for it was too dark to read them in the woods, he eagerly perused them.

One of the two was the letter to Eveline, purporting to be from her lover, which she had accidentally lost in her agitation, at the moment of setting out on her at first hopeful but sadly terminated errand; its contents are already known to the reader; and the other read as follows:

"MR. MANDEVILLE:--Being aware of your dislike to me, and having learned that you charge me with a crime of great magnitude--no less than that of stealing your horse, (of which, permit me to say, I am as innocent as yourself,) and feeling assured, from these circumstances, that there was no hope for me ever to gain your consent to wed Eveline, I have taken the only alternative left me in the premises--that of persuading your daughter to elope with me. She has consented; and ere you read this note, will be my wife. I hope you may find it in your heart to pardon us for taking this step, as it appears to us the only way in which our ardent wishes can be accomplished; but if you cannot pardon me, at least forgive Eveline, who has had a hard struggle between filial affection, duty and regard, and the strong pleadings of her heart; though her deep love at last conquered.

"But as we feel certain you will be highly exasperated at the first on receiving this intelligence, we have deemed it best to absent ourselves for a time. You will not be able to find us, if you choose to institute a search, until such time as we please to show ourselves; hence you need not put yourself to the trouble of looking after us. So soon, however, as you feel a willingness to receive us as your children, we will gladly return to you. To ascertain your feelings on this subject, we will voluntarily open a correspondence with you at some period in the future, perhaps in a month, when you can communicate to us your wishes and commands.

"With sentiments of high esteem, and deeply pained feelings that I am compelled to take this step, I am, my very dear sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"CHARLES HADLEY."

Mandeville read this letter a second time to assure himself that its contents were what they seemed, and when satisfied on this point, he stood mute for a brief space of time, as if to fully take in the astonishing truth that Eveline, his only, his beloved child, had so far forgotten her duty and her promise, yes, her solemn promise, as to leave her home and *his* care, for the love of a stranger! At last the great reality seemed to enter his soul in all its crushing force, tearing from his heart the affections that had clustered around his only child for years, from his bosom the hopes of a lifetime, and leaving him a desolate, smitten, soul-chilled being, with all the beauty and brightness of life departed!

Oh, ye children of affectionate parents! beware how you crush the hearts that have "nourished and cherished" you as only parents' hearts can do! God will smite the undutiful child with a curse! Bear and forbear, even if the commands of those appointed over you should seem to be unjust. Remember their labor, and toil and suffering in your behalf, and spare, oh! spare them in their old age, when their bodies are ripening for the grave, and their spirits for the skies. Let not their gray hairs go down to the chambers of the dead in sorrow, nor their failing strength be suddenly brought low by the anguish *you* have inflicted upon their spirits; but spare them as you would be spared!

Several minutes elapsed before Mr. Mandeville could collect his scattered and stunned thoughts together. The blow was so sudden, the shock so terrible, they almost prostrated him. He walked up and down the room, with paleness on his cheeks, and a load in his bosom. The only evidence he manifested of the great grief that was consuming him was an occasional groan, which came up from the great deep of his heart, as though they were forced out by some unseen or over-mastering power. He was like the tall oak of the forest when blasted by the fiery thunderbolt! What a sad picture!

At length the exclamation burst forth from his lips, as though the overcharged heart would relieve itself in words:

"Oh, my God, pity me!" and he clasped his hands, and pressed them upon his laboring breast, as if to still its tumult. Then came another groan, accompanied by a deep, soul-desponding "Oh!"

And the strong man was calm. But such a calmness! It seemed as if years of suffering had stamped their impress upon his brow, and in his face, in those brief moments of agony! Ah, how true it is, that the soul may grow old in a day!

After a time he again took up the letters and perused them.

"How artful!" he mused to himself, as he read the one to Eveline. "Every word is written with studied care, and every sentence conceals a temptation. Then the last, the postscript, so much to tell her, to excite her curiosity, as well as operate upon her affections!--The villain! But she ought not to have yielded to his solicitations; even in her great love I can find no adequate excuse for her. She knew he was accused of a crime, and pledged me her solemn word that she would never see him until the accusation was proved false. But she is gone--*gone*! Oh, what desolation in the thought! And I am left alone and forsaken in my woe! Ungrateful child! may heaven reward you as you have dealt by me! No, no, God forbid! Heaven be merciful to her! But on *him*, on the miscreant who is at the bottom of all this undutiful conduct, of all the pain it inflicts, may the fierce lightning of God's vengeance descend in burning wrath, and as a consuming fire! God of heaven! thou who beholdest the anguish of a stricken parent's heart, smite him with a curse; aye, pour out upon his forsaken head the vials of thy hot anger! Give him no rest to his soul, day or night, until the hour of reckoning shall come!"

Amen! Let that prayer enter the ear of Him who sitteth upon the Throne; and may He commission the angels of wrath to bear the curse, and heap it upon the head of the guilty author of all this wretchedness, and of the unutterable pain inflicted upon *another* heart!

* * * * *

Bill and Dick proceeded with their prisoner through the denser portions of the wilderness for two or three miles on foot, when they met Duffel, who had prepared horses for their flight, as it was a good long way to the cave. The villain approached Eveline, and said:

"I hope you will pardon the seeming rudeness which necessity compels me to manifest toward you in the present emergency. I hope soon to find you a pleasant resting-place, where I shall have leisure and opportunity to make explanations and amplify on this brief apology."

To this insulting speech Eveline made no reply, but she cast a defiant and piercing look upon the miscreant, which made him quail with cowardly fear, and took from his manner much of its bold assurance. He saw in that one glance of her eye an unconquerable resolve to meet him as a foe, and never to be vanquished; the victory he had flattered himself as being nearly won, he now saw afar off, unless the most beastly violence should be resorted to. But without a moment's delay, she was placed upon a horse, himself and accomplices mounted on others, and, he by her side, with Bill and Dick in the rear, the whole party pushed forward for the cave, where they arrived a little past the middle of the afternoon without any serious adventure.

Duffel placed his captive in the Captain's room, with the bed-room to retire to at her pleasure.

"I trust," said he, "you will find this a comfortable place; and be assured I shall strive to do all in my power to make your stay here as agreeable as possible. Books you shall have whenever you desire them; there are a number in the case yonder, and any others you may wish for shall be procured. The length of time you will remain my guest depends upon your own choice, with one condition annexed, of which I will speak to you more fully to-morrow. At present I have urgent business to attend to elsewhere, which cannot be delayed; I regret to leave you so soon; I hope you will pardon me, and I will endeavor to make amends in the future for any apparent neglect at the present. You will find the key to the bed-room in the lock on the inside; make yourself easy during my absence. I shall take the precaution to lock the door of egress and ingress to this room, so that you may rest in perfect security that no one can harm you. And now good evening, for I must be off, and may pleasant dreams attend your slumbers."

With this mockingly polite address and adieu he left the room and the cave, securing the door after him, and was soon on his way back.

Eveline had sustained herself with the most determined and heroic fortitude during all the trying scenes of the day, and until Duffel was gone. By a great effort of the will to seem calm, she had kept herself from betraying any emotions of fear while her enemies were near to observe her bearing; but now that she was alone, the unwonted tension to which her powers of endurance had been subjected, caused a reaction to take place; she was overwhelmed by the flooding tides of thought and despair that rushed in upon her. What a day of calamity it had been! What a night of rayless darkness was before her!

She knew that she was in the hands and at the mercy of an unscrupulous villain, who was incapable of performing a noble or magnanimous act, but base enough to resort to any means in the use of which to carry an end, or gain a point. She but too well knew the fate before her, if no means of resistance were placed in her hands; and where to find these she knew not. She was, as we said, overwhelmed with dismay. But gradually, as she had time to reflect, to collect her thoughts, and form resolves, she began to grow calm. There was a strength in firmness of will which could surmount many difficulties. It was, indeed, a kind of wall of defense about her, which might materially aid her in the contest she clearly saw before her, with her unprincipled enemy. He was, she knew, like all villains, a coward, and she determined, among other things, to operate upon his fears.

It might be supposed that she would feel little like sleep under the circumstances by which she was

surrounded; but having overheard part of an aside conversation between Duffel and his confederates, in which he mentioned meeting them at some place designated, and about something to be done on the morrow, she felt assured of what she could not have been certain on his own word merely, that he had business which would detain him until the next day, and, consequently, would not return to molest her for the present. She retired to the inner room, locked and bolted the door, (she had not expected to find a bolt on the inside, and the fact that there was one gave her a feeling of greater security,) then knelt down and offered up a fervent prayer to heaven for protection, for shielding care and final deliverance; after which she laid down, and composed herself to rest. Her slumbers were peaceful and undisturbed, attended with pleasant dreams; and she awoke, in the morning, as she supposed--for the light of day never visited the dark recesses of her abode, which were lighted by artificial means alone--much refreshed, with her spirits quite restored to their former elasticity.

She went out into the other room, and selected a book for perusal; it chanced to be a work on metaphysics, and after poring over its abstruse pages for some time, she became drowsy, and finally fell into a dreamy sleep. In her fitful slumbers, she was visited by a dream or vision of extraordinary vividness, which made an indelible impression upon her mind, because she felt personally interested in the characters that appeared before her, and by alluding to the scenes, she might alarm the guilty soul of her persecutor; so, at least, she hoped and believed; with what reason we shall see hereafter.

* * * * *

After leaving the cave, Duffel hastened back to Mr. Mandeville's as fast as his fleet steed could bear him. It was after dark before he drew up in front of that gentleman's house, his horse covered with sweat and foam, and well-nigh exhausted. It was his wish to be there before the father should institute any search for his missing daughter, that he might succeed in throwing the blame upon Hadley, in case the letters dropped for the purpose of implicating him should not have fallen into the hands of the parent; and with this view he had a story already made up, to the effect that some one had seen the fugitives in their flight. As was his custom, he paused on the outside of the house to listen, hoping by that means to obtain a knowledge of affairs, and of the feelings of Mr. Mandeville relative to his daughter's desertion or abduction as the case might be. He soon heard the hurried footsteps of that gentleman, as, in his deep distress, he paced the floor--heard, also, his broken exclamations and heavy groans, and the only sentiment all these things awakened in his callous soul was expressed in the unfeeling words spoken to himself, in thought:

"The old man takes it hard."

It was a very extraordinary thing for Mr. Mandeville to express his thoughts aloud, but he did so on this occasion, and Duffel heard his comments on the letters, and his execration of the writer, as also his reflections upon his daughter's conduct; then there was a crumpling sound like that of paper, as though the sheets were crushed in the hand of the reader. All this was music to the crime-stained soul of the guilty listener, who exulted in the success of his scheme, and felt additional assurance of ultimately triumphing in all his undertakings. But when the spirit-bowed father, in his hopeless agony, called down the curse upon the head of the author of the wrong, and appealed to Heaven for vengeance, the villain cowered as if truly smitten with a bolt; and the bare thought that the fate prayed for *might* be his, sent a cold chill to his heart and forced out great drops of perspiration on his brow. He trembled in every limb, like one in an ague fit, and it was some seconds before he could regain command of his faculties. At last he felt something like himself again, and not wishing to hear anything more of the same kind, he knocked at the door, and the next minute stood face to face with Mr. Mandeville. Black as his corrupt heart had become, he could not look unmoved upon that countenance, and behold the ravages made in a short hour by the pains of soul *he* had inflicted.

"Are you sick, Mr. Mandeville?" was his first inquiry.

"No, sir; but worse, much worse than sick."

"Indeed! How is that?"

"Eveline is gone!"

"Gone?"

"Yes, gone forever!"

"What!" and the miscreant evinced the utmost surprise and astonishment. "You do not mean to say she is dead?"

"No, no! Would to God she was! I would a thousand times rather have followed her to the grave! But read, read, and know for yourself what has happened." Saying which, he placed the letters in the hypocrite's hands, and then, while he was reading them, buried his face in his own hands, and sat in mute but agonized grief.

Duffel read the letters with secret delight, repeating to himself at every particular place where it suited him best, "Glorious!" and at the close of all, "I must reward Bill for this. He's a perfect gem of a devil for such work."

But to Mandeville, in well-feigned amazement, he exclaimed:

"Charles Hadley!"

"Yes," said the afflicted parent, lifting his bowed head, "of all the world, *him!* a criminal and vagabond, who had fled from justice to hide himself from the face of man! Oh, my God! to think that she would forsake home, friends, a good name, and trample upon a parent's love for such a villain!"

"Perhaps it is not yet too late to save her?" suggested Duffel.

"How? what?" ejaculated the other, catching at the words as a drowning man would at a straw.

"I say it may be possible that the marriage-rites have not yet been performed. This may be written for a blind to prevent pursuit."

"No, no; I cannot doubt its truth, and would not have a hope raised in my heart to be crushed out again by despair. Beside, whither should I go in pursuit of them?"

"I see you are in hopeless despondency, but I do not feel like giving over without a struggle--I have too much to lose in Eveline. Shall I try to rescue her?"

"Oh! yes, if you wish to do so."

"And if, by any means, I can circumvent this Hadley, and prevent their union, I have your consent to make her my wife?"

"Certainly."

"And will you interpose parental authority in my behalf?"

"Yes, after this I will."

"I have still one request more to make, and that is, that you will permit me to act in my own way, and

according to my own judgment in this matter."

"Do so; I have no advice to give."

"Very well; I am to understand, then, that if by *any means* I can rescue Eveline from Hadley, she is to be my wife?"

"Yes."

"Then I will try. I will follow them to the end of the world if need be. Perhaps you may hear from me soon, perhaps not for a month. Good-by."

In a few moments he was galloping away at full speed, as if to impress his recent host with the idea that he was in great haste to be after the fugitives.

Mr. Mandeville had been too deeply absorbed with his own feelings to pay very strict attention to what Duffel was saying; but the words *by any means* now rose vividly up in his mind, and like a flash came the thought--

"He may intend to *murder* Hadley!"

Starting to his feet, he hastened out for an explanation; but Duffel was already gone, and turning back, he entered his dwelling with the expression in his thoughts--

"Let him die: it matters not!"

Ah, had he known the true state of the case, and the devilish import of those words in the mind of the abominable wretch who had uttered them, how suddenly would he have aroused himself to action. But now he cared not.

"If," thought he, "Eveline is so ungrateful, if she thinks so little of a father's love, let her go! Why need I seek to force her to stay with me when she prefers the society of another? Oh, if I had not loved her so tenderly, I could endure this trial better. But why mourn and lament? No, rather let me forget her, as she has forsaken me."

But he could not forget her with all his resolving, and we will leave him with his sorrow.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INTERVIEW.

Faithful to his wicked intentions, Duffel presented himself before Eveline on the day succeeding the one in which she was placed in confinement at the cave, and having no choice in the matter, she was obliged to become a participator in the conversation he was pleased to introduce and force upon her. She was seated on an elegant sofa--for the apartment was luxuriously furnished--when he entered; and with all the assurance of an accepted friend, he walked up and took a seat by her side. She was reading at the time, and when he entered she barely raised her eyes from the pages of the book, as if to assure herself who it was that intruded, and then, without further notice or any sign of recognition, continued to peruse the work in hand. This unexcited, cool and self-possessed conduct was not what the villain seemed to expect or desire; he hoped to find a suppliant in tears, instead of a calm and apparently unconcerned woman; he was prepared for such a subject, but for the one before him he was not, and he was at a loss how to proceed; indeed, just at that moment he was the most uneasy of the two. But he must do something, and so opened the interview on this wise:

"You seem to be deeply absorbed in the contents of that book, Miss Mandeville, and I am pleased to see you so well entertained in this rather solitary abode."

As this remark did not positively require a reply, Eveline continued to read without opening her mouth; Duffel bit his lip in vexation, but after a pause of some duration continued:

"I am very sorry to interrupt you when so agreeably employed, but necessity often compels us to do things abhorrent to our feelings; and as I have some important communications to make, which it is best for you to know immediately, I must beg to be permitted to disturb you for a few minutes. Perhaps it will be some compensation for the brief interruption to give you the latest intelligence from your father and former home."

At these words Eveline for the first time raised her eyes to the face of the villain, as if to ascertain the expression of his countenance, and learn whether he was in a serious or mocking humor. He went on:

"I had the pleasure of a long interview with Mr. Mandeville last evening. He was in much distress at your absence, and thought you were very undutiful to leave him in his old age without even a parting word."

At this unfeeling recital, Eveline cast upon the heartless wretch a look of indignation, and her dark eyes fairly shot fire; he quailed under the scathing rebuke of those orbs, as he had often done before, but was chagrined that he had been unable to draw a single word from her lips, and mentally resolving to bring her to the speaking point, he proceeded:

"But sorry and indignant as he was at *your* conduct, he was far more deeply exasperated at Hadley."

"Hadley!" repeated she, in the first moment of surprise.

"Yes; that very loving letter he addressed to you fell into your parent's hands, together with another one from the same writer, directed to himself wherein Hadley asks forgiveness for himself, and especially for you, fair lady, whom he represents to be in deep distress, that love irresistibly draws you to him and away from home."

"Villain!" ejaculated Eveline, with flashing eye.

"Be careful of your words, my dear; you are not now in your father's house, and it may not suit my purpose to allow you the use of such epithets, as applied to myself."

With this remark, Eveline at once turned to her book and commenced reading again, as much as to say:--"Have the conversation all to yourself, then!" and the miscreant so understood and interpreted the act, and felt that he was outgeneraled by the superior tactics of his opponent, notwithstanding the immense advantage he was master of in the contest.

"Nay, fair lady," he said, "I did not intend to cut you off from the privilege of speech, but only to advise you to be a little careful in the use of terms and epithets."

"Sir, if after forcing a conversation upon me on your own terms, and at an advantage of your own choosing, you are too cowardly to hear what I please to say, you must talk to yourself. When I speak at all I select my own words. I do not belong to that class of contemptible poltroons, who slink behind others to hide themselves and their crimes, basely exposing the innocent to the censures and punishment that should fall upon their own guilty heads. No, sir; woman as I am I would scorn to stoop to such a low depth of infamy to screen myself from any position, even from death itself; and if you, with all this littleness of mind and cringing cowardice of soul, expect to intimidate me by any menaces, all I have to say is, you have 'reckoned without your host.' And permit me to tell you that there are no words in any language half adequate to express my contempt of you as a man, or my abhorrence of your acts as a criminal, of whom, thus far, the gallows has

been shamefully cheated."

This bold speech fairly took the rascal out of himself. He ground his teeth in rage and seemed on the point of committing some desperate deed, but those unquailing and flashing eyes were fixed upon him with a look that seemed to burn into his innermost soul, and penetrate its dark recesses of guilt. He was again conquered by that look; there was a magnetic power about it he could not withstand; and swallowing his rage as best he could, replied after this manner:

"I perceive you have that implement for which your sex is so distinguished, a ready tongue, and I must confess it points words sharply and drives them home with force, and under some circumstances I might feel like retaliating; but here, as my guest, I shall not presume to do so; it will accord much better with my wishes to proceed with the matter in hand.--As I was saying, your father fully believes that Hadley has persuaded you to leave home and elope with him, and he is so shocked by your want of filial affection, as to be totally disqualified for acting with his usual energy; beside, he says if you care so little for him as to desert him and the home of your childhood for a horse-thief and a vagabond, he cares not to seek after you, but says you may go."

At the first, Eveline felt like weeping, and for a moment buried her face in her hands; but then she felt it would not do to give way to feelings of tenderness and sorrow in her present situation, and choking down the great grief that swelled up in her bosom on her father's account, she suddenly assumed a commanding attitude, and addressed the calculating human fiend as follows:

"Inhuman monster! how long do you expect thus to dare the vengeance of heaven? You have stained your soul with crimes that would darken the pit of night; you have committed robberies, and thefts, and *murder*! Ay, start and turn pale when your crimes stare you in the face, you have done so before, and you will again. You thought there was no eye to witness your plotting deeds, no ear to hear your murderous plans except those of your vile confederates, but you see I am aware of your crimes."

"Who told you these things?" he demanded, breaking in upon her discourse.

"That is a question I shall not take the trouble to answer; it is enough for you to understand that *I know what you are*, and that long-delayed justice will overtake you, perhaps, sooner than you deem it possible your secret acts can be brought to light; for you seem to have forgotten that there is One, whose eye never slumbers, whose ear is always open to the prayer of the distressed and to the voice of the blood of the innocent, which crieth from the ground as did the blood of Abel."

"Ah, what a pity it is you are not a parson, or at least a parson's wife! You really talk like a preacher; but I fear your discourse has produced little more effect upon *your* auditory than do the polished words of a fashionable divine upon *his*; all very fine, but fancy sketches are not apt to effect as much with sober, common-sense people, as is the truth."

This was said with something of returning assurance, Duffel having tried to work himself into the belief that all was guess-work on the part of Eveline, so far as her accusations were concerned. She saw this, and in a moment the remembrance of her dream that morning flashed across her mind, and she determined to try the effect a reference to the scenes which passed in review before her mental vision would have upon him:

"Sir, your assumed assurance would soon leave you if you were in a court-room, and the evidence of your guilt, as I have it, detailed by witnesses. When your secret conference with those vile instruments--not yet so vile as yourself--whom it has pleased you to use as tools, were made known before a court and jury, your brazen impudence would depart, and the specter of a gibbet in the distance--and but a short distance, too--would pale your unblushing cheek and palsy your false tongue, skillful as you may have been in casting blame upon others by deceptive and lying words. When it was proved that *you* stole my father's horse; that

you are responsible for the absence of Mr. Hadley; that *you* pointed the knife and the pistol at his heart, and then mendaciously represented him as the thief and kidnapper who is found in your own person; then, sir, would you veil your face and go out no more among men, but upon your forehead, as *now* upon your soul, would be the brand of *thief, robber, murderer!* Ay, well may you cower! well may the cold sweat force itself out upon your brow! Did it never enter into your debased mind that the villain who is degraded enough to sell himself to crime for a little sordid dust, will, for a larger sum, betray his employer? Do you suppose that when *you* meditate vengeance upon your tools, they will idly await your pleasure and plans, and lift no hand in their own defense?"

At this point Duffel actually sprang to his feet, the great drops oozing from every pore! How had his secret thoughts become known to her?--thoughts that no mortal ear had ever heard him utter?

"Girl! girl!" he shouted, "who and what are you? demon, witch or spirit?"

Then he paused a moment, as if to collect himself, and decide upon a course of action. Becoming a little more composed, he continued:

"If you are in league with hell, then are we of one family if you have not belied me, and I shall take it upon myself to strengthen the affinity by--"

"Sir!" she said, with a commanding look which awed him into silence, (for his superstitious feelings were already in the ascendant, and he began to *fear* her) "I have no connection with the household of his Satanic majesty, *nor do I intend to have*, albeit you have intimated to the contrary."

"Don't be too sure of that," he interrupted. "You must know that when I set my heart upon a measure, I never allow myself to be defeated in its accomplishment; and just now the darling object I have in view is a union with yourself."

This was *said* with much of his usual assurance, though the expression of his face gave indications of internal uneasiness, and a trembling of soul, which belied the ostensible bravery put on for the occasion.

"You speak as though there was but one will in the world, of which you were the fortunate possessor; permit me to disabuse your overweening confidence and selfishness on this point. I have no wish to pass words with such an unmanly representative of mankind as you, sir, but let me assure you it is my very calm and fixed determination to show you that all your intentions cannot be carried out."

"We will see, then," he said, with something of aroused indignation, "whose will is the stronger, or, rather, who has the advantage in this contest. You seem to forget your situation at the present moment, and that you are entirely and completely in my power."

"I forgot nothing, sir: I am in the hands of One, before whom you are as a grasshopper; and His justice does not always slumber."

"Turning parson again! It is all very well; but just now that high authority seems to be engaged in some one else's behalf, and, much to my satisfaction, has left you to take care of yourself. I, on the contrary, having an immediate interest in your welfare, have undertaken to care for you; and inasmuch as your very powerful ally has given you into my hands, I esteem it my interest and privilege to find a home and provide for you."

These words of derision were spoken with mock politeness, and the manner of the speaker indicated that much of his wonted assurance had returned.

"May that God you impiously defy, whose attributes you daringly and deridingly blaspheme, let fall upon

your guilty head the just punishment for your crimes; I ask for you no greater curse--Heaven knows that will be dreadful enough!"

"There, that will do! We have had enough preaching for one day; let us now proceed to business. I was just remarking how completely you are in my power, and a glance at your situation will at once reveal to you the fact that I have you where I can compel a compliance with my wishes; but I do not propose to use force, unless compelled to do so by your own obstinacy and willfulness. I have already, on former occasions, spoken to you of my deep and unquenchable love for you, and it is not my purpose to repeat the declarations made at those several interviews farther than to say, that my feelings toward you remain unchanged; I regard you too highly to permit another to wed you; I may be selfish, but that is a natural result of love; no one ever loved but he desired to possess the object of his affection. In this respect I do not claim for myself any superior excellence; my love is human in kind, it only differs from others by being stronger in degree; and the deeper the love, the more ardent the desire to win the beloved. This is my only apology for bringing you here; and, as it is a very flattering one, I hope you will accept it, and pardon the act to the performance of which I was irresistibly driven by this strongest passion of the human heart."

Seeing the direction he was giving the conversation, Eveline took up her book and commenced reading. Duffel was exceedingly vexed, but this time he was not to be balked in his designs, and so took the book from her hands, saying as he did so.

"I beg pardon, but now I *must* and *will* be heard. I have already informed you of your father's feelings toward yourself and Charles Hadley: I have now another piece of intelligence to communicate to you; and that is, that your parent gave you to me in case I should be able, by *any means*, to save you from a union with Hadley."

"It is false! My parent gave me his solemn promise never to interpose his authority to compel me to marry against my will."

"Very well: you at the same time gave him your word never to see Hadley until he was cleared of the crime imputed to him; he believes you have been unfaithful on your part, and that he, therefore, is no longer bound to observe the compact entered into between you."

"Again you are guilty of misrepresentation. My father's word was pledged to me before he had even asked me not to see Mr. Hadley, and there was, consequently, no compact between us, but a voluntary promise on either side."

"Which you violated by going to meet Hadley, as you supposed."

"No, sir, I did not. My word was given to be observed so long only as Mr. Hadley appeared to be guilty. I know him to be innocent, and that knowledge absolves me."

"As you please on that point; for it matters but little, and does not change the view taken of the subject by Mr. Mandeville, who, as I said, has given you to me on the one condition of preventing a union between you and Hadley; and *I am at liberty to act just as I see fit* in order to accomplish this end. Don't you see that I have everything my own way, and your father's sanction, also, to any measures I may adopt?"

"What you say *may* be true, though I have no evidence whatever that it is; for if you would lie to my parent, you would lie to me also. One thing, however, I *do* know, and that is, that you have not yet obtained *my* consent to your proposed measures, and being of age, I have the legal right to make such disposition of my hand as I may see proper; and be assured I will never bestow it upon *you*! Sir, I would prefer to wed the vilest wretch in the Penitentiary of any State before you."

"You may repent the use of such words, fair lady; and, indeed, but for my merciful feelings toward you, ere

this you would have been glad to beg the boon I now offer and you reject."

"Infamous villain! never!"

"We shall see."

"And we *shall* see!"

She fixed upon him that look from which he had so often shrunk before, and again he quailed beneath it.

"From what you have already said," he replied, avoiding her gaze, "I am led to suppose you suspect me of crimes in the eyes of the law, which it would not be pleasant for the world to know. This is an additional reason why I cannot permit you to leave this place except as my wife; for I am not prepared just yet to enter the court-room. I am persuaded that one of your strongest reasons for refusing to marry me, has its foundation in a former preference, and is kept active by the hope of a union with the object of that preference; if so, permit me to say to you that Charles Hadley is *dead!*"

"Perhaps, but I must have better evidence of the fact than your simple, unsupported word, or I will not believe it. *I know you bargained to have him killed*, but I hope God overruled your wicked intentions."

"Your hope is vain, and I will bring you the necessary witnesses to-morrow to prove my words; at present I will state the fact, and add; for your benefit, that, whether true or false, your destiny is the same, and from it you cannot, shall not escape. I will now lay down the unalterable decree of fate, which you may as vainly attempt to avoid, as to pluck down the stars of heaven, or to blot out the sun from the firmament!"

"Perhaps."

"I give you one week in which to con the matter over in your mind; if at the end of that time you willingly consent to become my wife, well and good; if not, then I will make you mine whether you will or not!"

"Perhaps."

"Girl! don't presume too far on my patience. I warn you it is not the most enduring in the world."

"I am not so sure of that. Cowards are generally very patient when there is no danger at hand."

"You will repent this, girl!"

"And you, sir! what will you do when the rope dangles in your face?"

"Kiss my pretty wife and commend her to the compassion of her friends."

"You will never have a wife, sir. God in His infinite mercy, will spare all my sex from such a fearful calamity."

"Enough words for this time. To-morrow I will bring the witnesses of Hadley's death, as I promised you; and this day week I will receive your final answer to my last offer of a peaceable marriage."

So saying, he left the room and the cave.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EVIDENCE--DUFFEL THWARTED.

It would be difficult to tell which of the two, Eveline or Duffel, was most uneasy, or least alarmed, during the progress of the conversation recorded in the last chapter. Duffel feared that Bill and Dick had played him false, and he also saw that his antagonist was too much for him in a fair contest. Eveline felt an internal dread of her adversary, though she gave no outward manifestation of fear, having firmly resolved to withstand his every attack, and if need be die in defense of her virtue. When alone, however, the feelings uppermost in her mind were those of distress and apprehension; and as she took a survey of the position in which she was placed, and contemplated the hopelessness of her situation, a tide of emotions, long suppressed, swept over her spirit, and yielding to her feelings, she bowed her head, and wept.

When Duffel was alone, he called up all that had passed, and as he dwelt on the revelation of his plots as made to him by Eveline, he came to the conclusion that the sooner he could get rid of Bill and Dick the better; for it must have been through them that she came in possession of the secrets known only to themselves.

"I'll teach them a lesson!" he said, "and once clear of these fellows I will never trust rascals again. I wish they would, hurry and make way with Duval; I would then have them! However, I must have an interview now, and use them awhile longer."

He proceeded to the "swamp," where his associates were to meet him. They were already in waiting when he arrived, and without ceremony or circumlocution, he accosted them as follows:

"So, then, you have turned traitors, have you?"

"_Traitors!_"

"Yes, and been developing my secrets."

"If any tongue but yours should dare make the accusation, it would be silenced forever," replied Bill, in much excitement. "Who dares to make such a charge against us? We demand to know, and his lying lips shall be sealed with his own blood!"

"There, that will do. It was only a woman that intimated to me that you were unfaithful; and I thought then, as I think now, that it was all guess-work with her."

Here he narrated so much of the interview with Eveline as related to themselves, and concluded by asking if they had held any private conversation that she could by any possibility have overheard.

"Not a word, your honor; we did not so much as make a sign by which she might suspect us or you."

"Very well, I am satisfied; but it seems she either knows or suspects something, and we must be more than ever on our guard. What I wish to say to you now, is, that this lady, either for willfulness or out of disbelief, affects to discredit my statement concerning Hadley's death, and I wish you to accompany me to the cave to-morrow, and confirm my statements. You need not implicate yourselves, but give the facts as you saw them transpire."

"All right we'll be there; and I guess we can fix up the right kind of a story for the occasion."

"And to-morrow night you must make a descent upon 'Squire Williams' pasture-field, and save a little of his grass by removing a part of his stock. You understand?"

"Perfectly. We will try, but it's getting to be rather a dangerous business of late. Since Mandeville's horse was stolen, the men have taken it into their heads to defend their property. Only a few nights ago, two of our men went over with the intention of taking Thompson's fine bay; but he was on hand, and shot one of them through the arm; and they were glad to get off without the horse."

"Indeed! that's bad news, for we must make a raise somehow. I don't want the captain to come back and find we have done nothing in his absence."

"Well, we will do the best we can; but it is about time we were leaving this part of the country, at least for awhile. I don't think we can effect much, and we run great risks of being detected."

"Do you think suspicion rests on any of our members?"

"Well I can't say as to that. People are beginning to suspect everybody they don't know, and some that they do. If a man hasn't any particular occupation, he is pretty certain to be suspected of getting his living by dishonest means."

"We must get away from here. I will be ready to look out some other location within the next fortnight. In the meantime, do the best you can, and all that you can; but be very cautious. Remember to-morrow."

"We will be there, be assured."

With this the villains departed.

Eveline continued to weep for some length of time and then, arousing herself, she summoned all the courage of which she was master, and braced herself to meet the fate in store for her, be it what it might.

In passing through the room, her eye fell upon a strip of paper, which lay in such a position as to indicate that it had been brushed from a table which was sometimes used by Duffel to write upon. She listlessly took it up and glanced over it, when her eye caught a few lines penciled upon it. Seating herself, she examined the writing more closely, and in a moment became interested. On the paper were some characters, the meaning of which she could not comprehend, though she recognized them in a moment, as being the same in form and character as those on the letter which had fallen into her father's hand, purporting to be from some one to Hadley, as related in the former part of this story, and in connection with these were clearly traced the following words:

"And then Bill and Dick! They are first rate fellows in their way, and have been very serviceable to me; but I don't think it is best to have too many confidants. I must get rid of them in some way, either by fair or foul means. Then I shall feel safe and at ease."

These few lines, it seemed to Eveline, had been written unintentionally, as a man would unconsciously "think aloud;" and she was persuaded in her own mind, that Duffel knew not of their existence, or he would have destroyed them. And this was the fact. He had written a letter to the captain on the day previous to Eveline's abduction, the first draft of which was now in her hand. This paper was on the table at his side, and after finishing the letter, he sat for some moments in deep thought, the burden of which was his own situation. His pencil was in his hand, and in the course of his secret communion, the words we have quoted were spoken to himself, and recorded with the pencil--his mind the while too completely absorbed in the current of his reflections to note the act or be aware of the mechanical action of his hand.

It instantly flashed across her mind that this document might be made serviceable to her, if, on the morrow, unperceived by Duffel, she could find an opportunity of slipping it into the hand of one of his confederates. She turned it over, and wrote on the other side:

"I found this paper in the room where I am confined. You will know whether or not the writing is in the hand of your employer; should it prove to be, as I suspect it is, you will at once perceive his intentions toward you, and can act accordingly. If, in this new phase of affairs, you feel willing to desert his service, and aid me to escape out of his hands, and from this place, you shall be abundantly rewarded, and I will ever be your debtor.

"E. MANDEVILLE."

She then folded the note into as small a compass as possible, and placed it about her person for future use.

The next day, Duffel visited the cave in company with Bill and Dick, whom he introduced into the captain's room for the purpose already named.

"You have not forgotten our conversation yesterday, Eveline," said he, "nor have I my promise. In these gentlemen you have the witnesses of Hadley's death, which, for your own good, I have taken this pains to establish beyond a doubt. My friends will now speak for themselves."

Bill at once addressed himself to her as follows:

"It is with much pain, fair lady, that we are before you as witnesses of the sad occurrence referred to by Mr. Duffel; but as circumstances have placed us in this unpleasant situation, we crave your pardon most heartily, and the more so, if what we have to say should be a source of grief to you. It so happened that my friend and myself were crossing the mountains, a short time since, and being somewhat belated, were urging our passage through a dark and gloomy valley, in some apprehension, when we suddenly came upon two villains, who had just slain a man, and were about to rob him. We rushed to the spot before their work was completed, and they fled from the scene of murder in the greatest alarm. We dismounted, and found that the individual was Mr. CHARLES HADLEY, with whom we had been acquainted some years before. He was not yet quite dead, and spoke a few words about his mother and some other lady; but his articulation was so indistinct and his words so broken, we could not gather the import of what we supposed to be his dying messages to those of whom he spoke. He expired in a few moments, and we then hastened to the nearest hamlet for assistance. I would fain stop here, lady, for the rest of the recital is very shocking; but I have been requested to tell all, and must do so. It was something over an hour before we, with some four or five others, who had accompanied us, returned, when, oh, horror! what were our feelings on beholding a pack of hungry wolves devouring the body of Mr. Hadley! We lighted torches and drove them away, but nothing remained of the dead man but his bones! God grant that I may never witness another such a sight!"

Eveline, who was much shocked at this story, lest it *might* be true, though she was by no means certain it was not made up for the occasion, appeared to be much more deeply affected than she really was, and made appear as though she was about to faint, seeing which, Duffel stepped up with the intention of supporting her. She sprang from him, and, in great apparent agitation, seized Bill by the arm, and demanded of him if what he had said was the actual truth, and at the same time pressed the note in his hand, giving him an intelligent look. He very dextrously transferred the little billet to his left vest pocket, as though he was simply laying his hand upon his heart to give greater solemnity to his reply, and said:

"I assure you, madam, what I have told you is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and my friend will confirm the statement I have made."

"Yes," said Dick, thus appealed to, "the sad story is but too true; I wish for your sake it was not."

This was said with some feeling, and it had more effect upon Eveline than even the horrid recital given by Bill, but she felt the necessity of crushing down all tender feelings, and with a masterly effort succeeded in doing so, then replied:

"You will pardon me, gentlemen, for having seemed to express a doubt on the subject of your narrative; we are apt to judge persons by the company they keep, and knowing your friend here," (pointing to Duffel,) "is very much given to telling falsehoods, I thought it possible you might have formed that detestable habit through his example; I trust, however, it is not the case."

Duffel boiled with internal rage at this remark; but suppressing his anger, he conducted his allies out of the room, gave them some directions, and then returned to impose his unwelcome presence and conversation upon Eveline, who had no means of avoiding him, but was compelled to hear his words.

"I hope," said he, "you are now satisfied of the truth of my declaration, that Hadley is dead."

"He may be; but I say now, as I said before, I do not *know* that he is; but admitting that he *is* dead, what difference does it make?"

"Why not much, it is true, and I think I took the liberty of saying so yesterday. I only wish, by proving the certainty of this event, to show you the folly of continuing longer to set your affections upon him, provided you have been doing so heretofore."

"And suppose I should cease to remember him, what would that avail you?"

"I would then hope to be able to convince you of my own deep love, and in so doing of exciting a kindred sentiment in your own bosom."

"Have you the presumption to believe that I could be brought to such a state of degradation of feeling, now that I know who and what you are, when I rejected you under far more favorable circumstances? If you have, let me at once tell you, that in this instance, as in many others, your vanity has led you to entirely over-estimate your ability to please. Perhaps some of my sex might be silly enough to listen to your well-turned speeches, but I can assure you the less you speak to me of *love* the better."

"People often change their minds."

"So they do; but I think you have pretty good reason to believe that *I* am not particularly liable to be charged with that failing."

"Well, no, I believe I cannot charge you with that weakness; but I am sure you are very obstinate for one of your sex, which is not usually adjudged to be among the amiable characteristics of a lady."

"A lady that has no mind of her own is no credit to the sex; but I am sorry to say there are too many of that class, at least we might readily suppose so by the easy manner in which they are taken captive with soft, silly nonsense, and smooth, flattering words. If you admire such, the best thing you can do is to go and make love to them; you will progress much faster than you do here."

"There now, by my troth, I like that! I wouldn't give a cent for a girl that had no spirit about her. If you keep on at such a rate, I shall be more madly in love with you than ever! Come, be a good girl, and give us a little more of that kind of spice!"

"You like it, do you? Very well, I will change the key a little then, just a little, and let you have a peep at yourself. You pretend to entertain sentiments of regard for me; but you know, and I know also, that it is my father's wealth of which you are enamored."

"No, I swear to you, I love *you*!"

"And I know that is a false oath. You base hypocrite! do you think for a moment that I cannot and do not see through your flimsy gauze of deception? I can read your guilty soul as a book; I know your motives, and I know that a pure, generous, or noble sentiment never had a lodgment in your breast. You are base, corrupt, cowardly and unmanly in every sense of the word. There is not a redeeming trait in your character. You are false to your friends, you cajole your enemies, and prey upon community. You *know* this is a true picture of yourself, only that 'the half has not been told;' and yet you have the unblushing audacity to talk to me of *love*!"

"Yes; and what is more, I am going to wed you."

"Sir! never dare to utter such a word in my presence again!"

"Ha, ha, ha! That *is* rich, any how! Ha, ha! A weak prisoner to dare a mighty captor in that way! You certainly must forget where you are, my pretty little defiant beauty! Why I could just as easily compel a compliance with my wishes, as make you a listener to my discourse."

"Not quite, sir; you might possibly find yourself slightly mistaken should you attempt too much, and I give you fair warning to beware what you do!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Why, my love, I could conquer you with one hand."

"You had better not try it, sir!"

"I certainly would make an effort had I not already allowed you a week to make up your mind. But to show you how completely you are in my power, I will just plant a kiss on your ruby lips--"

"Never, sir; *never*!" said she, with flashing eye. "Dare to touch me with your polluted hand, and you die on the spot!"

"Ha! what's that I hear? Talk of killing, do you? Well, we shall see."

And he took a step toward her, with the intention of carrying out his threat.

"Stop, sir!" she said; and there was that in the tone of her voice which arrested him as suddenly as would a bar of iron interposed across his way. "Know," she continued, "that lips polluted as yours are can never come in contact with mine! I would sooner press mine to the slimy carcass of a decaying animal, than permit them even to touch yours! and I would far rather inhale the atmosphere from putrid flesh, aye, from the vilest carrion, than that your foul breath should enter my nostrils! This, sir, will give a faint idea of the utter detestation, the inexpressible loathing, I feel for you."

"By heavens! you shall repent of this in sackcloth and ashes! Detest and loathe as you please, you *shall* feel my lips upon your own! and that now!"

With this, the infuriated villain stepped forward and made a pass, intending to encircle Eveline in his arms, but she eluded his grasp, and placing the sofa between them, drew from the folds of her dress a small dagger, and pointing it at his heart, said:

"One step, one movement toward me, and your life pays the forfeit!" and she pressed the point of the weapon against his breast.

The cowardly wretch was taken aback, and the moment he felt the instrument touch him sprang away, as if the sharp steel was truly entering his flesh.

"Base coward!" she, in her excitement, hissed between her teeth in the most contemptuous manner. At his discomfiture and these words, his rage knew no bounds; he was beside himself with anger, and but for the weapon which she held, would have wreaked his vengeance upon her at once in the most beastly manner. As it was, his cowardice did not permit him to make the attempt, and he contented himself with pouring out his wrath in words:

"You incarnate child of h---! I'll make you weep in sorrow and shame for this! I have given you a week for reflection, but now your time is at hand, any hour that I shall please to crush you! and I will not keep you long in suspense. You have called up a thousand furies in my breast, all clamorous for revenge, and I will not resist their cries! No, it will be manna to my soul to see your proud spirit humbled, or behold you a suppliant for mercy at my feet!"

"_Never!_"

"Oh, yes; you may talk, and by my dalliance I have learned you to become insolent; but now I am done with temporizing. I throw down the gauntlet, since you have entered the lists, and will compel you to accept the challenge."

"No, sir, I accept it freely! Don't talk of compelling *me* to do a thing."

"I'll show you what I'll do! I'll bring tears into those flashing eyes, and prayers from that venomous tongue! Yes, I will! I have engagements ahead for two days, and after that you shall have no peace day or night, until I have forced you to become my wife! I wouldn't marry you at all, but that I have sworn to you to that effect, and I will keep my word."

"You have uttered many false oaths before; they are so common I do not regard them."

"Your boasting will soon be done! If need be, I have fifty men under my command, upon whom I can call for assistance, and not one of them will dare to disobey my orders."

"Poor, contemptible poltroon! Fifty men against one feeble woman! Verily, you have a brave set of fellows under a brave commander! But you dare not call upon your men; I could make forty friends of the number in quick time; but, even if I should fail, you are too much of a coward to trust fifty men with your secret, especially as they all know you have a superior in command, to whom *you* are amenable."

"Who told you this?"

"Find out as best you can. Perhaps I might suggest to you the possibility of having already made friends among the members of the Order."

"Order! Who the d---! told you there was an Order?"

"Well, find out."

"I will, then!"

"And you will not!"

"Then there's treason in the League, and I'll ferret it out."

"Do so, by all means!"

She was gaining the victory again, and he changed his tactics.

"I care but little who you may have in league with you, so long as you are here in my power. No one can enter this room without my consent, and in it I am safe even from the attack of an army without. Here you are my prisoner; you think you are safe in the other apartment with the door locked and bolted on the inside, but you are not. There is a secret passage to the room, of which you are in total ignorance. I can avail myself of it at any moment: and you will some time be compelled to sleep. Don't you see I have you, now?"

This was sheer folly; for it was evidently his best policy to have kept the knowledge of the secret passage to himself if he expected to avail himself of it; but he was for inflicting all the pain he could, and this he fancied would be a deep thrust.

"I thank you, villain, for this timely piece of information; and be assured I shall not fail to be prepared for your reception, should you dare to intrude into my presence while there."

"Hooty-tooty! as if I am not to be master in my own house! Well, well; flatter yourself with foolish fancies if you will; but know that your destiny is fixed. You shall never leave this cave, except as my wife. This is your fate, and you may as well make up your mind to it at once. I will have no more words with you at present, but will leave you to reflect on what I have said, with the hope that a little calm thought will show you the folly of resistance, the certainty of your fate and the wisdom of a peaceful acquiescence therein."

Saying which, he left the cave, as much vanquished as victor, though with a firm resolve to carry his purpose, even if he had to disable her first, by shooting her through the arm, with a pistol, in order to overcome her!

CHAPTER XV.

BILL AND DICK--HORSE-STEALING--ANTI-THIEF LEAGUE.

On leaving the cave, after the interview with Eveline, Bill and Dick resorted to a place where they were in the habit of holding consultations on their own affairs, arrived at which, Bill produced the note which Eveline gave him, from his pocket, and at once perused it. A dark scowl gathered on his face as he read, and when he had mastered the document, an exclamation broke from his lips to this effect:

"Infernal villain and coward!"

"What now?" queried Dick, not a little surprised at his companion's violent language.

"What do you think?"

"That's a pretty question to ask! as if I could know anything contained in that paper, when I've never seen it except in your hand."

"This rascal, for whom we have been working these three months, wants to get clear of us, so soon as he has obtained from us all the aid he desires."

"What, _Duffel_?"

"Yes, Duffel."

Dick stood a moment, as if in doubt whether to believe Bill's words or not; at length he inquired:

"How do you know this?"

"Why, here it is, in his own hand-writing."

"That he wants to betray us?"

"No--yes--that is, he wants to get us out of the way!"

"How?"

"By fair means or foul; he don't seem to care which. But I will read his words," and Bill read the billet to his accomplice.

"So he's afeard of us!" commented Dick. "Well, it ain't much wonder that he is. Ef I had as many crimes to account for as he has, and others knew of my guilt, I'd be skeered, too."

"See here, Dick, what the d---I does he mean by wanting us to hurry off that affair with Duval?"

"Fool! can't you see nothin'? Why, he wants us to kill a member of the Order, and then have us shot as traitors!"

"Egad! plain enough, truly. Well, Mr. Duval, you may pass this time; we'll pitch into higher game. What do you say, Dick?"

"Say? Why, that this friend of ours will have to git up mighty airly in the mornin', ef he finds us nappin'."

"Let me tell you, it is no very pleasant fix, this, that we are in. Duffel fears we will betray him, and is resolved to prevent it by having us killed. That's the 'long and short' of the matter; and he has fifty men at his back, all sworn to obey his orders. He can accuse us of treason, try, condemn, and have us shot, in the shortest possible time. Now, how are we to help ourselves?"

"Well, we can't be tried till the next regular meeting of the League, and it is more than two weeks till that time. We can watch his movements, and, ef need be, kill him or give him over into the hands of the law on a charge of murder."

"Yes, give him over to justice, and who is to prove him guilty, unless it be ourselves, and then we would have the whole League down upon us in quick time! a pretty way, indeed, to get rid of him. True, we might kill him at our next meeting in the 'swamp' and then be hung for it, which would be a poor recompense for our trouble and bad pay for taking the life of such a dastard. No, I am for revenge--a revenge that will thwart his designs, and save us from his power at the same time."

"But how are you going to accomplish so much? that's the rub."

"See here; on the back of this note, Miss Mandeville writes a few lines, asking our aid, and promising a reward for any service we may be willing and able to render her. My plan is this: To take the lady from the cave, which will be the deepest blow we can strike the villain, and then--"

"Well that'll do for the present. I want to know, before you go any further, how you are to git the gal out without the *key*, which, I take it, Duffel is very careful to secure about his own person?"

"Key! the deuce!" replied Bill, taken aback, for a moment, by the query. "I hadn't thought of that, but it's no difference; my plans are not alf made out in the details yet; but this is no bar to them; for I'd like to see the lock that Bill Mitchel can't make a key to fit, if he has a fair chance. I can make a false key in a day that will open the door to the captain's room. So that difficulty is settled."

"And now for the rest of your plan."

"Well, when we get all ready, I'll just drop a note to some of the vigilance men, and tell them when and where they can find Duffel taking care of a stolen horse. This will save us from the malice of any of his confederates, as they will not suspect us, and place Duffel in the hands of the officers of the government; and he will not get away soon, I'm thinking!"

"So you expect to have Duffel captured about the same time you are liberating his gal. Well, that's pretty sharp; I think you have not wasted your time in Duffel's service, and after all, ought to thank him for giving you such good lessons in plotting. But you have left one loophole yet, for all that."

"What is it?"

"I've been tryin' to think what you will do with the gal when she's brought out of the cave. She'll have to tell where she's been, and that'll fix all of us."

"I have that matter all settled. It won't do to take the girl home, that's certain; and this is my plan for action on that score: You see I have been thinking this matter over in my mind before to-day. I didn't know but we should have a split with Duffel on the Duval affair, and I was preparing for such a state of things in case it did come. As I have told you before, I know where there is a magnificent cave for our purpose in the mountains of Virginia, to which it has been my determination to retreat, should anything go wrong here. Well, I intend to take this young lady along with us to that cave."

"Dang the women! I don't like to be bothered with 'em. Ef you are goin' to that place, why not let the gal go home and 'blow' all she's a mind to? It wouldn't hurt *us*, ef she did let out the secret."

"It might, though. Some of the members of the League might chance to find us hereafter, and inform on us out of revenge."

"But we can swear the gal to keep still about who let her out."

"Pooh! do you suppose she would or *could* do it?"

"Why, yes, I think it's more'n likely she'd keep her tongue out of gratitude. She's no common gal, that, and you may put a peg there."

"Ah, that's it exactly. She's no common girl, as you say; and I have been envying Duffel his good fortune ever since she has been in the cave. The truth is, I was smitten by her charms the first time I saw her, and was half tempted to play Duffel false then; and now that I can serve myself and disappoint him at the same time, I shall not be slow to avail myself of the opportunity."

"I don't like this business of runnin' off women, nohow you can fix it. It allers looked mean and cowardly, somehow, and I despise meanness and cowardice above all things."

"Well, that is a pretty speech to come from you, anyhow! as if you had not been engaged in mean acts half your life, for which you would have to swing, if the law should once get his clutches upon you."

"I know I have done some *bad* things; of *mean* acts I have performed but few, and the meanest of these was helping to carry off this very gal to the cave; and it was by far the most cowardly. Two men to one woman! It's actually a disgrace, and I never think of it without feelin' little!"

"I am willing you should think as you please about the matter, so you give me a little help in the affair."

"I don't know about that; I am tee-totally opposed to meddlin' with women, and I don't think it's manly."

"Yes, but in this instance we are compelled, as it were, to take the girl with us. That changes the case, you know, very materially."

"I'm not so sure as we need to take her. I believe she'd keep our secret ef we'd let her go."

"Well, I don't; and so we differ. But that is not the question. Go she must--go she *shall*! Will you assist me?"

"Why, I reckon I'll have to; it wouldn't hardly be fair to refuse a friend after helpin' an enemy. I'll stand by you."

"That's a good fellow! Well, so much is settled. To-morrow Duffel will be away, and I will take the impression for the key. By Jove, won't it be rich when he finds that he has been robbed and the bird is flown!"

"I think he'll conclude this partic'lar part of God's footstool is likely to become a leetle too hot for him."

"Yes; and about the time he begins to prepare for leaving, he'll find himself taken care of in a way he doesn't dream of."

"And there will be one coward less at large in the world."

"And he will be paid for his treason to his friends."

"But how are we to manage him till the time for action comes?"

"Oh, we must be friendly as ever; he is not quite done with us yet, and we must seem to enter into his plans as fully as ever we have done, and, above all, give him no cause to suspect anything is wrong, or that we have any idea of his intentions toward us."

"Then we must go after them horses to-night?"

"Certainly; I would not miss the opportunity, because, if we succeed in taking the horses, they will be under our care, and we can use them for our own purpose."

"Sure enough. But if we don't get them, what then are we to do?"

"Why, we will take some from the stable."

"I don't like that much. Ef it is found out, as it will be when we are missed, we shall have the enmity of the Order."

"I know, and have prepared for such an emergency."

"How?"

"I will let you know in good time. We must away, now, to meet Duffel in the 'swamp.'"

Thus terminated the interview between these bad men. Had Eveline dreamed that such would have been the effect of her revelation to them of Duffel's purpose, she would have burned the paper sooner than have placed it in their hands. From one snare she falls into another, and there appears to be no end to her misfortunes.

* * * * *

Night was upon the world. In peaceful slumbers the innocent reposed, while the wicked, the thief and robber, stole out upon errands of vice and crime.

'Squire Williams, though in common a follower of that old proverb:

"Early to bed and early to rise, Make a man healthy, wealthy and wise;"

was, on this evening, up until past eleven o'clock, in social chat with a neighbor, who had "dropped in to spend the evening" with him. During the conversation between them, the subject of most engrossing and universal interest in that community, that of horse-stealing, was amply discussed.

"What do you think is best to be done?" inquired the neighbor.

"Well, others may do as they please; but I intend to *defend* my property," was the 'Squire's reply.

"Just the conclusion I have arrived at; and I shall not be surprised if we are called upon very soon to put our resolves into practice."

"Have you heard anything new?"

"Well, no, I haven't heard anything, but I've seen a little, and that, I take it, is about as good."

"Why, yes, it might be better, if it was good for anything at all."

"I do not know how good it is, but my suspicions were excited."

"It is quite an easy matter to have our suspicions excited these exciting times, and on this very exciting subject. There is Mr. Mandeville, has been made to believe that one of the best young men who ever lived, is guilty of stealing his horse first, and his daughter afterward."

"You don't mean to say that he suspects Mr. Duffel of such crimes?"

"No; he judges a thousand times better man than Duffel; for, between you and me, I have my doubts about this Duffel. I have seen him on two different occasions in company with a couple of, to say the least, very suspicious looking characters."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes; and what is more, he was evidently on good terms with them, though he did not appear to wish me to think so, and passed the matter off indifferently. I might not have thought so much of the circumstance were it not for the fact that he does not attend to business at all, and yet lives in a better style and more extravagantly than any other young man in the country. I tell you a man can't live these times, and spend money as he does, without having an income much greater than his."

"Perhaps he is making inroads on his capital."

"That may be, too, though I do not know that it is the case; but I *do* know that he is absent from home much of the time, occasionally for days together, and nobody can tell where he is."

"I have noticed the fact of his absence myself."

"Mr. Mandeville was here to-day, and gave me a history of his troubles. It appears that this Duffel was in love with his daughter--or, as *I* suppose, with his money--and had proposed to him for her hand, which he was willing to bestow, but the daughter was not. She had placed her affections upon another, and, in my belief, a far worthier object, and to the importunities of both her father and Duffel, she gave a firm and constant refusal. The parent forbid her favorite the house, and he believes that it was through his persuasions that Eveline left her home, of which you, of course, have heard."

"Why, yes, I heard the fact, but none of the particulars."

"Well there are no particulars, except that Mr. Mandeville found a couple of notes, purporting to be from her lover, one addressed to herself and the other to him, in the former of which he persuades her to meet him at a certain place, and in the latter informs the parent of their elopement and asks forgiveness. Now it strikes me that these notes or letters were placed there by design, and that they are both forgeries. I know the hand-writing of the young man he accuses, and though the manuscript of the two letters is a very good imitation of his, yet it is not the same. Beside, I do not believe him capable of such an act."

"Why, then, is the daughter gone?"

"I believe she has been kidnapped!"

"_Kidnapped!_"

"Yes, I do!"

"But who would do it? Who would *dare* to do it!"

"Who so likely as the true lover's rival?"

"Heavens! you don't believe *Duffel* would commit such a crime?"

"I do; but mind, this is to go no further until I can find *proof* to sustain my belief. I am going to keep a strict watch upon the movements of this fellow, and I think I shall be able to find out where he keeps himself a part of the time during his absence."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing more nor less than that there is a secret gang of thieves and villains of all kinds, whose head quarters are somewhere in this region of country, and that I intend to ferret out their hiding-place."

"I am with you in that work with all my heart!"

"Very well. Here, then, is a paper I wish you to sign. It is a pledge. The villains have banded together to prey upon us, and I am for banding together to frustrate their plans and bring them to justice. This is simply the form of agreement we enter into among ourselves, and it binds us to use all honorable efforts, to further the cause in which we engage, and to expose the guilty wherever and whenever we can find them, even if the offender should be our nearest kin."

"I'll sign it, sir, with a hearty good will!"

"It further obligates us to aid each other to the utmost of our ability in recovering stolen property, in case any of us should meet with such a misfortune."

"All right, that's a good feature, I'm one of you, heart and hand!"

"Then you may sign, understanding, however, that all which passes between us, as members of this body, is to be kept an inviolable secret. We administer no oath, depending solely upon the honor of our members, all of whom are expected to be honorable and honest men, whose word will be better than the most terrible oath of a criminal."

The document was signed, and the 'Squire continued:

"Now, I wish you to consider all that has or may pass between us this evening as strictly confidential. At the last meeting of our body it was made the duty of every member to protect his property, and to shoot down all thieves who were caught in the act of stealing horses. Some, however, were for first warning the depredators, and if they did not then desist, to fire upon them."

"Indeed! is it supposed that the rascals are so bold?"

"Certainly they are! Why, it was but two or three nights ago that two thieves went into the pasture to take old Marshall's horses, supposing he was too aged and infirm to thwart them, even if he should learn their designs; they went early in the evening, before people usually retired to rest; they caused a disturbance among the horses, which called out a couple of neighbors who chanced to be there, who went to the pasture and demanded of the thieves what they wanted; when they had the insolence to reply, that they came after the horses and were going to have them. With this the men fired upon them, but only with the intention of frightening them away; but they were not so easily scared, and continued to follow up after the horses, which were not easily caught, especially by strangers. Seeing this, the men reloaded their rifles, and, taking the best aim the darkness would allow, fired again; this time with the desired effect, as it was believed one of the villains was wounded."

"I had no idea they were getting so bold!"

"No doubt they are numerous, and numbers beget confidence, you know. But we must teach them a lesson or two they will not soon forget."

"By the way, George Gordon came home from a hunt a day or two ago, with a wound in his arm. Do you think it possible he could have been one of the thieves that night?"

"The truth is, I don't know who to trust nor who to suspect. I have no doubt there are numbers of seemingly honest people who belong to the secret gang of thieves. I should hardly have believed it of Gordon; but there is no telling. How does he account for the wound?"

"He says his gun accidentally went off while he was leaning upon it with his arm over the muzzle."

"Guns are not apt to play such scaly tricks as that; and we had better watch him."

"By-the-way, I heard a report yesterday, to the effect that Thompson had shot, or shot at, some thieves the other night."

"Yes, and you will hear of more shooting; mark that! And if the thieves do not cease their operations, you will hear of some of them being shot dead pretty soon!"

At this point in the conversation, a trampling among the horses in the pasture attracted the attention of the 'Squire.

"Thieves, now!" he exclaimed; and taking down a couple of rifles, he gave one to his neighbor and retaining the other himself, the two sallied forth to ascertain what was going on. It was a starlight night, and they could see some distance tolerably clearly. No sooner did they come in full view of the field in which the horses were, than they espied two thieves attempting to coax the 'Squire's favorite horse to them. The animal, however, had always been shy of strangers, and would never suffer itself to be caught by one even in the day-time. It was a noble animal, and the thieves, as well as the lawful owner, had set their hearts upon it. They would approach as near as prudence dictated, and then hold out corn and salt to entice the beast; it would come near, but the moment they made the least motion to catch it, would wheel about and let fly at them with its heels in such a manner as evinced to the thieves that it was best to keep at a respectful distance. They were yet unwilling to go without him, and made repeated attempts to win him over to their way of thinking, but he was entirely too honest to be wheedled into such bad company.

The 'Squire watched their operations until he thought it was about time to stop the play, and then fired near, but not at the rascals, at the same time calling out to them that they had better leave in short meter if they wanted to get away alive. Supposing that he was alone and his gun empty, they returned an insolent answer, to the effect that they would leave shortly on a couple of his horses; and turned to try their hand at taking some of the others in the pasture. To such a bold pass had the thieves arrived!

"Aim *at* the rascals, and fire!" said the 'Squire to his companion; and they did so.

"By jing, Bill, we'd better be moving, I believe. That ball took a lock of hair off by my ear!"

"The devil it did!"

Everything being still at the moment, the 'Squire heard this scrap of conversation between the thieves, and called out:

"Yes, you *had* better leave, or I'll put the next ball through one of your hearts!"

"Do it, then, and be ----!" said one of them; and leveling a horse pistol at the 'Squire he fired, the ball from which struck the fence close by. This climax of insolence aroused the 'Squire fully. His gun was just reloaded, and taking the best aim at one of the miscreants, both of whom were now retreating rapidly, he fired. The fellow clapped his hand to his face, but continued to run. They were soon out of sight.

The incidents here related are strictly true; but the truth is not half told. Many such scenes took place, and numbers of the thieves were killed, and some of them proved to be neighbors to those who had shot them!

The villains on this occasion were Bill and Dick, as the reader is aware, and this was the termination of their attempt to save the 'Squire's pasture, as Duffel suggested, or to get his horses as they themselves desired.

So soon as the thieves were gone, the neighbor remarked to the 'Squire:

"This reminds me of what I was going to say in the early part of the evening, but was led from the subject by the turn our conversation took."

"I remember, now, you mentioned having seen something, which excited your suspicions that all was not right, in some quarter."

"Well, it was two men, very dare-devil looking fellows, whom I have seen prowling about on several occasions, looking out, as I thought, for chances to steal; and if I am not greatly mistaken, these are the same men."

"No doubt of it at all.--This night's operations have convinced me more than ever of the necessity of strong measures; and the next time I see thieves at their work, I will not stop to scare them, but the first fire will be to wound or kill!"

"I think I shall act on the same principle."

"I advise you to, and all other honest men. I am satisfied nothing else will do."

With this they parted, each going to his own home.

It may be well enough to explain more fully than has yet been done, that Bill and Dick acted in two capacities, one of ruffians, the other as gentlemen. Bill was equally at home in either character, and could act the latter quite *a la mode*. Dick was rather out of his element when it came to the gentleman: he was a little awkward, and by no means at his ease; but give him a daring or desperate act to perform, and he was entirely at home. Yet for all this there was a streak of the man about him, and at heart he was better than either Bill or Duffel.

It was at Dick that the 'Squire aimed the last shot, and the bullet grazed his cheek, doing him no serious injury, however, though it drew the blood and left a scar.

The two villains notwithstanding that they were foiled in their attempt upon the horses, prepared for the prosecution of the rest of their schemes on the morrow with great energy. But leaving them for the present, we will turn to other scenes and characters.

CHAPTER XVI.

EVELINE--THE ANTI-LEAGUE.

Eveline did not sit down in supine idleness, and mourn over her sad fate. True, at times she gave way to her feelings, when the hopelessness of her situation came upon her, as she strove to penetrate the future, in all its crushing force; and she would then weep for a time. But there was a firmness about her character and a strength of determined resolution in her purposes, which braced her spirit and filled her bosom with feelings such as only have birth and nourishment in heroic souls. She looked her intended fate in the face, with the fixed purpose to meet and conquer it, or perish in the attempt.

In Duffel's absence, she had, on several occasions, searched the rooms of the cave in which she was confined, to see if there was no secret passage which communicated with the outer world. Her search had proved unavailing; but instead of the outlet she was seeking, she found a small, jewel-hilted dagger in a rich and costly case. It struck her at once that this weapon might prove of great value to her, and with much care she concealed it in the folds of her dress, where it was made fast. It was this dagger that served her so excellently in the interview with Duffel, recorded in a preceding chapter.

During the interview just referred to, it will be remembered how admirably she sustained her part, and how triumphantly she thwarted Duffel in all his villainous calculations, and especially in his attack upon her person. After the wretch was gone, and she found herself alone, a train of sad reflections came crowding in upon her mind. Was Hadley indeed dead? she thought--and then the circumstantial narrative of the two accomplices of her captor arose fresh in her mind.

"Oh, my God!" she exclaimed, "can it be that ravenous beasts fed upon his flesh? that those arms upon which I have leaned, and which I hoped would protect me, were torn from his body? that those lips which have smiled so sweetly and spoken so hopefully and tenderly, and that noble face and brow were gloated over by howling and bloody jaws! No, no; it cannot be! God is just! and the wicked shall not triumph."

She tried to drive the horrible picture from her thoughts, and after a time succeeded; for she felt the necessity of self-control in her trying situation, and bent all her energies to that point. Then she reflected upon all that had transpired that day, and she felt that with Duffel there was no mercy. But she was not overcome by the thought. If worst come to worst, she resolved that death should save her from the spoiler.

As these reflections occupied her mind, she remembered the declaration of the villain concerning the secret communication between the two apartments in which she was imprisoned. Until now it had been a source of no small consolation to her, that, in case of an emergency, she could retreat to her own room, and there abide in safety. But now this small comfort was taken from her, and she felt how completely she was in the power of her adversary. This feeling, however, did not crush her spirit; for she had already brought herself to the sublime point of martyrdom, and was prepared to die for virtue, rather than yield, *in any case*, to become the victim of sin, or to the wishes of the base wretch who hoped to conquer her.

Life is sweet, and it will never be surrendered by one who has a correct appreciation of its Author, until every consistent effort has been made to preserve it. Hence, Eveline determined to use every means to save herself before having recourse to this last resort.

As she was reflecting upon this matter, the suggestion came, that, perhaps, she might find this secret passage between the two rooms, and possibly be able to fasten the entrance way to her apartment on the inside, and thus bar the miscreant out, who would dare intrude upon her privacy. Acting upon the supposition that this idea was not beyond the pale of possibility, she commenced a diligent examination of all that part of the wall of the outer room which extended as far as the inner one; but she could find no resemblance to a door, no crack in the solid rocks, no spot on the floor which gave the least indication of what she sought. All was apparently an unbroken mass, through which no mortal or living thing had ever passed. She began to think that, after all, Duffel might possibly be deceived himself, or else was only trying to frighten her. Determined, however, if there was such a communication as he spoke of, to find it, if it could be found, she went into the other room, and commenced the same minute search, having first locked and bolted the door, so as to make certain of not being discovered or interrupted, unless the intruder should come by the secret way. After the closest examination of the wall, with her eyes, to no purpose, she commenced trying the efficacy of touch, pressing her fingers over every portion of the surface of the room; but, as no appearance of what she was laboring to find rewarded her search, she began to despair of success.

"If there is such a passage," she thought within herself, "it is so guarded that none may find it, save the possessors of the secret: and my only hope is in sleepless watchfulness. How long I shall be able to live without sleep, God knows."

In this manner the night was passed--night in the outer world; for to her the night and day were alike, and she could only guess as to which prevailed above her. She sat down to collect her thoughts and form, if possible, some plan of action by which to be governed. While thus engaged, she recollected the note she had given to Bill, the memory of which had been crowded from her mind for the past few hours by the pressure of other things.

"Oh, if I but knew how it would affect them!" she said, as she suffered her thoughts to dwell upon the subject. "They will certainly see the folly of trusting in Duffel, and the imminent danger they are exposed to in his service; but will they, can they help me? I will hope even if it is vain to do so. It is a fearful thing to be compelled to throw one's self into the hands and upon the mercy of such bad men; but God can overrule the evil intentions of the wicked, and very bad men sometimes perform noble and generous deeds."

Ah! had she known that at the very moment she was thus endeavoring to console herself, Bill was taking an impression of the lock to the door of the outer room, for the purpose of taking her to another prison, farther from home and hope than the one she was now confined in, how the little hope from that source would have died in her bosom!

After remaining for some length of time in a state of attempted repose, her mind, the while, completely absorbed in contemplating her own situation, she finally concluded to go out into the other apartment, and make another effort there, to find the entrance, if such there was, to her own room.

She had not been thus employed long, when a knocking at the outer door attracted her attention. She listened a moment, and then, supposing it to be Duffel, was about to retire to the inner cavity and bar him out; but just as she started to put this resolve in execution, her steps were arrested by hearing her own name called in a voice not like Duffel's. She instantly paused, and the call was repeated:

"Miss Mandeville! If you are present and hear me, please step to this door and look into the keyhole. It is a friend, who will aid you, that is now addressing you."

With a beating heart, she quickly reached the door, and from the place designated drew a small, compact roll of paper. On it were traced some lines by one who was evidently a highly accomplished penman. She hastened to examine the purport of the billet, which read as follows:

"Your appeal to us for assistance was not made in vain. We are fully satisfied of Duffel's wicked and base intentions toward us, and are resolved to thwart them. You shall be brought out of this den, and behold again the sunlight of heaven. By the day after to-morrow we will have our arrangements completed, when you may expect to hear from us again. Hold yourself in readiness to leave this place at any moment. Is this satisfactory to you, fair lady?"

There was no name to this; but it needed none to tell Eveline from whom it came. She knew it was from Duffel's accomplices, and rejoicing in the success of her plan, she replied to the inquiry at the close with alacrity:

"Yes, my good friends, this is eminently satisfactory. May God bless you, as you help me."

"Thank you for the confidence you place in us! we will endeavor to reward your expectations by delivering you from this dismal prison, at the very earliest moment possible. Will you now be so good as to burn the little strip of paper, lest by some unfortunate accident it might betray us to our mutual enemy, and thereby frustrate our plans?"

"Yes, sir, I will burn it immediately."

"Thank you. Keep up your courage, and be of good cheer."

"Accept my warmest gratitude for your generous aid, gentlemen; and be assured you shall not go unrewarded for the great service you render me."

"We ask no pay. The service you speak of will be most cheerfully and gladly rendered; and in your enlargement and the defeat of Duffel, we shall be more than a thousand times rewarded for the small efforts we shall be compelled to put forth in your behalf. And now adieu!"

"Adieu, gentlemen, and may Heaven bless you, in your efforts on my behalf."

It would be impossible to describe the feelings of Eveline at the close of this interview, separated though she was from her expected deliverers by a door of adamant. She did not take time to think into whose hands she was about to fall; in her gratitude and enthusiasm she forgot that they were ruffians, and clothed them in garments and with the glory of heroes, who for her sake risked their lives! Oh had she seen the blackness of heart which lay at the bottom of their seeming heroism and noble deeds, how her poor heart would have grown sick, and her bright hopes gone out in midnight darkness!

She retired to her room, bolted herself in, again read the note, then burned it, and gave herself up to the enjoyment of the first delicious hope that had sent joy to her troubled heart since the sad hour of her capture. Only two more days, and she would be at liberty! What a joy to her desponding spirit! Two more days, and she would be free from her fiendish persecutor, and could fly to her parent, to pour the balm of consolation into his rent breast, and bind up his lacerated heart! Only two more days! How the thought swelled her bosom! Alas! that from this high pinnacle of hope she must so soon be hurled!

From the interview Bill went out to meet Dick, whom he had left on guard, to give warning if Duffel or others should be coming to the cave.

We may as well remark here as at any other point, that the arrangements of the order with regard to the cave were these: One of the number was always expected to be within its precincts, to admit members who wished to obtain entrance, either to escape the pursuit of officers of justice, or to deposit booty. If by any possible chance this guarding sentinel should be called away, without being able to give warning of his departure from the post assigned him, he was to leave the key in a designated spot, where any member might find it in case of need. As Bill did not wish any one to know what he was doing at the door, he very generously offered to take the sentinel's place for a half-day, and permit him to go out and breathe the fresh air. The offer was gladly accepted; and Bill succeeded, to his entire satisfaction, in getting an impression of the lock, while on duty in the sentinel's stead.

There was, also, in a far corner of the outer cave, or rather, in an apartment by itself, a kind of kitchen, where food was prepared. It was from this place that Duffel supplied Eveline with nourishment, taking her meals to her himself, which, by the way, though ample and of good quality, were generally served up cold, or, to speak plainly, were left in the captain's room for her to partake of when and as she saw proper; for she would touch nothing that he brought, in his presence, nor would she have done so at any other time, could she have lived without food; it was only to be preserved from starvation, that she forced herself to eat in that cheerless abode.

In another part of the cave, separated from the main room partly by natural and partly by artificial means, was a kind of magazine, where powder, lead and arms were kept. To this the men had access at any time, and always resorted when in need of weapons or ammunition. With this brief explanation, the reader will be able to understand how things were managed by this band of freebooters, as, also, some of the succeeding portions of this story.

As we said, Bill left the cave and went out to see Dick, who was stationed along the passage-way in the bank of the stream, to impart to him the success of their operations thus far, and to finish the details of some of their arrangements for the future. The two worthies remained in conversation some two or three hours awaiting the return of the sentinel; and then Bill, becoming impatient, left the cave in Dick's care, and hastened away to get his key made. A portion of their conversation while together will be given hereafter, when a third party will be introduced as a listener; a party who at *once* became most deeply interested in their plans, and caught every word with the greatest eagerness, and with such emotions as may be supposed to agitate a human bosom only in cases where life and death are pending in the balances.

Will the contest be villain for villain? and life against life? We shall see! What, in the meantime, will become of the so recently hopeful Eveline? Will she be lost in the strife where murderer wages war against his brother murderer? Let us not anticipate.

Before proceeding with the direct thread of our narrative, we will again glance at the action of the "Anti-Horse-Thief League," organized, as already intimated, to put down the bold land-pirates, whose depredations upon property had become so unbearable the honest portion of community had no alternative left but to "become a law unto themselves," and by direct and combined action clear the country of the host of desperadoes with which it had become infested and overrun. Many of our aged readers will remember those exciting times; perhaps some of them can call to mind the very hour when *they* were forced to take their rifles

in hand and go forth to defend their property.

On the very night that Bill and Dick made their ineffectual attempt on 'Squire Williams' horses, two others of the "Horse Thief League," as the gang of thieves were christened by the honest portion of community, went on a similar excursion into a different neighborhood, some five or six miles away, and met with a still warmer reception from the farmer whose stock they endeavored to remove without his consent, than did Bill and Dick in their attempt; for one of them was so badly wounded as to be scarcely able, with the assistance of his companion, to get away from the field and to his own home. Next day it was rumored that such a neighbor was badly wounded, and it was very doubtful if he recovered. Of course the wound was accounted for on strictly honorable grounds; but people understood the matter; and when, the second day, his remains were borne to the tomb, people shook their heads, but kept their lips compressed. If his children could grow up honest men, the crime for which their father died should never be imputed to them, or cast reproach upon their after lives. Then, too, it would not do to speak too plainly about a man's being killed, as it might lead to unpleasant consequences in after years, perhaps; for men were acting unlawfully in thus defending their property with arms.

These things caused still more active and energetic measures to be adopted by the Anti-League. A vigilance committee was appointed, consisting at first of three, and afterward of five men, who were to serve one month, and then be relieved by other five, each member taking his turn, until all had served. The duty of this committee was to keep a constant watch upon the movements of all suspected characters; and when a horse was stolen, to follow up the thief until, if possible, the offender was taken and the horse recovered. 'Squire Williams volunteered to serve on this committee as one of the first five, and four others joined themselves with him. For himself, without naming his suspicions to any one, he kept an eye upon Duffel's movements, resolved, if he was guilty, to prove him so, by the collection of such facts as would convict him in a court of justice. The neighbor who was with him on the night of the attack became his companion on the committee, and took upon himself the task of watching Bill and Dick. This arrangement was made the day after the thieves had been shot at; so that while Duffel was busy making his arrangements with the members of the Thief League, in anticipation of a speedy removal of the head quarters of operations to another part of the country, and while Bill and Dick were busy with their plans of villainy, having in view the defeat of Duffel and the possession of Eveline, the committee were also busy, endeavoring by the most active and vigilant efforts, conducted at the same time with great celerity, to circumvent the villains; not that they knew the particular plots and counter-plots that were going on among the common enemy, for of these they were ignorant; but they were determined to hunt them up and stop their depredations.

Thus it will be seen that the elements are at work; and from the determined character of all the operators and their great desire to have things done speedily, we may expect stirring times.

CHAPTER XVII.

HADLEY.

It will be remembered, that after his recovery from the wounds inflicted by Bill and Dick, as recorded in a former chapter, Hadley proceeded to Philadelphia. When he reached that city he found his mother and uncle both very sick, and in need of constant care and attention. She had no kind daughter to sit by her couch and smooth her pillow; and he had no affectionate wife to bathe his fevered brow with her soft hand, and by such gentle attentions as no one else can bestow, alleviate his pain. Hadley endeavored, to the best of his ability, to fill the place of daughter to one, and of wife to the other, in his assiduous efforts to watch over, aid and comfort them; and though he did not possess all that sweet softness of manner and voice that belongs especially to woman, and though he could not perceive, with the quick intuition of the other sex, yet by constant attention he was enabled to ease many a pain and throw comfort into many an otherwise sad and lonely hour.

At first his mother was in need of the most attention, and was hardly expected to live from one day to the next; but he soon had the satisfaction of seeing her disease yield to nature and treatment, and she began to grow better. But almost before he could relax anything in his attentions to her, the uncle became much worse; and he shared his time between the two, scarcely taking time to eat or sleep.

Between the uncle and nephew there had existed a coldness for some years, which was caused by the following circumstance:

In his youth the uncle was the companion of an estimable young man, between whom and himself there existed the warmest friendship and sincerest attachment. They were indebted to each other for many kind acts, and thus became mutually endeared one to the other. At length they were separated, by the uncle going to the West Indies on business, expecting to be detained a length of time, perhaps for years, which proved to be the case. While he was away the friend of his younger days met with that fate so common to mankind--fell in love and got married. The union proved to be a happy one; and when, after years of separation, the uncle returned, he found in the house of his friend a joyful wife and a beautiful, smiling daughter, a child of seven years, with a sweet disposition, and a heart to love everybody.

To this young child, Mr. Scofield--James Scofield was the uncle's name--soon became very deeply and fervently attached, as did also the child to him; He saw that the father had found a nearer and dearer friend than himself, and he was glad in his heart to witness the happiness which reigned in the peaceful home so sweetly cheered by love. Many persons would have been jealous of the wife's ascendancy in her husband's affections; but instead of envying the wife, or feeling ill toward her, he came to love her as a friend, not only for her own sake, but, also, because she made his friend such a kind and amiable companion; and in the endearment of their little girl, who soon learned to be his pet, he was repaid for any exclusive companionship from her father that he might have monopolized had he remained, like himself, a bachelor.

Four years after his return from the Indies, Mr. Scofield was called to the bedside of his dying friend. In their last interviews he was charged with the guardianship and care of the young girl, conjointly with the mother, who was also recommended to his friendship, with the injunction ever to be to her as a brother and a counselor. These trusts he accepted, with a promise to be all to the dear ones he left behind that his friend could wish; and this promise he faithfully kept. No friend, brother, father, or husband could have been more attentive to the wants, or more solicitous for the welfare of those entrusted to their protection or dependent upon them than he was. He endeavored to anticipate their desires and necessities--of advice and friendship, not of goods, for the friend was in good circumstances, and had left them with plenty of means to live well and comfortably all their lives--and in all things to be to them the kind friend they needed.

A warm attachment existed between them. Many thought--and idle gossips whispered it about--that the widow was soon to console herself for the great loss she had sustained, by taking Mr. Scofield as a second husband; but no such idea ever entered *their* minds. Her heart was buried in the grave with her husband; and he--ah, he had a secret. A gentle being, beautiful to him as an angel, had once crossed his path; but before taking her to the altar, the angels came and took her to their homes, beyond the reach of blight or death; and since then his thoughts often wandered away to the regions of perfection; and with the memory of his loved one in heaven, he never coupled a thought of a second love on earth.

It was not long that the widow and her husband's friend remained in ignorance of each other's feelings; the secret he had kept from all others he confided to her; and in mutual explanations and confidences, they soon came to understand each other; and thenceforth their intercourse was unrestrained and cordial. What knew or cared they for the busy tongue of rumor? Nothing. Secure in each other's esteem, with a high rectitude of purpose, they continued their good offices to each other, careless what the world might say, so they gave no cause for vicious tongues to speak evil of them.

We need hardly say that with such intimate association, Mr. Scofield learned to love little Ida as a father loves

his own child. Had it not been for the judicious watchfulness and careful training of her excellent mother, she might have been spoiled by his petting. As it was, no child could be gladder to see a parent than she was to see her friend. She would bound away to meet him; and when seated, would climb upon his knee while young, and when older seat herself by him and listen to the stories he would tell her, or play in his locks with her childish fingers.

About a year after his friend's death, Mr. Scofield's only sister lost her husband; and, at his earnest solicitation, she and her little boy came to live with him.

Mrs. Hadley was not wealthy, though she could not be called poor, as her husband had left her a small property, which, by careful management, would school Charles and keep them both until he should arrive at manhood, when, by his own exertions, he could carve out a fortune for himself.

Mr. Scofield soon learned to love Charles very dearly, for he was an amiable and affectionate boy, and always strove to be kind and dutiful to his uncle. It was one of the brother's first acts to introduce his sister to his friend's wife; and they were not long in forming a warm attachment for each other; so much so that Mr. Scofield became almost jealous of each of them for cheating him out of so much of the society of both. He might have become quite jealous had it not been for the fact that while the mothers were entertaining each other, he was left to entertain the children, who, of course, were soon almost constantly together, and were not long in becoming as familiar and affectionate as brother and sister.

It was not long until Mr. Scofield conceived the idea of a marriage between these two children when they should arrive at proper age; and this finally became the darling wish and object of his life.

It does not come within the scope of this sketch, to dwell upon particulars in regard to the affairs of these two happily situated families, and so we pass over the intervening years, until Charles, at seventeen, was sent to College. About the same time Mr. Scofield was called away to the West Indies on business, and by his advice, the two widows were to live together during his absence.

He had never breathed his intentions concerning the young people to any one, and he hoped no interference would be required, but that the constant association of the two would naturally result in an attachment like the one he so anxiously desired to spring up between them.

Charles made rapid progress at college, and in three years graduated with honor. During these three years he had seen his uncle but once, as his India business was much more complicated than he had expected to find it, and detained him, with the exception of a brief visit home, a little over three years in arranging it, which, was finally done by closing it up and removing his funds nearer home.

He was very proud of Charles as a student, and often prophesied great things for him; but he was sorry to be able to perceive no signs of an attachment like that of lovers existing between the young folks. Still he was hopeful. They might love and not know it themselves; if so, it would require something to awaken them to a consciousness of the fact. He resolved on trying an experiment. Meeting Ida alone, he said:

"Do you know, my dear, that I am about to send Charles away?"

"No. Where is he going?"

"Where there is a possibility we may never see him again."

"Oh, don't say so, uncle!" (She had learned to call him uncle.) "What would we do without him? Do send some one else, and let him stay!"

The uncle thought he saw the evidence of a deep affection in her evident distress, and, as this was his object, he replied:

"Oh, I had only thought of sending him to the West Indies; but if you insist so hard, I suppose I shall have to find some one else to go."

"There, that's a good, dear uncle, as you always are. Oh, I am so glad Charles will not be sent away from us!"

With secret delight--for he felt sure she loved his nephew as he wished--Mr. Scofield next sought Charles, to see if an interview with him would result as satisfactorily to his wishes as with Ida. He was disappointed; Charles evidently loved Ida, but it was only with a brotherly affection. He waited a few weeks longer, and then spoke plainly to his nephew on the subject that lay nearest his heart. He told the young man how much he desired to see him and Ida united, and hoped if he did not already love her, that he would try to do so. As Charles had formed no attachment at that time, he readily consented to converse with Ida--ascertain whether her affections were engaged to him, and if so, to reciprocate them, if possible. He did so; but he found that Ida's attachment was like his own, and then he plainly told her of his uncle's wishes.

"I had never thought of that," she said; "but if it is his desire and yours also, that we should be united, I think I could live happily with you."

This was said in a matter-of-fact way, that, more clearly than anything else, showed her want of that peculiar kind of love which sanctifies marriage. Charles saw this, and replied:

"I have no doubt, Ida, but you would make one of the best of wives; but I should fear to wed you, when neither of us loved more ardently than we do."

"Why would you _fear_?"

"That either or both of us might afterward see some one that we could love as those are expected to, who enter into the solemn obligations of the marriage covenant. The heart is not master of its own emotions; they come and go, regardless of our calls and commands, and we may not count upon being able to control them. How wretched it would cause either of us to be united to each other, while a third party was loved, I leave you to determine for yourself. I have been so accustomed to regard you as a sister, it seems strange to think of you in any other light; and I hope this little passage between us will not mar the freedom of our intercourse."

"I am sure I do not intend that it shall; and I think in consenting to become a nearer companion to you than even a sister, I have given ample assurance of my esteem and regard."

"We will then continue to be friends, and I will go at once and communicate our decision to my uncle."

When Charles related to Mr. Scofield what had transpired between himself and Ida, he saw that his uncle was deeply disappointed and dissatisfied.

"Boy!" he said, in more of a passion than Charles had ever seen him, "Boy, you've made a fool of the matter and of yourself, too!"

"Why, uncle!" replied Charles, in utter astonishment.

"Yes, you have!" continued the old gentleman, "and I am provoked at you. I have always intended to make you my heir, but I shall not do it now, at least, not until you consent to wed Ida."

"Ida does not wish to marry me."

"She'll not object, I know she will not. I have set my heart upon the match, and you must marry her, Charles."

"I am deeply pained to say so, but I cannot."

"You *must!*"

"Nay, then, I _will not!_"

"Boy! do you wish to drive me to disinherit and disown you?"

"Disinherit me if you will, but I beg you will not disown me. I have a conscience in this matter; if it was only a whim, I would yield to your wishes."

"And you utterly refuse to accede to my desires?"

"I do."

"Well, I am sorry for you, but I am resolved, seeing you care so little for me, to substitute Ida's name for yours in my will."

Charles could bear to be treated harshly, but to be accused of want of affection and gratitude toward the benefactor to whom he owed so much, called tears to his eyes.

"You know, uncle, that I love you as I would a father, and it is unjust of you to charge me with a want of affection."

Mr. Scofield was moved by the evident distress his words had caused in his nephew's mind, and relenting a very little, he said:

"I will try you, then; instead of cutting you off at once, I give you a week to consider the matter over; if, in that time, you find you love me well enough to accede to my wishes, well and good; if not, I will surely do as I have said."

Saying this, he abruptly closed the interview, and left Charles in a state of the deepest distress and sorrow. His mother tried to persuade him to yield to his uncle's good pleasure; and, finally, Ida and her mother joined in entreating him not to break all their hearts by suffering himself to be driven from home. He had most difficulty to overcome Ida's pleadings, for she told him no fate could be so bad as for him to be sent away, to wander in the world, and die, perhaps, among strangers, with no kind mother, sister or friend to minister to his wants or smooth his dying pillow.

"Spare me, Ida!" he said with emotion. "You will yet see the day when you will thank me for my firmness. If I did not think so--if I could be convinced that you loved me, as every woman's heart must love some one at some period in life, I would not hesitate to comply with the wishes you all express, and remain on my uncle's terms. As it is, I shall go."

The week expired, and at its close Charles had everything arranged to leave home. He formally told his uncle of his determination to seek his own fortune, as it was impossible for him to comply with his wishes; but that he did not go in anger. For his fortune he cared but little, though it was a great grief to be compelled to go from him bearing his ill-will.

The uncle was much affected, and a word of entreaty from the young man would have induced him to recall the sentence of his doom; but as that word was not spoken, he could not quite unbend enough to voluntarily

ask his nephew to remain. Charles left on the morning after the interview, for the west, having, after due reflection, arrived at the conclusion that a competence could be secured there as speedily as anywhere else. Fortune led him to the Mandeville settlement, where he soon became a favorite, and where he was in a fair way to accumulate a reasonable share of this world's goods, when the incidents occurred and the mishaps befel him, which have already been narrated.

With these digressive remarks, thrown in to give the reader a fuller knowledge of the character and position of one of our most interesting characters, as, also, that what follows may be understood, we return to that portion of our story now supposed to be more deeply interesting to those who have followed us thus far, in the perusal of this more than merely romantic tale.

As we said, Hadley's time was taken up first, in waiting upon his mother, and then upon his uncle. In the midst of these trying but cheerfully performed duties, he found but little time to think upon his own prospects, though not an hour passed that the image of Eveline was not called up before his mental vision, and if left to the current of thought for a brief period, his reflections became of the most agonizing character, and the topics upon which he dwelt something like these:

Was she sick? or, worse for his hope, had she passed to that "bourne from whence no traveler returns?" If alive, was she still persecuted by Duffel? was her father still resolved to force her to wed the villain against her will?

As such thoughts rushed through his mind, he almost became impatient of duty and ready to leave his post to fly to the rescue of his love. But a groan from either of the invalids would instantly call back his wandering mind, and in the active labor of kindness and sympathy, he always forgot his own troubles. It was well for him he knew not of the charge preferred against him by his base rival, and still better that he knew nothing of the villain's intentions in regard to the idol of his heart, or he would probably have left the sick ones to care for themselves, and flown to the rescue of her he loved, ere she was stolen and conveyed to the cave.

In the midst of his duties at the bedsides of the afflicted, he had forgotten to inquire after his old friends, Ida and her mother; but so soon as Mrs. Hadley began to mend, she told him they were away from the city on a visit to some friends, but were expected to return in a few days. He was glad to hear this, for as soon as he could leave, he wished to return to the west. He made a confidant of his mother, and told her she must excuse his impatience to learn the fate of his affianced bride. She remembered but too well the days of her youth to chide him, telling him he should go as early as he felt it safe to leave his uncle. They had scarcely finished their little communications, when Charles was called to minister to the other invalid. After making him as comfortable as possible, Mr. Scofield requested him to be seated, and then opened a conversation with him, on this wise:

"I suppose, Charles, you have not forgotten the cause that separated us?"

"No, uncle, I have not?"

"And do you still adhere to your old determination?"

"I do?"

"Well, I have repented of my rashness, and I hope you will forgive me."

"I have nothing to forgive, but much to be thankful for."

"I was very cruel, for I had set my heart on the marriage, and it was a deeper disappointment to me than you could well imagine; but it is over now, and I am satisfied all has turned out for the best, seeing you did not

love each other. I have finally arranged my affairs, and my will bequeathes ten thousand dollars to Ida, and the rest, about fifty thousand, to yourself. I may not live long, or I may linger for years; but whether I go soon or remain long, be a friend to Ida and her mother when I am taken from them."

"I could not be otherwise, my dear uncle; it will be truly a pleasure to serve and protect them. But now let me thank you from the bottom of my heart, for your kindness. I am unworthy to become your heir, but if it so please Providence and you to permit me to become the recipient of your bounty, I shall make it my endeavor to use and not abuse your wealth."

"God help you there, my boy! It is a difficult thing to make good use of riches."

We shall not dwell to narrate all that transpired. In a few days Ida and her mother came home, and learning the situation of their friends, immediately installed themselves as nurses to the sick.

Hadley was now relieved from the weight of care and duty he had assumed, and took more rest.

His meeting with Ida was cordial, and it was not many hours till they were mutual confidants, and Ida said:

"So, you see, I *do* thank you for your firmness. But, oh, I so much wish to see Eveline. You must go back soon. She may need your aid."

And he did go soon. Mr. Scofield soon began to convalesce; his mother was out of danger, and bidding all an affectionate adieu, with the hope soon to meet again, he started in the early dawn of a beautiful morning for the scene of his hopes and fears.

On the second day of his journey, a sad presentiment of impending evil took possession of his mind. Ah! had he known the situation of his beloved at that hour, how his heart would have died within him, and his soul burned to inflict merited retribution on the heads of her enemies. But the dark fate that hung over her at that hour was veiled from his view, and hope mingled with fear in his bosom. Fear, however, kept increasing, and before the close of the third day, a voice seemed to Whisper:

"Haste, Hadley, haste! Wings of lightning can scarcely bear thee swift enough to the rescue of her thou lovest so dearly!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE UNKNOWN LISTENER.

Eveline continued to indulge in her pleasing reverie of hope, and in the cheering thoughts that came crowding upon her mind in anticipation of a speedy release from her dungeon, and restoration to her father and friends, she forgot that her situation, in the meantime, was one of peril, even if her newly found friends should be able to accomplish their object. Duffel might return at any moment, and, in vindictive fury, bring about her ruin or death. Such dark pictures, however, were, for the moment, driven from her mind by those of a more enlivening nature, and she ceased to search after, or even to bear in mind, the secret passage.

As she sat in peaceful quiet, thinking of home and dear ones, her eye chanced to fall upon a spot in the wall, where, the light striking it to advantage, a clear, crystalline stone, flashed back the rays from her lamp, as it sparkled with a brilliancy scarcely inferior to that of a diamond. Curiosity led her to a more minute examination of this singularly bright object; and approaching, she placed her finger upon it. It seemed to be imbedded firmly in the solid rock, but projected out a very little beyond the surrounding portions of the wall, just far enough to be perceived by the touch. She pressed upon it to ascertain if it was really unmovable, and, as she did so, open flew a small door, barely large enough to admit a single person through its portals. In a

twinkling her labors of the past day and night came to remembrance, and she exclaimed:

"_The secret passage!_"

In a moment all her former feelings returned; and, taking a lamp in her hand, she prepared to explore the mysterious avenue thus opened before her. Before committing herself to the unknown, perhaps tortuous passage, she took the precaution to place an obstruction in the doorway, so that the door could not, by any possibility, swing to and shut her on the outside. She took the forethought, also, to see that her dagger was safely secured about her person, not knowing whither she was going, or into what company she might fall.

Having thus prudently provided against accidents and emergencies, Eveline entered the passage, which was dark, damp, and dismal, with trembling nerves and a timid heart. Slowly, cautiously, step by step, she felt her way, aided by the light of her lamp. It seemed strange that she should have to go so far to get into the other room; yet still she moved on and on without coming to the end of the passage or to any place of egress.

The way was narrow and somewhat zigzag, and in several places she had to stoop in order to proceed. Where did the underground passage terminate? With what did it connect? Was it a natural one? or had it been made by man? Perhaps it was the connecting line between the cave she had left and some other den of wickedness known and occupied by this band of villains? With such and a hundred similar suggestions her mind was occupied, and she began to feel unpleasant. Perhaps she was venturing into the presence of those who would have even less regard for her than Duffel. An undefined terror for a moment seized upon her, and she was about to yield to the dictates of fear, and return to her room, when a kind of murmuring sound, as if of voices in the distance, met her ear. Listening a moment she felt quite sure there were living persons somewhere near; and summoning all her resolution, she boldly pushed forward, determined to solve the mystery in which she was involved, and if human beings were in her vicinity, to ascertain who and what they were.

Advancing with a cautious but firm step, she was not long in doubt as to the nature of the sound; it evidently proceeded from human lips. As she drew nearer words became distinguishable; and then she came to the end of the passage, which abruptly terminated against a solid wall, like those of the cave. But the wall was evidently a thin one, and on the immediate outside--or other side--were the persons, who were engaged in conversation. She stood there but a brief moment when her attention became fixed and all absorbed in the conference going on between the interlocutors, both of whom (she could distinguish but two voices,) seemed to be deeply interested in some matter under consideration.

"I tell you what it is, Bill, I don't like this here bizness of runnin' off that gal a bit. I've been thinkin' the matter over, and the more I think, the more I don't like it."

These were the first words that Eveline heard distinctly and connectedly. Who were they? and who was the girl? There seemed to be something familiar about the voice of the speaker, and yet she could not tell where or when she had heard it before. In a moment came the reply:

"I thought that point was settled. I tell you I'd take her if it was only to spite Duffel."

"Duffel!" ejaculated Eveline in thought, and she came near making the exclamation aloud. "Duffel! then these men know him!" In a moment the truth flashed upon her mind. It was Duffel's friends, her captors, the ones from whose aid she was so soon to be delivered! Yes, now she remembered the voices! And for a moment her heart bounded in gratitude to the last speaker, whose words she understood to express his firm resolution to liberate her. The moment the rejoinder came from the other, however, her mind was perplexed, but as she listened further the whole matter was untangled:

"And wouldn't it spite Duffel just as much if we should take her back?"

"No, I don't think it would. Beside, I want to show him how completely we can beat him at his own game; and then, too, I wish to be revenged on him to the fullest extent; he likes the girl, and to know that she is in the hands of another, who has entirely outwitted him, will be a source of chagrin, and the spark to light the fires of jealousy."

"You don't intend to let him know that you have taken the gal!"

"Certainly I do!"

"And then have the whole League after us! A fine plot, truly!"

"League the h----! I tell you I'm going to blow the whole thing to nothing, cave and all!"

"What!"

"When I leave this region there will be no League here. This cave will be in ruins, and the whole order scattered to the four winds of heaven!"

"Are you crazy, Bill Mitchel!"

"No, I am just coming to my senses. Here we have been these many years, doing all the most dangerous and daring work of the order--work that others were too chicken-hearted to undertake--and what is our reward? We are esteemed as the meanest of the Clan, and as being hardly fit to associate with those who claim to be the gentlemen of the League. Why, I believe the officers would cut our throats at any time to save themselves. See what Duffel is after at this very time. Never was a man served more faithfully than we have served him, and now that we have rendered him all the aid he needs or desires at our hands, he would cut us off; aye, worse, he would murder us--murder us as we have murdered for him. Do you think I would let an opportunity to be revenged on him pass unimproved? _Never!_"

"But how are you goin' to do all this mighty work?"

"I'll tell you. The captain is away; I intend that Duffel shall be secured by the officers of the law; the rest of the members I will take measures to frighten; and when they resort to this infernal cave for refuge, counsel, or concert of action, they will find it in ruins."

"How in ruins?"

"Isn't there powder enough in the magazine to blow it to atoms?"

"Powder!"

"Yes, *powder*! Is there anything in that explosive material that need cause you to look so wild? I thought you were better acquainted with its properties."

"I believe I begin to understand your intentions; but they don't exactly chime with your plans of yesterday."

"Yesterday! I tell you I was only half awake then. I hadn't considered all the sides to the question; and the more I think, the madder I get. I tell you we have been imposed upon; and I am going to pay back the debt with interest. I had another idea yesterday; but my plans were then immature and unsettled, now they are arranged even to the details. I tell you I have been thinking for the last twenty-four hours; and it has been to some purpose, as you and the rest of these fellows, and Duffel in particular, will find out."

"Very well; if the order is to be destroyed, then there is no need of fearing to let the girl go home, as she could do us no harm if she *did* reveal our secrets."

"I tell you I have taken a fancy to the girl myself and have set my heart on possessing her, *and I will do it*. It's true I don't care for the order now. I defy all its members; but that makes no difference about the girl. She goes with us."

"I don't believe any good will come of takin' her, but there is a plaguy good chance for evil to come of it."

"Let it come, then, and we'll face it like men! I tell you I am desperate; I have fixed my stakes and I don't intend to be driven from them. The more I think, the more determined I become."

"But it looks so mean and cowardly to abuse a woman."

"Who said I was going to abuse her?"

"I say so."

"You'd better be a little careful of your speech, my good fellow!"

"I'll say what I please; and you know what I have said is the truth. Haint you goin' to deceive the gal? Didn't you jist tell her that you was her friend? and that we'd liberate her? And don't she expect us to take her home, instead of away off to that cave in Virginny, where she'll be no better off than she is here? And haint it cowardly to lie and deceive them as trust in your word and honor?"

"Honor! a pretty word that for such a fellow as you to use! How long have you entertained such high notions, pray?"

"Allers, sir, allers! Did you ever hear me tell a lie? Did you ever see me betray any one that put themselves under my care? Say, sir, have you?"

"Well, no, I don't know as I have; but what of that?"

"A great deal, sir; a great deal! It means that I'm not a mean, cowardly dog; that I don't go to a woman with a lie in my mouth, and sneakingly deceive her! No, sir, I am above such work."

"That will do, I can't bear everything, even from you, and I warn you not to go too far!"

"Warn away, then; I'm not the man to be skeered by any woman-stealer that ever walked the earth. No, sir, I'm not! And I say ag'in, the man that'll impose on a woman is a coward, and a mean one at that."

"Come, come, Dick, it's no use to be talking in that manner. You know I am no more of a coward than yourself; and so what's the use of such an ado about nothing. Didn't you tell me yesterday you would stand by me in this affair? Come, now, keep your word, and don't prove yourself a liar after such a boast of truthfulness, just a moment ago?"

"Yes, there it is ag'in. You told me it was for our personal safety, and such like stuff, that you were goin' to take the gal along; and now you defy the whole order, and are goin' to blow them all to atoms! I take it that makes quite a difference."

"Didn't I tell you the girl was to go any how? And didn't you say it would hardly be fair to help an enemy and not a friend? Come, where is your honor now?"

"That promise, I tell you, was obtained under false pretenses, and is not binding!"

"A pretty excuse, indeed!--Well to bring the matter to a point at once, I now state distinctly that I am going to take the girl with me, because I wish to do so, and for that reason alone; and I want you to help me. Will you do it? That's the question, and I want a positive answer, yea or nay, and no more palaver on the subject. Say, will you stand by your old friend in this last great hour of need?"

"I s'pose I'll have to; but it goes mightily ag'in' the grain, to be mixed up in these women affairs, and I feel as mean as a kill-sheep dog, when I find myself at such a dirty work.

"Well, that matter is settled, then, and I hope we shall have peace and agreement between us hereafter. I know when you say you'll do a thing, you'll do it, and I want a reliable companion to stand by me just now. Once we get into our new quarters, in old Virginia, I shall feel safe, as we can bid defiance to our enemies."

"Well, let us be off, then, as quick as possible; for, to tell the truth, I don't like this part of the country much; it's gittin' entirely too hot for our bizness, and is by no means as safe as it might be."

"We must be off to-morrow, if we can finish all our arrangements, which I hope we shall be able to do, if we lose no time. We must have our horses ready to-night, at all events; for it may suit to start in the night, if we fail to get away to-morrow. I am not sure but it will be the best plan to leave in the night, any how."

"Certainly, it will be."

"Well, it's settled, then, that we leave to-morrow night; and that being the case, I must hasten away to get the key made. You stay here till the sentinel returns, and then meet me at the usual place this afternoon, and we will have everything arranged in order."

With this the villains parted, Bill going out of the passage, and Dick into the cave.

To all this Eveline was an absorbed, but to them unknown, listener. How the great hope of the morning died in her bosom, as the fearful truth was revealed to her, that another snare was laid to entangle her feet--that her newly found friends were but enemies in disguise. Instead of liberators, who would restore her to home and friends, they were vile miscreants, destining her to a fate no better than that which now surrounded her, and removed still further from the possibility of succor. For a little time she clung to the hope that Dick would hold out in her behalf; but this last prop was taken away, and she felt that there was no help from any quarter, and that self-dependence was her only safeguard.

Ah, how desolate was her heart in that hour! How like a lone reed in the pelting tempest did she feel herself to be! Surrounded by enemies on all hands, a prisoner in a dungeon, with no friendly arm to lean upon, no kind voice of sympathy to encourage and strengthen her, she felt almost like giving over the struggle, and lying down to die where she stood.

But this feeling of despondency was of short duration. Arousing to a lively sense of her situation, this apathy was thrown off, and the native energy of purpose which she had exhibited so strikingly on former occasions, quickened her spirit and restored vigor to her frame. Immediately she began to collect her thoughts, and cast about to see if there was no way of escape from this new danger. At first she thought of making a confidant of Duffel, and throwing herself upon his generosity; but remembering all that he had done, she felt that this would be vain, so far as *she* was concerned, while it might save *him* from merited exposure and punishment; and so she at once abandoned the idea.

In the midst of perplexity and doubt, the thought struck her with the vividness of a flash of intelligence, that the passage she was in might communicate with the outer world! The very suggestion caused her to heave a

sigh of relief. What so probable as this supposition? At any rate she had something to do, a definite object to call forth her energies; and this was no small matter, in the state of mind under which she was laboring at that hour.

Raising her lamp to a level with her face, she passed the light close to the wall, scrutinizing every spot, to see if there was no sign indicative of another spring-closed door. But no brilliant fragment of stalactite appeared as a reward for her search, and she turned away with a feeling of disappointment, and heaviness at her heart. As she did so, for the first time her eye fell upon a polished surface, much resembling the face of a mirror, upon the opposite wall. Looking more attentively, she discovered, as it were, trees, shrubs, a running stream of water, and all the accompaniments of a finished landscape painting. Fearful as was her situation, she could not help pausing to admire the beauty, the naturalness, the perfection of the scene. She had never beheld any thing half so vivid, so truthful, from the pencil of the artist. It actually seemed as if water was running over its gravelly bed, as if the bushes moved in the breeze; in a word, the whole looked far more like a reality than a cold painting. As she was gazing in admiration upon this singular appearance, a bird actually flew over the scene! She could hardly believe her senses; but soon another one followed, and she knew there was no deception in her eyes this time.

Philosophy was not universally taught in those days, as it is now, and Eveline did not know how to solve this mystery as well as many a school girl could do at the present day; but she had read of the tricks of the magicians of Egypt and India, and what seeming wonders they could show in their magic mirrors; and she came to the conclusion that the robbers of the cave had learned the same art, and that before her was one of the soothsayers' glasses.

But what was the design had in view in placing it in that obscure and unfrequented place? As this query suggested itself to her mind, a man passed along on the bank of the stream! and in a few minutes another in the opposite direction; and in the last one she recognized one of her captors! She at once comprehended the design of the apparatus; it was to reveal what was passing without to the eye of the individual within, who had doubtless adopted this method of informing himself of passing external events, as a means of personal safety in case of need. It was, she supposed, a device of the captain of the thieves, to save himself, either from the ministers of the law or from the violence of those under him, in case of revolt.

It is not our design to enter into an elaborate description of this piece of mechanism, as every student of philosophy, who is well acquainted with the reflection and refraction of rays of light, will understand how an ingenious contrivance produced the results spoken of. The same principle enters into the arrangement of the *camera obscura*. There was an aperture very artfully cut through the wall, and so guarded on the outside as to escape notice; and in this a tube was placed with a set of happily contrived fixtures, by the aid of which the scene without was accurately depicted on the polished surface within. It was the work of the captain, as Eveline supposed.

As this contrivance was evidently intended to give information of danger from without, it must certainly be connected in some manner with the means of escape; else what was it worth? Such was the conclusion to which Eveline arrived, as she philosophized upon the matter. And she reflected further, what other method of escape was there, save a secret medium of communication with the outer world? None at all, except it be a quiet waiting within the passage she now herself occupied, which she could not bring herself to believe was the case; so she renewed her search for the door of egress.

On minutely examining the mirror, she saw at one side of it a small projection, like a ball of ivory, and pressing hard upon it, a door, of which the mirror itself was a section, sprang a little way open. She threw it back wide on its hinges, and holding her lamp in the opening, saw at her feet a flight of stairs leading down into the gloom below. A damp current of air came up from this subterranean cavity, and its clammy coldness sent a chill almost of horror through the frame of the agitated girl. One less resolute than herself would have shrunk at the idea of exploring so dismal a looking place; but not so she. Summoning all her energy, she

boldly descended the steps, which had evidently been cut out by the hands of man, and soon found herself at the bottom of the course. In front of her, all was solid earth and rock; but on turning to the right she discovered an opening, following which it was but a little while till she saw light ahead, and a few more steps brought her to the margin of the stream, along the bank of which was the path to the cave. That path, then, was immediately above her! And here she was with the wide world before her! How her heart bounded!

Her first thought was to fly immediately; but prudence dictated a cautious survey of the place before venturing her all in an attempt at flight.

She accordingly ventured out in the most guarded manner, to make explorations. The water was but a little way below where she stood, and when in a high stage must evidently flood the place she occupied and the steps leading up out of it. But as the stream was now very low, she had a fine opportunity for making observations. Stepping down to the edge of the water, she had an excellent view of the stream both ways. The banks were very high on each side, steep, and inaccessible; so much so, indeed, that for a moment she was in despair of getting from her prison, now that she had found the way out. A closer inspection of the bank where she stood showed her the possibility of escape, by following the water's edge to some point below or above, where the high bank receded. This was enough; all she wanted was the bare likelihood or possibility of escape, and she would venture all upon the trial.

Having made these hasty observations, she started back, to make preparations for an immediate departure. When she reached the upper passage and closed the door, she glanced at the mirror to see what was going on without. What was her disappointment and horror, to see Duffel's image passing before her on his way to the cave! She had hoped to get off before his return; but now that hope was gone. She must meet him again; and to what desperate extremities might he not proceed in the interview in which she must now be compelled to take a part! Then she remembered that she had left the door from her room to the passage ajar, and he might reach it before she could get there, and revealing to him her secret, cut off her last and only hope of escape. The thought awoke all her energies, and dashing along the narrow way at the top of her speed, stooping as she ran, to avoid the low places, she reached her room and closed the door of the passage, just as she heard a knock at the other one, opening into the larger room.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE THREAT AND ITS EXECUTION--EVELINE LOST.

Quickly arranging things in her room, and restoring the lamp to its accustomed place, so that every article should appear in usual order and nothing betray her secret, Eveline--the knocking at her door being just then repeated--demanded:

"Who is there?"

"It is hardly worth your while to ask that question, when you know there can be but one person having access to this place."

"Excuse me, sir; but I have understood that *you* were only here by courtesy, the rooms belonging to another."

"Well, I am here, at any rate, and have the mastery as well as the occupancy of the place. Will you open the door?"

"If I please."

"Well, *do* you please?"

"And if I do not?"

"Then I shall enter by another way."

"As I am not overly anxious to see a *master*, you may enter as you can."

"Very well."

Eveline chose not to open the door for two reasons: first, she wished to ascertain whether or not there *was* a secret passage between the rooms; and, secondly, if Duffel's assertion in regard to the matter should prove true, she wished to know at what point the entrance was situated, that, if need be, in any future movements she might make, obstructions could be placed in the way of ingress. One thing, however, perplexed her a little; she could not keep her eyes on all sides of the room at once, and Duffel might come from some quarter unawares, and take her at advantage, ere she could meet his attack. Thought is very rapid in times of danger, if presence of mind is retained, and the difficulty stated had fixed her attention but a few seconds, ere several plans of release had suggested themselves and been abandoned; but at length it occurred to her, that as it was impossible for the secret door to be in the same place as the other one, she would be perfectly safe, in taking a position against the latter, from any possibility of surprise, and standing there she could seem more at her ease than in any other position, where her continued watchfulness would betray anxiety.

She had scarcely placed herself in the posture desired, before she saw a portion of the wall to her right slowly move from its place, and presently a mass, the size of a small door, stood out fairly into the room, and from behind it stole the villain, in such a manner as to leave no doubt of his intentions to surprise her, if possible. Seeing she was prepared for his reception, and aware of his entrance, he closed the door, and, boldly stepping into the room, addressed her thus:

"So, incredulous fair one, you see I am here, notwithstanding your disbelief in my word."

"Yes; I see you are here."

"Well, that is a very cordial welcome to an old friend, certainly. In what school have you taken lessons in hospitality and politeness?"

"In one where I have learned to treat insolence according to its deserts."

"Indeed! then I think we must have graduated at the same institution. Perhaps we had as well try each other's skill and proficiency, and the one that shall prove the aptest scholar be declared victor in the contest between us. Do you accept the challenge?"

"I accept nothing from you; your pretended friendship I despise; your threats I hold in as much contempt as I do their author; your intended insults I will pay back even to death, sir!" and as she spoke, there was a flashing light in her eye which gave the villain to understand she meant all she said; but assuming not to heed his convictions on that point, here plied, with as much seeming ease as he could command:

"Oh, I have heard such talk before."

"Yes, and like the base coward you are, you sprang from the dagger at your breast, even though it was but a woman's hand that held it."

"Girl! don't presume too far on my forbearance! I warn you in time to beware of that!"

"I presume nothing on any good trait of character or nobleness of soul you may possess, sir, but on your

cowardice!"

"Do you wish to drive me to extremes?"

"You are already on the extremest verge of all that is vile and loathsome."

"By the furies of h---, I'll not endure this longer!"

"Oh, yes, you will; you need not expect any other treatment so long as you continue to force your unwelcome and disgusting presence upon me. I have not taken lessons in the school of which you were talking, in vain: and as you set yourself up as a rival, just exercise your skill; I ask no favors, and fear not your opposition."

"Yes, you do; with all your boasting, you fear me, coward though I be, at this very moment."

"Yes, exactly as I fear the proximity of any other corrupt thing with which it is unpleasant to come in contact. There is a certain small animal of the cat species, bearing, however, another and very significant name, with which it would be about as disagreeable to come in contact as with yourself; as I would fear it, so I fear you; in my estimation you are equally vile and equally to be avoided."

Again Duffel grew red in the face with rage, and he was on the point of seizing and overpowering Eveline; but his eye fell upon the dagger, which she held in her hand, and prudence or cowardice held him back. His response was given with savage malice:

"I'll take the fire out of your temper, ere you are many hours older; mark that! You have gone too far for me longer to continue my gentle dealings toward you. I have endeavored to persuade you, I have expostulated with you, and made all reasonable offers to induce you to acquiesce peaceably in your fate, which I would have made an honorable and enviable one; but you have treated all my kindness with contumely and misconstrued my forbearance into cowardice. Now you must prepare for the worst."

"Sir--villain, rather, every word you have uttered is as false as the pit of night, and you know it! Yes, sir, you know that as you stood there and spoke, unmitigated falsehoods fell from your lips while every declaration! And knowing this, and knowing that *I* know it, also, you have the audacity and the insolent impudence to say that you have offered me an honorable position in life! Is it possible that you are so fallen as not to know that in a truthful, virtuous, and noble soul there can be nothing so abhorrent as lying, villainy, and cowardice? Talk of honor! Better might Satan take of goodness!"

"Go on! you are only placing thorns in your path, every one of which will pierce you as a pang of agony."

"I have no doubt you would like to intimidate me by such ominous remarks; but I have heard similar ones from the same source before; and knowing the distance which separates their author from truth, you may well rest assured I place implicit confidence in their falsity."

"I'll prove to you how true they are, then; in one thing, at least, you shall be convinced of my veracity; and that is, that I am now in earnest, and mean to remain in earnest until my wishes are accomplished, and you, the victim of my pleasure, become a suppliant for mercy and restoration to an honorable position in society."

"_Never!_"

"We shall see; I have been talking,--from this time on, I *act!*"

Saying this he drew a pistol from his pocket, and holding it before her, went on:

"You see I came prepared this time! I was fully resolved to bring matters to an issue at any rate, and more especially if you persisted in your insulting course of address. You have done so; the cup of your transgressions is full, and the time of your probation expired. Now comes the judgment!"

He had expected to see her turn pale and tremble, and, perhaps, become a suppliant for more time to consider the matter; but with the exception of a little closer compression of the lips, and, if possible, a little more determined expression, he saw no change pass over her countenance. If terror she had, it was kept out of sight. She made no reply, and he proceeded:

"You think because your dagger served you once it will do so again; but it will not. I could execute my plans immediately and at once have you helplessly in my power; but I prefer to give you one more and the last opportunity of deciding for yourself. Know, then, that as soon as I find this offer rejected, I will send the contents of this pistol through your right arm, and if that is not enough I have another in my pocket here, which shall pay the same respects to your left arm. You will then be at my mercy as completely as though you were an infant. I leave your own fancy to picture what will follow, understanding my intentions as you do. With this certain doom before you, will you, Eveline Mandeville, consent to be my wife, now or at some future day?"

"I WILL NOT!"

The reply was clear, bold, decided, without a tremor of voice or the quivering of a muscle. The fiendish wretch was awed by her courage, but having, as he said, resolved to bring matters to a crisis, he went on:

"You have chosen your fate, be the consequences upon your own head!" He raised the pistol.

"Will you throw away that dagger and permit me peaceably to approach you?"

"_No!_"

"I will ask you three times, and with your third refusal I shall fire; so beware! Will you throw away the dagger?"

"_No!_"

"This is the third and last time I shall ask the question," and he repeated it slowly: "Will you throw away t-h-e d-a-g-g-e-r?" and he brought the weapon to his eye.

"NO!"

There was a pause of a second, and then a flash of fire, a cloud of smoke, and the report of a pistol told that his threat was executed. The brutal monster waited a moment for the smoke to clear away from his vision, not liking to venture upon that ominous looking dagger until assured of a bloodless victory. Poor, despicable coward!

As he kept his eye fixed toward the spot where Eveline stood, eager to see the result of the shot, he felt something strike his breast, and, turning his eyes downward, he beheld the glittering dagger glance along his left side! A button had turned its course and saved his life! He sprang away, uttering an affrighted oath, and grasped for his other pistol. It was not in his pocket! and there he stood unarmed, before the unhurt but outraged woman he had attempted to destroy!

Eveline, though excited, was unusually self-possessed during all the interview just related. She felt the imminence of her danger, but it only aroused her faculties to a more acute observation of every incident and

circumstance that might, by any possible chance, be turned to advantage. When she saw that Duffel was resolved to put his threat in execution, she determined to make him the victim instead of herself, if it were possible to do so. In speaking of this reserved pistol he unconsciously placed his hand in his pocket--a side coat pocket--and drew the weapon up, so that the breech rested upon the upper and outer edge of the receptacle in the garment. Eveline noticed this, and in a moment her plan of action was formed. She did not like the thought of killing a human being, but as Duffel had proceeded to such extremes, she felt that if it was not her duty to slay him under the circumstances, she would, at least, be justifiable in so doing. She, therefore, settled it in her mind to go to this extreme length, much as she shrank from a deed of blood, in case the monster fired at her. She took in the idea at once that a puff of smoke would conceal her movements for a moment, and, under its friendly cover, feeling sure of her ability to avoid the shot, she would smite the villain to the heart and seize the pistol at the same instant, to use in case the thrust should prove ineffectual. Having her mind divided between the two acts, both of which must be done in the same breath, she did not aim the dagger with as much precision as under other circumstances she might have done, and the result was as already stated; the pistol, however, she safely secured; and when she saw Duffel feel for it, and perceived his disappointment and alarm at not finding it, she said:

"Here it is, sir, and for once you are in my power! It is now my turn!"

The miscreant cowered before her determined gaze.

"Prepare for your end!"

"I crave your mercy."

"_Mercy!_ You, vile, unmanly wretch! did *you* show mercy?"

"I was excited,--spare me!"

"Down on your knees, then, and beg for your life!"

He hesitated to demean himself thus, she raised the pistol, and there was a fire in her eye which spoke volumes to the craven soul of the poltroon. He obeyed, fell upon his knees and begged his life at her hands, promising to liberate her if she would grant his prayer. When he ceased pleading, and paused for her reply, she answered:

"Know, base coward, that, woman as I am, I would scorn to take the life of an unarmed enemy. I was only trying you to ascertain how low you would degrade and how debasingly demean yourself to beg for mercy. I would have made you swear to take me from this place, but I knew you would perjure yourself the moment an opportunity afforded, and I did not care to burden your guilty soul with another crime. For the same reason I decline accepting your proffer to take me away. I know you would prove treacherous, and I will not trust myself in your hands. Go, now, and remember that the next time you enter this room in my presence, you die! I will not permit another insult of the kind; no, sir, *never!* Open that door and leave!"

He obeyed; she followed him with the pistol presented, until he was out of the captain's room. He closed the door into the outer cave with a slam, and locked it, and then called out:

"Madam, you were a fool for not securing the keys while you had me in your power. I now curse and defy you, and swear that I will make you repent this day's work in the dust and ashes of humiliation. I shall not come alone next time, but with fifty men; and you *shall* be overpowered and feel the weight of my vengeance! I'll wring your proud heart till it bleeds, and in your degradation will scorn you!"

She did not wait to hear more of his harangue, but hastened back into her room, shut and bolted her door,

placed every movable object in the apartment against the one by which Duffel had entered, and then entering the secret passage, ran to the mirror to see if the villain left. She had been there but a few minutes when he passed, cursing as he went, and swearing to be revenged.

The reader may wonder why Eveline did not shoot the wretch when she had him in her power, but the truth was, she knew nothing about using fire-arms, and feared to make the attempt, lest, failing, she should be again in his hands. She knew, too, that it would not be prudent to trust herself to be led out of the cave by him, as the moment he met one of his followers he would betray her, and she would be again a prisoner. Still she would have made this venture, had not the secret passage held out to her a more hopeful mode of escape.

All these considerations, dangers and probabilities flashed through her mind with the fleetness of thought, and she came to conclusions with the same rapidity. Doubtless, she pursued the best course. She could presume on Duffel's cowardice, but she dare not trust his word or his oath.

So soon as her persecutor passed out from the cave, as shown by the mirror, she hastened back to her room to make preparations for leaving the den of infamy in which she had been confined, feeling well assured that but a few hours would be suffered to elapse, ere Duffel, with as many adherents as he deemed necessary to accomplish his ends, would return, to wreak his pitiless vengeance upon her. Making everything ready for her departure, she awaited the darkness of the approaching night, that in its friendly mantle she might find protection and shelter. But ere the light of day had withdrawn, she again ventured out into the stream for the purpose of more fully reconnoitering the place, and fixing in her mind the relative position of things, obstacles and distance, and to obtain such knowledge in general as might facilitate her escape.

Night came; she left her room, the common door locked and bolted, the secret one clogged with the furniture of the room, so that it would require the united strength of several men to force it open. The door of the secret passage which she had learned to open and shut from both sides, was closed after her, and alone she passed along that damp aisle, paused a moment before the mirror to note whether it reflected the scene without, and seeing upon its face but blank darkness, she opened the last door between herself and the world into which she was going, closed it as she passed through its portals, descended the stairs, reached the outer extremity of the passage, put out her lamp, and the next minute stood on the pebbles at the margin of the stream. A brief survey of the coast in all directions satisfied her that she was not observed, and without more delay she moved down the stream as rapidly as the nature of the ground and her want of experience in such places and mode of travel would permit.

It was about a mile from the starting point before she reached the first recession of the high bank, that afforded an opportunity to leave the stream, which she improved without delay, and after a laborious ascent of an inclined plane, more than a hundred yards in extent and quite steep, she found herself on the high bluff, with the cave in the distance.

But now a new and before unthought of difficulty faced her. She was in a wilderness, with no compass by which to direct her course, and no friendly guide to conduct her to the habitations of men. For a moment she was almost paralyzed by the magnitude of this untried danger, and hope well nigh fled from her breast. But rousing her energies she boldly looked her fate in the face, and committed herself into the hands of that Providence who had so often befriended her in former times of peril, and then shaping her course as well as she could by the stars, she plunged into the dense forest, with her face, as she believed, toward home, which she hoped to reach some time the next day.

Alas for her hopes! in less than an hour she was totally bewildered and lost in the wilderness! She felt her loneliness and helplessness now more than when facing her malignant enemy; and to add to the horrors of her situation, howls of wild beasts soon greeted her ears!

CHAPTER XX.

THE TABLES TURNING.

When Duffel left the Cave, as shown in the preceding chapter, he went immediately to the place where he had appointed to meet Bill and Dick, boiling over with rage all the way, and "breathing out vengeance" on the head of Eveline. He had entered her room so confident of triumphing, that the humiliation of defeat was tenfold greater than if he had doubted of success. And then the degradation to which he had been forced to abase himself! The very remembrance of it set his blood to boiling! He cursed himself for his cowardice; he cursed Eveline for her manifestation of courage and for everything else she had done. To be forced to kneel and beg his life of a woman! and that woman his own prisoner, on his own terms, in his own dungeon! The thought burned into his very soul! and the more he thought the fiercer became his wrath.

In this frame of mind he reached the rendezvous, and found his accomplices awaiting his arrival, for they had work of their own on hand and did not wish to be detained too long by their old leader but now secret foe.

"I'm glad to find you here," he said, as soon as he came up, and his tools saw in a moment that something unusual had happened or some extraordinary work was to be done.

"We are always punctual," Bill replied.

"And it is well you are this time; for there is work to do immediately. I want you to collect together as many of the members of the League as can be found, and assemble them in the cave by midnight."

"Why, what in the world has happened?" inquired Bill in some alarm, lest his own scheme should be frustrated by these demonstrations on the part of Duffel.

"Not much of anything; indeed I may as well tell you at once, that this movement has reference to Miss Mandeville. I have just returned from the cave where I called upon her, and from her obstinacy and a number of hints thrown out, I am fully persuaded she expects deliverance from some quarter; and I am determined to put an end to such anticipations without further delay. I think the sooner she is conquered the better. I should have proceeded to extremes at once, but I wished to persuade her into a voluntary marriage, so that I might come in for the old man's money; but she has found some means of arming herself and is firmly bent on having her own way, while I am as fully resolved she shall not. But I must have a dip into the old gentleman's purse; that's another fixed fact; and so I am going to marry the girl whether she will or not; and I want you, Bill, to act the parson. I know you can do it. Disguise yourself and--. But you know all the details as well as any reverend pastor in the land. Do it up right, and give each of us a certificate in due form, so that it will stand in law; and you shall be liberally rewarded; yes, and promoted, too. You shall not serve me for nothing. Come, now, away as fast as possible to get the men together, and report to me at midnight precisely, in this place."

Duffel had managed to smother his wrath during the brief moments he was giving his orders; but no sooner had the seemingly pliant tools of his will left, than he again foamed over, and pacing back and forth, continued his cursing, as though he would spend his impotent fury in blasphemy.

Bill and Dick started off, as if in the most cheerful manner and with the greatest alacrity they would do their leader's bidding. But no sooner had they reached a safe distance than they began to consult how they were to manage this new and unlooked for phase of affairs, which seemed destined to undermine all their former arrangements and to overthrow their entire calculations and plans. But Duffel could not be more determined to avoid defeat than they were, and they set down the thwarting or overreaching him as the first object to be accomplished. Bill reflected awhile, and then said:

"I think we can manage it. Instead of going after the men, you must get three horses ready for our immediate departure, while I go and prepare the lady for the journey. We must endeavor to have everything arranged by eleven o'clock, so as to be sure of success."

"But how are we to manage Duffel?"

"Leave him to me; I can do that part of the business effectually, I think."

With this understanding, the rascals parted, each to carry out his part of the work for the evening and night; and they had but little time in which to work, for the afternoon was far advanced, and they had many miles to travel, in order to accomplish their ends.

Before proceeding to the cave, Bill sat down and dated and signed a note, already written, which he folded and addressed to 'Squire Williams, and procured the service of a little boy to carry it to him. We shall hereafter learn its import and object.

When he reached the cave it was already night. He found the sentinel in a very uneasy mood, and very anxious to get off till morning, to carry out some design of his own. He had engaged a member to take his place, but from some cause he had not arrived. Bill gladly assumed the post, and in a few minutes was alone with his thoughts and plans.

When assured that the other was far enough away, he closed the door to the cave and locked it. Then, going to the armory, he selected several braces of the best pistols, and secured them about his own person, for his and Dick's future use. He next opened the money-chest, and took from it all the gold that had been collected since the last division, some two thousand dollars in all. This he fastened in a belt worn next to his person. After making every other arrangement about the room according to his wishes, he went to the magazine and brought out all the powder it contained, and so placed the kegs and other vessels containing it, as to secure the greatest amount of destructive force from the whole. All these he then connected by trains of the explosive material, which were united in one wider one leading out at the door of the cave.

These preparations made, he went to apprise Eveline of their readiness for departure, intending while she was making the few preparations necessary for starting, to go out and see after Dick.

When he opened the door to the captain's room, he was struck with the profound stillness which everywhere pervaded the place. No Eveline was there; but he remembered having seen the door to the small room open on a former occasion, and supposing her to be within, went and rapped on the door, at first gently. No answer. Then louder, and louder. All was still. He called her. No response came. Wondering if she was asleep, or what could prevent or deter her from answering his call, he proceeded to break open the door. This he succeeded in doing, after considerable effort; but when he perceived she was not there, his surprise and astonishment were unbounded. He knew not that while he was robbing robbers, and placing powder for the demolition of the cave, she had left its dismal precincts by a way unknown to him or Duffel, and was now far away in the wilderness.

"Where is she? What does it mean?"

These questions he put to himself, but could not answer. A thousand conjectures rushed through his brain; but no satisfactory clue to the mystery was hit upon. Had Duffel deceived them? No, his anger and earnestness were too real for that. Had she other friends? Had not the sentinel turned traitor, and having liberated the prisoner, was anxious to get away, lest his perfidy should be discovered, or to gain a reward for his treachery? This, though hardly probable, was the most plausible supposition, and Bill concluded to act upon it. He was resolved to carry out his plans in, all their details; except that Eveline could not be taken with them; for he was not going to yield up his stolen gold, nor forego his revenge on Duffel.

Looking at his watch, in the midst of these perplexing reflections and strengthened resolves, he saw that it was time for him to be off to see Duffel, as the place of meeting was some ten miles from the cave, and a part of the distance had to be gone over on foot. He reached the spot about the hour appointed, and found the miscreant already there, impatiently awaiting his arrival.

"What success?" inquired Duffel, the moment he came up.

"None at all, your honor."

"How?"

"Bad news, *very*."

"What?"

"I fear there is treason in the League. The doors of the cave are all open, even to the inner door of the inner room, and no living person is within its walls!"

Duffel was speechless with surprise and terror, the astonishing intelligence seeming to paralyze all his powers; at last he made out to loosen his tongue and queried:

"She is gone, then?"

"Yes, and the sentinel, too!"

"Then we are betrayed! What shall we do?"

The terrible news Bill brought, completely unmanned Duffel, and his presence of mind entirely forsook him; hence his last query, which was propounded with all the imbecility of helplessness.

"I'll tell you what I am going to do," said Bill; "and that is, leave this part of the country as speedily as possible."

"But won't the officers be upon us immediately?"

"No; if at all, not before to-morrow. We can make our arrangements to-night, lay in the swamp all day, and leave to-morrow night. You have a horse already prepared in the swamp; I would advise you to go home without a moment's delay, and make all necessary preparations for your journey, and be back in the vicinity of your horse before daylight, or as soon after as possible; and to-morrow night we can set out for the cave in the south-west."

"I believe your plan is a good one; but when shall we meet again?"

"Not until we get away from this section of country; perhaps not until we reach our ultimate destination. But we have no time to lose, all depends upon dispatch, and we had best be about our preparations. Good-by, captain."

"Good-by, my fine fellow. I thank you for your advice, and hope that when we meet again it will be under more cheering skies, and with brighter prospects before us. Good-by."

And thus they parted, to meet again--where?

Bill hastened back to the cave, where he found Dick in waiting with the horses. In as few words as possible, Bill explained to his confederate how matters stood, and what measures he had taken; then sending Dick back some distance with the animals, he laid a long train of powder from the cave outward, and at the farthest extremity placed a can of the explosive compound, wherein he had adjusted a slow match, to which he now set fire, and then hastened away with Dick to a place of safety.

Duffel, as we have seen, was thoroughly alarmed by the intelligence communicated by Bill; and like all who depend more on stratagem than on courage, he cowered before the danger which seemed to stare him in the face. The suddenness of the announcement had not a little to do in producing the result; but when on his way home from the interview, after having more time to contemplate the calamity and his own situation, his fear did not abate. Every little noise startled him, and his mind was constantly harassed with the idea that officers of justice were after him. One cause of his trepidation may be traced to the fact of his many and fearful crimes; he knew how deeply he had involved himself in guilt by the abduction of Eveline and the murder of her lover, as he believed, at his own instigation and command; and he felt well assured, now that his intended victim was at large, she would not be slow to act with vigor for his apprehension and punishment. He knew full well, too, that Mr. Mandeville, when once his eyes were opened, would pursue him with unflagging energy and tireless perseverance, until his crimes were duly expiated to the full extent of the law. With such knowledge and reflections for companions, well might the guilty wretch quake with fear. If "conscience makes cowards of us all," how much more so *him*, reeking as he was with blood and crime!

Notwithstanding all his fears, he reached home in safety, made a few hasty preparations for his journey, placed his effects left behind in as good order as the shortness of the time would allow, gave them in charge to his servant, with such orders for their disposal as pleased him, and then started for the swamp, which he reached about daylight, and into which he plunged with as much pleasure as ever a hunted fox entered its secure burrow. Though still very uneasy, he breathed more freely than before since receiving the unwelcome tidings from Bill.

* * * * *

'Squire Williams was seated in his easy chair after the labors of the day, quietly enjoying himself in a train of dreamy reflections, when he was aroused from his state of languor and but half wakefulness by a knock at the door. Feeling tired, he did not get up to open for the visitor, but in the old fashioned style, requested the knocker to "come in."

A neighboring boy entered, and handed him a letter, saying:

"The man who gave me the letter for you told me to tell you, you had better read it immediately."

"Indeed! Then it must be of some importance," said the 'Squire as he opened the document. It read as follows:

"SQUIRE WILLIAMS:--Having learned that you take a deep interest in the movements of young Mr. Duffel, who is supposed to be connected with a body of outlaws and thieves by yourself and others, I take the liberty, though a stranger, to address a line relative to the individual named, which may be of some service to you in detecting him, and to community, by preventing his further operations.

"If you will go to the swamp, nine miles from C---, early to-morrow morning, and watch closely all day and all the next night, should he not make his appearance sooner, you will detect him in the act of leaving the place on a horse which he has forgotten to pay for. I would advise that you take a few confidential friends with you, and, if possible, induce Mr. Mandeville to be one of them; you will understand my reasons for making this request in the end. Make all your arrangements with great caution and secrecy, _and be sure to trust no one in whom you have not the most implicit confidence, or you may be betrayed_. I make this remark, on the supposition that you are not aware of the fact, that some of your neighbors are associated with

a class of men who do not live by lawful avocations, but are members of an organization which has for its object union of strength and harmony of action among those who prey upon community. I would further advise, that you do not go to the swamp before daylight--*give him time to get into the trap*. I will cut the letter B on a beech-tree at the south-western corner of the swamp, which will be a sign and guide-mark that you are in the right way; from that tree keep a direct north-east course until you reach a large walnut tree, then turn at right angles with your former course, and cross the marsh on the logs which you will find placed there for that purpose. Beyond the marsh, or rather in the center of it, there is an island, which it is extremely difficult to reach by any other route than the one pointed out. On it you will find Duffel, *provided you are cautious and wary in your movements*. You will wonder how I am so familiarly acquainted with the operations of these bad men: without fully satisfying your curiosity, let me say, that whatever I may have been, I am now desirous of handing over to justice one who is deeply guilty--guilty of crimes of which even you, perhaps, have never dreamed of accusing him. On this point I have only to say, you yourself came near losing your life in place of one of his victims. I allude to the attack made upon you by two persons in the 'dark passage,' some weeks ago. You will remember it! I know all, though revealing but little; and as it will be known that treason is in the camp of the League of Thieves, I shall leave the country at once. Go to the swamp as directed, and you will satisfy yourself of all that I have told you; but let me advise you to note strictly the directions I give you, and be extremely careful in your movements and choice of confidants. Yours, for law and justice,

"EX LEAGUEIST."

So soon as he finished reading this singular communication, the 'Squire asked the boy:

"What sort of a man was he, that gave you the letter?"

"He was large, with dark eyes, and sun-burnt face."

"You did not know him, then?"

"No, sir; he was a stranger."

"That will do."

The 'Squire was puzzled to know what to do. The man might be acting in good faith, or he might be only leading him into a snare. After mature deliberation, he came to the conclusion that his informant was not deceiving him, and resolved to act upon the suggestions of the unknown writer, be he friend or foe.

He accordingly set about making preparations for the adventures of the morning, without delay. By midnight all his arrangements were completed, and he lay down to snatch a little rest before setting out on the expedition. At three o'clock in the morning, the little company, numbering five in all, of whom Mr. Mandeville was one, set out for the swamp.

Bill and Dick had scarcely reached a safe distance from the cave, when a sound as of ten thousand thunderbolts rent the air, and the ground at the same time trembled as in a violent earthquake. The horses plunged and snorted, and then stood still in mute fear. The villains, who were looking in the direction of the cave, saw a column of fire, smoke, earth, and rocks heaved up in the air--a huge mass like a mountain--some portions to the height of several hundred feet, and then fall again with a heavy crash, making the earth vibrate beneath them. They knew then that the cave was in ruins, and its place occupied by a shapeless mass of matter.

The explosion took place a little after three o'clock in the morning, and consequently but a few minutes after 'Squire Williams and his party had set out for the swamp. They heard it, and felt the quivering of the earth, though twenty-five miles distant, and for a moment paused in alarm, fully believing it was an earthquake. But

as no repetition of the sound or shock took place, they concluded the danger was past, and proceeded on their way.

Duffel also heard the report and felt the shaking, and it filled him with alarm. He was nearing the swamp at the time, and for a little while hesitated to proceed, but finally did so, arriving at the same conclusion as did the party in his rear.

It became the general belief in the neighborhood, and for forty miles around the cave, that the noise and its accompaniments were to be attributed to a veritable earthquake; and we believe a report to that effect finally went the rounds of the press.

CHAPTER XXI.

EVELINE PURSUED BY WOLVES--BILL AND DICK--DUFFEL.

Terrible was the condition in which Eveline felt herself to be placed when the deep-toned howls and piercing screams of the ferocious denizens of the forest fell upon her ear! In a moment all the wild and horrible stories of adventures with wild beasts she had ever heard or read about, came vividly up in her memory, and from a hundred places her disturbed fancy pictured the glaring eyes of savage monsters which she imagined were in the act of springing upon her. From these she would turn in affright, and hasten away as fast as her trembling limbs could bear her. In this way her confusion became more aggravated, until, finally, every trace of knowledge as to distance or courses, was obliterated in her mind, and she wandered without method or aim, save that she always went in an opposite direction to that from which the last sound proceeded. But this indefinite way of fleeing from harm did not answer her wishes; for soon she heard the baying of wolves in her rear, and the constancy of their howling, and the directness of their movements convinced her that she was pursued! What a thought was that! Alone, and lost in the wide wilderness, and the fiercest and most daring of its ferocious inhabitants on her track!

No sooner was this conviction fixed in her mind, than she flew rather than ran, tearing her clothes and lacerating her flesh against the brush and thorns which beset her way. She scarcely felt the wounds and thought as little of the destruction of her garments, but kept on, on, on, she knew not whither, and cared not, so that she escaped from her dreaded pursuers. All would not do. Ever and increasing, nearer and nearer, came the dismal sound! How her heart died within her, as the increased loudness of the baying of the wolves told her they were fast overtaking her! In vain she exerted all her remaining strength, and taxed every nerve and muscle to its utmost capacity! There was no help! As unerring as mistakeless instinct, and as certain as the decree of fate came the blood-thirsty pack! Despair began to settle down upon her spirit, and she was almost ready to wish herself back in the cave. But at this juncture, a sound seven-fold louder than any thunder she had ever heard, broke with stunning violence through the solemn forest, and at the same moment, far in the distance, flashed up a column of fire sparkling and scintillating, and sending a gleam, as of lightning, among the shades of the dim wilderness. It was the knell and funeral light of the cave.

Instantly everything was as hushed as the chamber of death; not a sound disturbed the stillness of the deep solitude that reigned around her, and Eveline herself paused, and held her breath in alarm and wonder. The illumination lasted but for a moment, and all was dark again; but in that moment the affrighted girl saw a large tree before her, with a cavity at its base, sufficiently large to admit her person; and, as soon as she could collect her thoughts after the surprise of this unexpected and mysterious phenomenon, she resolved to make the cavity an asylum for the night. She no longer heard anything of the wolves; the unaccountable light and noise seemed to have frightened them away, and with deliberation she rolled up pieces of timber to block up the mouth of her retreat, then entered and barred herself in as securely as she could, and patiently and sleeplessly awaited the dawn of day. The night being already far advanced, she had not long to wait, though to her it seemed like an age ere the welcome light appeared; but it did at last, without the anxious moments being disturbed, and she stepped forth from her hiding-place to renew her efforts to reach home. But she was at a

loss to know which course to take, or what method to adopt in order to extricate herself from the mazes of the pathless wilderness in whose impenetrable shadows she was enveloped. She stood for some moments in a state of perplexing irresolution, and then resolved to walk in the direction of the rising sun, thinking that if she did not reach home in that way, it was probable she would arrive at some settlement; and she was anxious to see the habitations of men, even if the occupants were entire strangers, for she felt a deep dread of remaining another night in the wilderness, and knew that once among honest men, it would be quite an easy matter to get home, even if the distance was great.

Having settled upon a line of action, Eveline began to execute her purpose with all the energy and promptness for which she was distinguished. She had proceeded some distance, and the sun whose dim approach was only heralded by a few faint streaks of light when she set out, was now pouring a flood of light through the interstices of the forest, when her attention was suddenly arrested by the appearance of two horsemen wending their way amid the intricacies of the wild-wood. Her first thought was to call to them for help, but on more mature deliberation she was fearful they might belong to Duffel's band, and if so, would betray her into the hands of that unprincipled and enraged villain, when she knew but too well that death or a fate infinitely worse, was the the alternative left for choice; she therefore kept silent, preferring to take the chances of her lone pilgrimage to casting herself into unknown and suspected hands.

It soon appeared, however, that the discovery was mutual, and that the horsemen had less fear of her than she of them; for, after a moment's pause to satisfy themselves of the reality of her presence, they turned their horses' heads toward her, and in a few seconds arrived at the spot where she stood, silently awaiting their approach. She had feared they were members of the association of thieves, and as such, was expecting to see hard features with a brigand's expression upon them; but, much to her surprise and pleasure, the men before her bore none of the marks she had pictured to herself, but were genteelly dressed and quite fine-looking fellows. One of them addressed her in the most polite manner and with a grace that showed plainly he had been in good society:

"Will you pardon me, fair lady, a stranger, for being so bold as to presume to address you? but it is so strange to see one so delicate as yourself in the midst of a wild wilderness at such an early hour. May I inquire if misfortune has overtaken you? or why it is that you are here? and if we can be of any service to you?"

There was something in the voice that sounded familiar to Eveline, and she looked at the speaker to see if she could recognize him as a casual acquaintance, but she could not; his features and face were entirely strange to her; and though every word he uttered seemed to be in a tone she had heard before, it was impossible for her to tell where or when, and she concluded it must be a singular coincidence and nothing more. When he concluded, she replied:

"I have been so unfortunate, sir, as to lose my way in the forest, and have wandered I know not whither, in my nightlong efforts to extricate myself from the unpleasant situation in which I am placed. If you can aid me to get to C---, or to any other neighborhood, I will take it as a great favor, and will reward you for your trouble."

"We will escort you with the greatest pleasure to any point you may wish to go. You must have wandered a long way if you started from C---, for it is more than fifty miles to that place."

"Indeed! I had no expectation it was so far. I cannot think of asking you to take me such a distance."

"We will do so with the utmost pleasure without being asked; it is exactly in our way, and very fortunately we have a horse at hand, already caparisoned for a lady's use, which is at your service." Then turning to the other he said:--"Bring up the led horse for the lady," and his companion started as directed. The speaker then continued, again directing his discourse to Eveline:

"By the appearance of your apparel, I should suppose you had not found the underbrush of the forest a very

pleasant impediment to travel; your face and hands, too, I perceive, have suffered severely."

"Yes, I have found darkness and the brush and thorns rather difficult opponents to contend with;" saying which, she glanced at her habiliments for the first time, and their tattered appearance caused her to blush; but in explanation, she narrated the adventures of the night, except such parts as related to the cave and her captors, which she deemed it best not to divulge, not knowing into whose hands she was falling. As she finished the narrative, the other man came up with the horses, and she was assisted to mount the one adapted to her use, when the three immediately started on their journey.

We have only to say--and the reader, most likely, has already anticipated us--that these two men were none other than Bill and Dick disguised, who had accidentally fallen in with her in that unexpected place, to the great delight of the former, and with ill-concealed disappointment on the part of the latter. They had intended to remain in the woods that day, and had just left the led horse for the purpose of making observations, when the unexpected event caused them to change their original intention, and set out on their journey for Virginia immediately. Little dreamed Eveline that she had fallen into such hands--that these, her seeming friends, were the very villains she had heard plotting their schemes of rascality and crime. How different from what they were would have been her feelings, had she known the truth in relation to her situation!

* * * * *

'Squire Williams and his party had no difficulty in finding the way into the swamp, as pointed out in Bill's note, and ere the sun was two hours in the heavens they had passed the marshy place spoken of, and were on the island, where, if the note of information was correct, they might expect to find Duffel and the stolen horse.

Here the 'Squire directed the men to remain while he went forward to reconnoiter and ascertain, if possible, where the animal and the villain were. He returned in less than an hour, bringing the intelligence that he had found the whereabouts of the former, but had been able to discover no traces of the latter.

A consultation was held as to what should be done, but opinions were divided. At this juncture Mr. Mandeville, who had manifested but little interest in the affair until now, and who was not apprised of the individuality of the persons they were after, seemed suddenly to become himself again, and taking in the whole subject at a glance, threw in his opinion to the following effect:

"The horse being found as stated in the letter, we have every reason to believe that the thief is not far off; and as the beast cannot live without food, at some time during the day the thief, who is, doubtless, secreted somewhere about the vicinity of the horse, will come out to feed him. I think all we need to do is to hide ourselves near the animal and wait for the fellow to appear."

This advice was at once adopted, and moving forward under the 'Squire's guidance as noiselessly as Indians, the whole party secreted themselves in ambush, within shooting distance of the horse, which was hid away in a thicket of bushes so nicely, that it was a mere accident the 'Squire discovered him. Here they remained in whispered silence for several hours, until some time in the afternoon, and were about to despair of seeing the culprit, when their attention was directed by Mr. Mandeville, who had kept a sharp look out, to a man descending from a thick, bushy topped tree. He was a good way off, and they could not distinguish his features; but he paused and looked around in all directions, as if to satisfy himself that there was no one near to observe his motions; then going to a large tree, and taking another look around to be sure of safety, he removed some bark from its base, which was very dextrously fitted to its place, and revealed a large hollow caused by the decay of the inner portions of the tree, from which he drew forth a bag of oats, and, cautiously approaching the horse, gave him a mess.

"Now is our time!" whispered the 'Squire. "Two of you go on either side so as to cut off his retreat, while Mandeville and I march directly upon him. You, Jake, look out for, and take charge of the horse. Move

rapidly, but with as little noise as possible. Strike out!"

With the concluding words all five rose from their hiding-place and proceeded to execute the parts assigned them.

Duffel, whose senses were quickened by fear, heard the breaking of a small stick under the tread of one of the party, and looking out, saw his danger; for he recognized his pursuers, though they had not, as yet, ascertained who he was. In a moment he decided upon his course of action, which was to flee for life; and, mounting the horse, which he had in preparation for any emergency, he bounded away at as rapid a rate as he could force the animal into going.

The 'Squire called out to him to stop; but he seemed not to hear.

"Stop!" repeated the 'Squire, "stop, or I'll shoot you!"

Still he heeded not the command or the warning, but made only the greater exertions to get out of reach of gun-shot and make his escape.

Without losing more time, the 'Squire leveled his rifle and fired. The rider tottered for a moment and then fell from his seat. In a minute or two he was surrounded by his pursuers.

"You have killed me, 'Squire," were his first words, as that gentleman came up.

"Well, why did you not stop; I should not have fired if you had done so."

"I did not wish to be taken alive."

At this juncture Mr. Mandeville came round where he had a view of the thief's face, and, with unfeigned horror and amazement, he recognized him, and exclaimed:

"_Duffel!_"

"Yes, Mandeville," said Duffel, "it is I, and there is Tom, *your* horse."

"So he is, as I live," said the bewildered individual. "How is this? I certainly am not dreaming."

"No," replied Duffel. "I would to God it was a dream. You see before you the very man of all others you had chosen for a son-in-law, and but for your daughter's opposition, I would this day have stood in that relation to you, which I am now glad is not the case. But I have much to reveal to you and little time to do it in."

"Well, first of all, have you seen anything of Eveline?"

"Yes, I have both seen and conversed with her, and until last night I knew where she was, but now I do not."

He then entered into a brief history of his past conduct in relation to Hadley and Eveline, keeping nothing back.

"So, then, Hadley is dead?" queried the 'Squire, who felt a deep interest in that young man's welfare.

"Yes, sorry enough I am to say it, for it is the only murder that rests on my conscience, and a heavy burden and a deep stain it is with which to appear in the presence of an offended God!"

"And you know nothing of Eveline?" interposed Mr. Mandeville.

"Nothing more than I have told you. She may be on her way home, or she may have fallen into the hands of those who will have as little regard for her feelings and wishes as I had. I think she has been taken from the cave by some of our number, but with what design is more than I can tell."

"Where is the cave?"

"I am bound by the most solemn oath never, under any circumstances, to make known its location, and if I were to do so, it would avail you nothing now; she is not there."

"Well, can't you give us some clue to its whereabouts?"

"No, I dare not. I know how great must be your anxiety to learn the fate of Eveline, but I can assist you no further in prosecuting a search for her. She is either safe, or her doom is sealed, and I know not which is the most probable, safety or destruction. In fact I am as much in the dark as you are in relation to her last disappearance; it is a mystery which I can only account for on the supposition already stated, that there is treason in the League."

All this was said with difficulty by Duffel, who suffered great pain from his wound, but would not allow himself to be disturbed until he had revealed what was on his mind. He now permitted himself to be placed on a rude litter, which was prepared by the men out of the branches of trees, and was carefully borne toward his home.

But before they had emerged from the swamp he motioned them to stop, and they did so.

"I am going!" he said, in a voice scarcely above a whisper. "I thank you for your kindness. Whoever bears the tidings of my death to my mother, please break the news to her as gently as possible."

The thought of his mother seemed to awaken the better part of his nature, and at the same time to quicken his pulses. He grew stronger under the excitement, and ejaculated in a louder tone:

"Oh, my God! that I should come to this! I fear the intelligence will kill her!"

He covered his face with his hands and groaned in agony. Every eye in that solemn group around him was moist with tears.

"Take me on!" said the sufferer, after a pause. "Possibly I may be able to hold out till I reach home. If I do not, Mr. Mandeville, and you should ever see Eveline again tell her that almost with my dying words I craved her forgiveness."

Duffel the man and villain was subdued, and Duffel the boy was again come to life. The memory of a mother's love opened the long-sealed fountain of affection in his sin-encased heart, and he felt once more, in a little degree, as he had done in the days of his innocence.

As he was carried along the current of thought again changed, and he cast a retrospect over the years of crime, which had made him an outlaw, and brought him down to the gate of death. The dark picture shut out the light of more pleasant memories, and his soul sunk back into the night of darkness which the blackness of his crime had cast around it! Again he groaned in anguish of spirit and closed his eyes, as if by so doing he would shut out the phantoms of his evil deeds from his soul's vision.

The excitement of conflicting emotions threw him into a fever, and before he reached his home, which was

not till after night, he was delirious. A broken hearted mother laid her soft hand affectionately upon his head, and called his name in such endearing tones as only a mother's lips can breathe; but he knew not that it was her, he felt only the touch of a horrid specter, and heard but the mocking of fiends!

Then he raved and bid the ghostly phantoms begone! Oh, it was terrible to witness his soul-disordered agony, and hear the awful words that fell from his fevered lips!

"Why, in Satan's name," he said, "have you come to torment me with your jeers and scoffs, ye minions of h----? Away with you! Back! back! I say, to your black home in the pit!"

Then covering his eyes he lay and shuddered for a brief period, but soon screamed out:

"Keep your forked tongues out of my face, you hissing devils!"

These paroxysms, upon the horrors of which we have no wish to dwell, lasted all the night, but subsided about the dawn of morning. The last image conjured up by his distempered fancy seemed to be one of Hadley:

"Oh, Hadley," he pleaded in piteous tones, "do not look upon me in that way! Take from me those mournful eyes, oh, take them away! for that look burns into my heart! Hadley! Hadley! have pity on me! and spare me! Am I not tormented enough already?"

But we will not linger to depict this harrowing scene. When the fever subsided he was weak as an infant. His mother asked him if he knew her, and he whispered:

"Yes, oh, yes! God forgive me for bringing your 'grey hairs in sorrow to the grave!' Oh, that I could die with your forgiveness graven upon my heart; but I dare not hope--I dare not pray for it!"

"God bless you, my son! and forgive you as I do!" passionately exclaimed the parent; and her heart was writhing with agony!

What a fearful thing it is to bow a parent's head with shame! to crush out the joy from a tender mother's heart, and shut the light from her spirit forever! And, oh, what a fearful thing to die with this consciousness burning into the soul like the sting of scorpions!

None of the horrid visions that visited his fevered brain in the hours of delirium were half so painful as the anguished expression on that mother's face. It sunk to the great deep of the guilty son's soul; and, with that pale face bending over him, his last glimpse of earth, his sight paled and his spirit left its clay tenement for eternity. What a lesson in his life and death!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DISGUISED VILLAINS MEET HADLEY--THE RESULT--CONCLUSION.

As already stated, Bill and Dick had disguised themselves in the garb of gentlemen, and with certain disfigurements of countenance which completely hid their features and rendered it impossible to identify them, either in their character of villainous murderers, or as the abductors, on a former occasion, of their present captive. When Bill first discovered Eveline in the woods, he was about to make known to her that he and Dick were the friends who had promised to liberate her, but on second thought he deemed it best to keep up the disguise, and learn, if possible, whether she had any knowledge of his real intentions and their ultimate destination. Hence her inability to trace the voice, which sounded so familiar, to the wily villain who had enticed her to meet Hadley for the purpose of placing her in Duffel's power.

Bill endeavored by every indirect means, not calculated to excite suspicion, to draw from Eveline the facts of her situation, with the view of informing himself of her sentiments toward the friends who had promised her freedom; but she kept her own counsels, and completely baffled him in his object. He knew that the present course of deception could not long be persisted in, as, at furthest, on the morrow a development of facts must take place, or, at least, a continued persistence in the disguise as to destination would be impossible. How to make himself known in his real character was a matter which puzzled him not a little; for he well knew from her manners and from the resistance she had made to Duffel, that it would be no easy task to force her all the way to Virginia. If he could only manage to keep up appearances until a certain point was gained, which he hoped to reach by night on the second day, he felt pretty sure of final success; for he would then be on a route along which friends were numerous, and he knew where to stop for refreshments and at what places to put up for the night. But how to reach that point was the difficulty.

After bestowing much thought on the subject, he at last hit upon the plan which he concluded would enable him to accomplish his ends without being mistrusted by Eveline. His plan was simply this: To give Eveline to understand that it would be impossible for them to reach C---- that day; and when, on the morrow, it should appear to be time for the termination of their journey, he would, in seemingly well disguised uneasiness, inform her that they were lost in the wilderness! and as the day wore away, that it might be possible they would have to remain in the forest all night, if they did not happen to stumble on some settlement or lone cabin. In this way he could gain the time desired; and he well knew *what* solitary cabin he would reach at night!

Poor Eveline was again in the toils of an enemy, and it would seem now that nothing but death could release her from the snare in which she had unconsciously fallen. In her situation, "ignorance was certainly bliss;" for while the web of fate was weaving so surely around her, she was thinking of home and friends with joy at heart, that soon she would return to the one and be greeted by the others. Alas! how little knew she of the dark purposes of the vile wretches who were confided in as friends!

Without lingering to describe the particulars of the day and night, except to mention that the latter was spent at a first class public house, and without the occurrence of any note worthy of incident, we will simply state that Bill, who let Dick into his secret, carried out his plans to the letter; and on the second day, about noon, communicated to Eveline the unwelcome and, to her, startling intelligence that they had missed their way and were somewhat bewildered, but still hoped all would come out right. All the horrors of her former night's adventure in the wilderness came up in her mind, and she shuddered at the thought that a repetition of its dreadful experience might be before her, but concealed her feelings as well as she could, though Bill saw that a sudden pallor overspread her face, and that she was really alarmed.

Bill produced a pocket compass, and pretended to take directions and shape their course from it. Toward evening, he announced the fact, that he was quite confident they were near a secluded dwelling occupied by an old half-hermit sort of a fellow and his family, which, though affording but poor accommodations, would be preferable to the forest as a shelter for the night. As predetermined by him, they reached this desolate looking habitation, and put up for the night. Seeing that Eveline was ill at ease, he found means to whisper in her ear:

"Do not be alarmed at appearances; these people are rough, but honest; and in any emergency, be assured we will defend you with our lives!"

But this whispered assurance of defense had the contrary effect from what was intended, for Eveline at once had her fears confirmed that there *was* danger to be apprehended. She did not, however, manifest her increased apprehensions of evil, but seemed as calm as possible until she was shown her sleeping apartment for the night, which was a room on the first floor, with a bolt to the rude door on the inside. She fastened herself in; but instead of sleeping, put out her light, and listened with sharpened ears to every noise that disturbed the stillness of the night. She had been in her room but a little while when she was startled by a call

from without:

"Halloo, the house!"

She waited a moment, and then heard the owner go to the door and demand:

"Who's there?"

"A benighted traveler, who has lost his way, and wishes to obtain shelter for the night."

"The house is already full of guests, and I cannot take any more."

"Let him in;" said Bill, whose voice Eveline recognized. "He may be worth taking in, you know."

The man then called out:

"My guests think you can be accommodated; so you may come in, I reckon, and share such fare and lodging as we can give, which are none the best."

"If you will show me the way to the stable, I will first see to my horse," said the traveler.

The host pointed out a shed where the beast could stand, and soon the two returned to the house.

The moment the new-comer entered the door, Bill and Dick cast inquiring glances at each other; paleness as of death was on their cheeks, and superstitious alarm at their hearts; for in the stranger they beheld CHARLES HADLEY! Was it his ghost come to torment them in the hour of their triumph and security? Several minutes passed before they could be assured of his identity, that he was veritably flesh and blood, and not a spirit. It was well for them that the obscure light of the room cast their features in shadow, or their blanched cheeks and disquiet looks might have betrayed them. In a very short time they found it convenient, as on a former occasion, when seeking the life of the same man, to go out to see after their horses.

"Well, Dick!" said Bill, when they were alone, "What now?"

"D---n me, ef I didn't think the dead had come to life, when I first seen that feller! He must be bullet proof, for I placed my pistol plumb ag'in' him when I fired. I'm half a mind to believe yet that it's his ghost."

"But it is not his ghost, that's certain, though I could have sworn that he was dead; and we must get rid of him, some way, or he'll play the d---l with us."

"I think the best thing we can do is, to leave the gal in his care, and cut stick for Virginny as straight as we can shoot."

"Nonsense! We can easily get old Sampson to kill him for his money, and that will save us from any further fear of his revealing our secret."

"I don't like this bizness of killin'; 'taint human, no way you can fix it."

"Come, Dick, don't make a fool of yourself. I want you to stand by me now, like a man."

"I shall have nothing to do with killin' Hadley; you may jist put a peg there, and say no more about it."

"Well, let me alone, then, and don't interfere with my plans, and I'll do it myself."

"Ef it's to be done at all, better let old Sampson do it. I'd a good deal rather his hands should be made red with Hadley's blood than mine. The truth is, Hadley is a first rate chap, and it's a mean, cowardly act to take his life." "Come, come! no more of that sort of talk. If you don't want to help me, just let me alone; with old Sampson's aid, I can get along without you; but I don't see what has come over you, of late."

"Well, I ken soon tell you that I'm down on this wimen bizness, and allers have been; and it is mean, low, dirty work--this steelin' poor things--any way you ken fix it, and I've told you so often. I don't believe any good will come of it in the end, either; ef I could have my way, there shouldn't, that's certain. Ef you *will* go ahead, why, go; but I tell you no good will come of it at last. I would be glad ef you would quit now; but I'll not stand in your way, becoz I've agreed to stand by you already."

With this understanding, the rascals returned to the house--if house it could be called--and very soon afterward intimated that they would retire.

"As the stranger seems very tired," said Bill to the host, "we will willingly remain until you show him his room," and he gave the proprietor of the premises a knowing wink.

As Hadley rose to follow the host, he thanked the men for their kindness, and Dick turned away to conceal his feelings, for he was really sick at heart, bad as he was, at the thought that so noble a fellow should fall a sacrifice for such a base purpose; and he half resolved to give him warning of his danger, and save his life. While his thoughts were thus occupied, the host returned, and he and Bill very soon went out together, Dick too well knew for what purpose.

"Ef I could only let them out and get them off safely, I'd do it," mused Dick; "but there it is, I can't do it, and it's no use tryin'."

But notwithstanding he came to this hopeless conclusion, he continued to think about the matter. At last he concluded:

"Well, ef I can't do anything else, I ken give the feller a friendly word of advice, jist to kinder put him on his guard, like."

So he stepped to the door of Hadley's room, and gently tapping it until he gained the occupant's attention, whispered in his listening ear:

"There is danger about, stranger, and ef you take the advice of a friend, you'll not sleep over heavy to-night. Better have your arms ready for anything that may happen."

"Thank you! my friend," whispered Hadley, in response.

"No thanks, stranger; I'd help you more, if I could; but my hands are kinder tied like, and if they were free, sarcumstances would prevent me from givin' you any aid."

Having thus compromised the matter with his conscience, Dick walked away, resolved to have nothing to do with the affair. Indeed, his sickness of the "wimen bizness" was hourly increasing, and he was half tempted to leave Bill, unless he would relinquish Eveline.

While these events were transpiring, Eveline, wide awake and excited by fear, continued to listen to every sound without, remaining perfectly still herself, so that the inmates of the house supposed she was sleeping.

We will here remark, that the house was a double-cabin, with a kitchen attached to one of the ends, and a sleeping-room to the other. The family were in the kitchen, and Eveline was in the room opposite to it on the

same side, but at the other end of the house. The part of the cabin leading to and from the kitchen, was in one large room; but the part leading to and from Eveline's room, was divided into three apartments, two small sleeping-rooms, and one large hall-shaped one, extending the full length of the house, which was a kind of sitting-room, and into it opened all three of the bed-rooms, two at the side and one at the end. There was a rude chamber above these rooms, furnished with beds; for old Sampson's was a rendezvous for thieves and pickpockets, who often assembled there in considerable numbers, rendering it necessary for him to have these various accommodations for their benefit. Old Sampson himself was an outlaw, and many a murder had been committed in his house, and always in the room occupied by Hadley, with which there was a secret communication, and beneath it a vault for the reception of the dead bodies of his victims, until such time as they could be removed without detection.

With this brief explanation, we return to the thread of the narrative.

When Eveline heard the voice of the stranger, she was struck with its peculiarity, but, as it was louder than she had been used to hear Hadley speak, she did not recognize it, and the few brief words she afterward heard him utter, were too indistinctly heard by her to elicit the truth. When, however, she heard that well-known voice thanking the men for their kindness, she recognized it in a moment, and but for the fact that he was just retiring, she would have rushed out and thrown herself in his arms.

Hadley had not long been gone, when she heard a low murmuring of voices back of her room, and noiselessly approaching the side of her apartment nearest the speakers, she placed her ear to a crevice in the logs, and listened.

"I don't want to go to extremes unless there is good reason to believe he has considerable money about him."

These words, spoken by the host, were the first she heard distinctly.

"I think there is no doubt on that point," was the reply, "for to my certain knowledge he has just inherited an estate from a rich uncle."

"Has he indeed? Then he may be worth plucking. But can we rely on your companion?"

"Oh yes; Dick is true as steel. He will not take an active part in the affair, because he does not like my taking the girl, on one side, and for the reason that Hadley has never wronged him, on the other, but he will be as far from betraying us as we ourselves; I will answer for him there."

Dick! Hadley! In the quickness of the lightning's flash, the whole truth beamed into Eveline's soul. Her pretended guides were none other than Duffel's accomplices, and the plotters, afterward, of her own destruction, and she was now on her way to that cave in Virginia!

But the horrors of her own situation were lost sight of in contemplating the fate that was hanging over Hadley, who was to be killed for his money! As the light of these great truths broke in upon her mind, she came very near screaming out in affright, but fortunately did not. She still listened to see if she could learn how the dark deed of blood was to be consummated, but the mode of dispatching victims seemed to be understood by both and was only alluded to and not explained, and the villains soon left the spot and re-entered the house.

What a world of conflicting emotions and thoughts now contended in the bosom of the long and deeply tried girl! She knew Hadley lived; but oh, what a fate hung over him! Could she save him? Alas! it seemed an impossibility. Should she make the effort, it might only hasten the catastrophe she would prevent. If she could only put him on his guard; but that was out of her power, for she could hear Dick walking to and fro across the large room, and she believed he was a sentry on guard.

In this dilemma she sat down on the only chair in the room, and leaned her head upon her hand. She then found that her brow was covered with large drops of cold perspiration, which the intensity of her feelings had forced out. What to do she knew not; and so she sat, in an agony of suspense, while the slow moments passed away. At length she thought of her arms, which she still retained, and as she did so, resolved to use them in case of emergency, either for the preservation of her lover, or to preserve herself from the fate in store for her if Hadley should be murdered and she carried off.

From the first, Hadley did not like the appearance of things about the house, nor the looks of his host, who was not only rough in features and manners, but carried with him a countenance with a very sinister expression upon it, and an eye that spoke of crime and a guilty soul; but when Dick gave the warning, he was doubly confirmed in his first impressions, and resolved to profit by the advice so singularly volunteered. He did not undress, but before extinguishing his light examined his pistols, a brace of which he had procured for defense, to see that they were in proper order for immediate use. After making all needful preparations, he put out his candle, and remained in perfect quiet. Soon he heard the two men return, and then Dick went above to rest, and the others were left alone.

For a long time all was still; not a sound was heard; not a whisper broke the profound silence; yet there were four pairs of sleepless eyes in that house, whose owners were all within a few feet of each other!

At length Hadley, who had taken a position by the door, heard the softest tread of feet, then a suppressed breathing close by his ear, and he knew that some one was listening. He turned his face away that his own breathing might not betray him, and awaited the result of the other's observation. It was but a little while till a low whispered conversation fell upon his attentive ear!

"Does he sleep?"

"Yes, apparently very soundly."

"Then the sooner it is done the better."

"Yes; bring me the lantern. Now when I go in, close the door and stand near, but do not open it till I call; I don't want the bird to escape."

"All right. Be careful to make sure work of it."

"Trust me for that; he'll never know who struck him."

Hadley knew the decisive moment had come, and he prepared himself for the crisis; but he felt that the odds was fearfully against him, and his hope of escape was small; still he was resolved to make a desperate effort for his life.

As already remarked, the room was small, and the head of the bed came within a few feet of the door, so near, that by taking one step, Hadley could touch it with his hand. Around the bed were long curtains reaching to the floor. It was but the work of a moment for him to secrete himself behind these in such a position as to face the murderer when he turned to look after him in the bed. He had just secured his situation when the door gently opened, and the man of the house entered with the noiseless tread of a cat, bearing a dark lantern in one hand and a monstrous knife in the other. Stealthily he approached the bed, and then gradually lifted the shade and threw the light around the room to be sure his victim was not out on the watch; then he gently parted the curtains and slowly brought the light to bear upon the pillows.

Now! thought Hadley; and as the surprised assassin raised himself up to take a closer scrutiny of the position in which he had expected to find his victim, he leveled his pistol within two feet of his breast and fired! With

a heavy groan the old man fell to the floor. Bill rushed into the room, and as he did so, Hadley fired his other pistol, but the uncertain light and Bill's rapid motion caused the shot to be thrown away.

At the same instant a piercing shriek from Eveline's room told that she was alive to all that was passing.

Bill immediately drew a pistol and fired at Hadley, but the latter made a quick movement to one side and avoided the bullet. Then the two sprang at each other and closed in for a life struggle.

It was man to man with them, but Bill had the advantage of much practice, and his strength being equal, his skill must finally gain him the victory, unless fortune should greatly favor Hadley. Life was the prize at stake, and every nerve and muscle was taxed to its utmost capacity. At length they fell, Hadley being uppermost. The knife which had fallen from old Sampson's hand, lay within reach, and Hadley stretched forth his hand to grasp it, but as he did so, Bill, who was watching his opportunity, by a sudden and tremendous effort, turned his antagonist, and seizing the knife, the moment he felt his enemy safely beneath him, raised it for the fatal plunge at his heart, and with an oath exclaimed:

"Die, now, like a dog! and be out of my way!"

But the words were scarcely uttered, when his uplifted hand relaxed its grasp of the deadly weapon, and at the same precise point of time, a flash and report told that a third party had taken part in the deadly conflict. Bill fell over upon his dead companion a corpse, and springing to his feet, Hadley stood face to face with Eveline! Each spoke the other's name, fell into the other's arms, and Eveline fainted away! At this juncture Dick made his appearance, and taking in the whole scene at a glance, hastened out and soon returned with a vessel of water. Hadley took a handful of the fluid and sprinkled Eveline's face, who soon revived.

We shall not attempt to describe the joy of the transported lovers. But the family had been aroused by the unusual noise, and soon the wife and her two daughters stood with the dead. In their horror and distress, Hadley and Eveline forgot their happiness.

There was no more sleep for the inmates of that lonely dwelling that night, and with the early dawn, the lovers, guided by Dick to a public road, left the scene of death and wretchedness for home, where they arrived in safety, the next evening, to the unspeakable joy of Mr. Mandeville, who had just returned from a fruitless search after his daughter, in despair.

Dick went back and buried his dead companion, and old Sampson, after doing which he left the country, and was never afterward heard of.

The League was never revived in that section of the country after the destruction of the cave, though many of the members went to the south-west to join their captain, and the Order is still in existence in a little different form.

We have little more to add. Charles and Eveline were married with the full and free approbation of Mr. Mandeville, who ever after loved Hadley as his own child, and acknowledged that for once the daughter's was better than the FATHER'S CHOICE, and often shuddered as he contemplated how narrowly his beloved daughter had escaped becoming the wife, first, and afterward, the victim, of THE HORSE THIEF RIVAL.

END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK EVELINE MANDEVILLE

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