

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**ERNEST
MALTRAVERS —
VOLUME 01**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

Ernest Maltravers — Volume 01

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton
Ernest Maltravers — Volume 01

DEDICATION:

TO

THE GREAT GERMAN PEOPLE,

A race of thinkers and of critics;
A foreign but familiar audience,
Profound in judgment, candid in reproof, generous in appreciation,
This work is dedicated
By an English Author.

PREFACE TO THE EDITION OF 1840

HOWEVER numerous the works of fiction with which, my dear Reader, I have trespassed on your attention, I leave published but three, of any account, in which the plot has been cast amidst the events, and coloured by the manner, of our own times. The first of these, /Pelham/, composed when I was little more than a boy, has the faults, and perhaps the merits, natural to a very early age,—when the novelty itself of life quickens the observation,—when we see distinctly, and represent vividly, what lies upon the surface of the world,—and when, half sympathising with the follies we satirise, there is a gusto in our paintings which atones for their exaggeration. As we grow older we observe less, we reflect more; and, like Frankenstein, we dissect in order to create.

The second novel of the present day,¹ which, after an interval of some years, I submitted to the world, was one I now, for the first time, acknowledge, and which (revised and corrected) will be included in this series, viz., /Godolphin/;—a work devoted to a particular portion of society, and the development of a peculiar class of character. The third, which I now reprint, is /Ernest Maltravers/,² the most mature, and, on the whole, the most comprehensive of all that I have hitherto written.

For the original idea, which, with humility, I will venture to call the philosophical design of a moral education or apprenticeship, I have left it easy to be seen that I am indebted to Goethe's /Wilhelm Meister/. But, in /Wilhelm Meister/, the apprenticeship is rather that of theoretical art. In the more homely plan that I set before myself, the apprenticeship is rather that of practical life. And, with this view, it has been especially my study to avoid all those attractions lawful in romance, or tales of pure humour or unbridled fancy, attractions that, in the language of reviewers, are styled under the head of "most striking descriptions," "scenes of extraordinary power," etc.; and are derived from violent contrasts and exaggerations pushed into caricature. It has been my aim to subdue and tone down the persons introduced, and the general agencies of the narrative, into the lights and shadows of life as it is. I do not mean by "life as it is," the vulgar and the outward life alone, but life in its spiritual and mystic as well as its more visible and fleshly characteristics. The idea of not only describing, but developing character under the ripening influences of time and circumstance, is not confined to the apprenticeship of Maltravers alone, but pervades the progress of Cesarini, Ferrers, and Alice Darvil.

The original conception of Alice is taken from real life—from a person I never saw but twice, and then she was no longer young—but whose history made on me a deep impression. Her early ignorance and home—her first love—the strange and affecting fidelity that she maintained, in spite of new ties—her final re-meeting, almost in middle-age, with one lost and adored almost in childhood—all this, as shown in the novel, is but the imperfect transcript of the true adventures of a living woman.

In regard to Maltravers himself, I must own that I have but inadequately struggled against the great and obvious difficulty of representing an author living in our own times, with whose supposed works or alleged genius and those of any one actually existing, the reader can establish no identification, and he is therefore either compelled constantly to humour the delusion by keeping his imagination on the stretch, or lazily driven to confound the Author /in/ the Book with the Author /of/ the Book.³ But I own, also, I fancied, while aware of this objection, and in spite of it, that so much not hitherto said might be conveyed with advantage through the lips or in the life of an imaginary writer of our own time, that I was contented, on the whole, either to task the imagination, or submit to the suspicions of the reader. All that my own egotism appropriates in the book are some occasional

¹ For /The Disowned/ is cast in the time of our grandfathers, and /The Pilgrims of the Rhine/ had nothing to do with actual life, and is not, therefore, to be called a novel.

² At the date of this preface /Night and Morning/ had not appeared.

³ In some foreign journal I have been much amused by a credulity of this latter description, and seen the various adventures of Mr. Maltravers gravely appropriated to the embellishment of my own life, including the attachment to the original of poor Alice Darvil; who now, by the way, must be at least seventy years of age, with a grandchild nearly as old as myself.

remarks, the natural result of practical experience. With the life or the character, the adventures or the humours, the errors or the good qualities, of Maltravers himself, I have nothing to do, except as the narrator and inventor.

E. B. L.

A WORD TO THE READER PREFIXED TO THE FIRST EDITION OF 1837

THOU must not, my old and partial friend, look into this work for that species of interest which is drawn from stirring adventures and a perpetual variety of incident. To a Novel of the present day are necessarily forbidden the animation, the excitement, the bustle, the pomp, and the stage effect which History affords to Romance. Whatever merits, in thy gentle eyes, /Rienzi/, or /The Last Days of Pompeii/, may have possessed, this Tale, if it please thee at all, must owe that happy fortune to qualities widely different from those which won thy favour to pictures of the Past. Thou must sober down thine imagination, and prepare thyself for a story not dedicated to the narrative of extraordinary events—nor the elucidation of the characters of great men. Though there is scarcely a page in this work episodic to the main design, there may be much that may seem to thee wearisome and prolix, if thou wilt not lend thyself, in a kindly spirit, and with a generous trust, to the guidance of the Author. In the hero of this tale thou wilt find neither a majestic demigod, nor a fascinating demon. He is a man with the weaknesses derived from humanity, with the strength that we inherit from the soul; not often obstinate in error, more often irresolute in virtue; sometimes too aspiring, sometimes too despondent; influenced by the circumstances to which he yet struggles to be superior, and changing in character with the changes of time and fate; but never wantonly rejecting those great principles by which alone we can work the Science of Life—a desire for the Good, a passion for the Honest, a yearning after the True. From such principles, Experience, that severe Mentor, teaches us at length the safe and practical philosophy which consists of Fortitude to bear, Serenity to enjoy, and Faith to look beyond!

It would have led, perhaps, to more striking incidents, and have furnished an interest more intense, if I had cast Maltravers, the Man of Genius, amidst those fierce but ennobling struggles with poverty and want to which genius is so often condemned. But wealth and lassitude have their temptations as well as penury and toil. And for the rest—I have taken much of my tale and many of my characters from real life, and would not unnecessarily seek other fountains when the Well of Truth was in my reach.

The Author has said his say, he retreats once more into silence and into shade; he leaves you alone with the creations he has called to life—the representatives of his emotions and his thoughts—the intermediators between the individual and the crowd. Children not of the clay, but of the spirit, may they be faithful to their origin!—so should they be monitors, not loud but deep, of the world into which they are cast, struggling against the obstacles that will beset them, for the heritage of their parent—the right to survive the grave!

LONDON, August 12th, 1837.

BOOK I

*"Youth pastures in a valley of its own:
The glare of noon—the rains and winds of heaven
Mar not the calm yet virgin of all care.
But ever with sweet joys it buildeth up
The airy halls of life."*

SOPH. /Trachim/. 144-147.

CHAPTER I

*"My meaning in't, I protest, was very honest in the behalf of the maid *
* * * yet, who would have suspected an ambush where I was taken?"
/All's Well that Ends Well/, Act iv. Sc. 3.*

SOME four miles distant from one of our northern manufacturing towns, in the year 18—, was a wide and desolate common; a more dreary spot it is impossible to conceive—the herbage grew up in sickly patches from the midst of a black and stony soil. Not a tree was to be seen in the whole of the comfortless expanse. Nature herself had seemed to desert the solitude, as if scared by the ceaseless din of the neighbouring forges; and even Art, which presses all things into service, had disdained to cull use or beauty from these unpromising demesnes. There was something weird and primeval in the aspect of the place; especially when in the long nights of winter you beheld the distant fires and lights which give to the vicinity of certain manufactories so preternatural an appearance, streaming red and wild over the waste. So abandoned by man appeared the spot, that you found it difficult to imagine that it was only from human fires that its bleak and barren desolation was illumined. For miles along the moor you detected no vestige of any habitation; but as you approached the verge nearest to the town, you could just perceive at a little distance from the main road, by which the common was intersected, a small, solitary, and miserable hovel.

Within this lonely abode, at the time in which my story opens, were seated two persons. The one was a man of about fifty years of age, and in a squalid and wretched garb, which was yet relieved by an affectation of ill-assorted finery. A silk handkerchief, which boasted the ornament of a large brooch of false stones, was twisted jauntily round a muscular but meagre throat; his tattered breeches were also decorated by buckles, one of pinchbeck, and one of steel. His frame was lean, but broad and sinewy, indicative of considerable strength. His countenance was prematurely marked by deep furrows, and his grizzled hair waved over a low, rugged, and forbidding brow, on which there hung an everlasting frown that no smile from the lips (and the man smiled often) could chase away. It was a face that spoke of long-continued and hardened vice—it was one in which the Past had written indelible characters. The brand of the hangman could not have stamped it more plainly, nor have more unequivocally warned the suspicion of honest or timid men.

He was employed in counting some few and paltry coins, which, though an easy matter to ascertain their value, he told and retold, as if the act could increase the amount. "There must be some mistake here, Alice," he said in a low and muttered tone: "we can't be so low—you know I had two pounds in the drawer but Monday, and now—Alice, you must have stolen some of the money—curse you."

The person thus addressed sat at the opposite side of the smouldering and sullen fire; she now looked quietly up, and her face singularly contrasted that of the man.

She seemed about fifteen years of age, and her complexion was remarkably pure and delicate, even despite the sunburnt tinge which her habits of toil had brought it. Her auburn hair hung in loose and natural curls over her forehead, and its luxuriance was remarkable even in one so young. Her countenance was beautiful, nay, even faultless, in its small and child-like features, but the expression pained you—it was so vacant. In repose it was almost the expression of an idiot—but when she spoke or smiled, or even moved a muscle, the eyes, colour, lips, kindled into a life, which proved that the intellect was still there, though but imperfectly awakened.

"I did not steal any, father," she said in a quiet voice; "but I should like to have taken some, only I knew you would beat me if I did."

"And what do you want money for?"

"To get food when I'm hungered."

"Nothing else?"

"I don't know."

The girl paused.—"Why don't you let me," she said, after a while, "why don't you let me go and work with the other girls at the factory? I should make money there for you and me both."

The man smiled—such a smile—it seemed to bring into sudden play all the revolting characteristics of his countenance. "Child," he said, "you are just fifteen, and a sad fool you are: perhaps if you went to the factory, you would get away from me; and what should I do without you? No, I think, as you are so pretty, you might get more money another way."

The girl did not seem to understand this allusion: but repeated, vacantly, "I should like to go to the factory."

"Stuff!" said the man, angrily; "I have three minds to—"

Here he was interrupted by a loud knock at the door of the hovel.

The man grew pale. "What can that be?" he muttered. "The hour is late—near eleven. Again—again! Ask who knocks, Alice."

The girl stood for a moment or so at the door; and as she stood, her form, rounded yet slight, her earnest look, her varying colour, her tender youth, and a singular grace of attitude and gesture, would have inspired an artist with the very ideal of rustic beauty.

After a pause, she placed her lips to a chink in the door, and repeated her father's question.

"Pray pardon me," said a clear, loud, yet courteous voice, "but seeing a light at your window, I have ventured to ask if any one within will conduct me to ———; I will pay the service handsomely."

"Open the door, Alley," said the owner of the hut.

The girl drew a large wooden bolt from the door; and a tall figure crossed the threshold.

The new-comer was in the first bloom of youth, perhaps about eighteen years of age, and his air and appearance surprised both sire and daughter. Alone, on foot, at such an hour, it was impossible for any one to mistake him for other than a gentleman; yet his dress was plain and somewhat soiled by dust, and he carried a small knapsack on his shoulder. As he entered, he lifted his hat with somewhat of foreign urbanity, and a profusion of fair brown hair fell partially over a high and commanding forehead. His features were handsome, without being eminently so, and his aspect was at once bold and prepossessing.

"I am much obliged by your civility," he said, advancing carelessly and addressing the man, who surveyed him with a scrutinising eye; "and trust, my good fellow, that you will increase the obligation by accompanying me to ———."

"You can't miss well your way," said the man surlily: "the lights will direct you."

"They have rather misled me, for they seem to surround the whole common, and there is no path across it that I can see; however, if you will put me in the right road, I will not trouble you further."

"It is very late," replied the churlish landlord, equivocally.

"The better reason why I should be at ———. Come, my good friend, put on your hat, and I will give you half a guinea for your trouble."

The man advanced, then halted; again surveyed his guest, and said, "Are you quite alone, sir?"
"Quite."

"Probably you are known at ——?"

"Not I. But what matters that to you? I am a stranger in these parts."

"It is full four miles."

"So far, and I am fearfully tired already!" exclaimed the young man with impatience. As he spoke he drew out his watch. "Past eleven too!"

The watch caught the eye of the cottager; that evil eye sparkled. He passed his hand over his brow. "I am thinking, sir," he said in a more civil tone than he had yet assumed, "that as you are so tired and the hour is so late, you might almost as well—"

"What?" exclaimed the stranger, stamping somewhat petulantly.

"I don't like to mention it; but my poor roof is at your service, and I would go with you to —— at daybreak to-morrow."

The stranger stared at the cottager, and then at the dingy walls of the hut. He was about, very abruptly, to reject the hospitable proposal, when his eye rested suddenly on the form of Alice, who stood eager-eyed and open-mouthed, gazing on the handsome intruder. As she caught his eye, she blushed deeply and turned aside. The view seemed to change the intentions of the stranger. He hesitated a moment, then muttered between his teeth: and sinking his knapsack on the ground, he cast himself into a chair beside the fire, stretched his limbs, and cried gaily, "So be it, my host: shut up your house again. Bring me a cup of beer, and a crust of bread, and so much for supper! As for bed, this chair will do vastly well."

"Perhaps we can manage better for you than that chair," answered the host. "But our best accommodation must seem bad enough to a gentleman: we are very poor people—hard-working, but very poor."

"Never mind me," answered the stranger, busying himself in stirring the fire; "I am tolerably well accustomed to greater hardships than sleeping on a chair in an honest man's house; and though you are poor, I will take it for granted you are honest."

The man grinned: and turning to Alice, bade her spread what their larder would afford. Some crusts of bread, some cold potatoes, and some tolerably strong beer, composed all the fare set before the traveller.

Despite his previous boasts, the young man made a wry face at these Socratic preparations, while he drew his chair to the board. But his look grew more gay as he caught Alice's eye; and as she lingered by the table, and faltered out some hesitating words of apology, he seized her hand, and pressing it tenderly—"Prettiest of lasses," said he—and while he spoke he gazed on her with undisguised admiration—"a man who has travelled on foot all day, through the ugliest country within the three seas, is sufficiently refreshed at night by the sight of so fair a face."

Alice hastily withdrew her hand, and went and seated herself in a corner of the room, when she continued to look at the stranger with her usual vacant gaze, but with a half-smile upon her rosy lips.

Alice's father looked hard first at one, then at the other.

"Eat, sir," said he, with a sort of chuckle, "and no fine words; poor Alice is honest, as you said just now."

"To be sure," answered the traveller, employing with great zeal a set of strong, even, and dazzling teeth at the tough crusts; "to be sure she is. I did not mean to offend you; but the fact is, that I am half a foreigner; and abroad, you know, one may say a civil thing to a pretty girl without hurting her feelings, or her father's either."

"Half a foreigner! why, you talk English as well as I do," said the host, whose intonation and words were, on the whole, a little above his station.

The stranger smiled. "Thank you for the compliment," said he. "What I meant was, that I have been a great deal abroad; in fact, I have just returned from Germany. But I am English born."

"And going home?"

"Yes."

"Far from hence?"

"About thirty miles, I believe."

"You are young, sir, to be alone."

The traveller made no answer, but finished his uninviting repast and drew his chair again to the fire. He then thought he had sufficiently ministered to his host's curiosity to be entitled to the gratification of his own.

"You work at the factories, I suppose?" said he.

"I do, sir. Bad times."

"And your pretty daughter?"

"Minds the house."

"Have you no other children?"

"No; one mouth besides my own is as much as I can feed, and that scarcely. But you would like to rest now; you can have my bed, sir; I can sleep here."

"By no means," said the stranger, quickly; "just put a few more coals on the fire, and leave me to make myself comfortable."

The man rose, and did not press his offer, but left the room for a supply of fuel. Alice remained in her corner.

"Sweetheart," said the traveller, looking round and satisfying himself that they were alone: "I should sleep well if I could get one kiss from those coral lips."

Alice hid her face with her hands.

"Do I vex you?"

"Oh no, sir."

At this assurance the traveller rose, and approached Alice softly. He drew away her hands from her face, when she said gently, "Have you much money about you?"

"Oh, the mercenary baggage!" said the traveller to himself; and then replied aloud, "Why, pretty one? Do you sell your kisses so high then?"

Alice frowned and tossed the hair from her brow. "If you have money," she said, in a whisper, "don't say so to father. Don't sleep if you can help it. I'm afraid—hush—he comes!"

The young man returned to his seat with an altered manner. And as his host entered, he for the first time surveyed him closely. The imperfect glimmer of the half-dying and single candle threw into strong lights and shades the marked, rugged, and ferocious features of the cottager; and the eye of the traveller, glancing from the face to the limbs and frame, saw that whatever of violence the mind might design, the body might well execute.

The traveller sank into a gloomy reverie. The wind howled—the rain beat—through the casement shone no solitary star—all was dark and sombre. Should he proceed alone—might he not suffer a greater danger upon that wide and desert moor—might not the host follow—assault him in the dark? He had no weapon save a stick. But within he had at least a rude resource in the large kitchen poker that was beside him. At all events it would be better to wait for the present. He might at any time, when alone, withdraw the bolt from the door, and slip out unobserved. Such was the fruit of his meditations while his host plied the fire.

"You will sleep sound to-night," said his entertainer, smiling.

"Humph! Why, I am /over/-fatigued; I dare say it will be an hour or two before I fall asleep; but when I once am asleep, I sleep like a rock!"

"Come, Alice," said her father, "let us leave the gentleman. Goodnight, sir."

"Good night—good night," returned the traveller, yawning.

The father and daughter disappeared through a door in the corner of the room. The guest heard them ascend the creaking stairs—all was still.

"Fool that I am," said the traveller to himself, "will nothing teach me that I am no longer a student at Gottingen, or cure me of these pedestrian adventures? Had it not been for that girl's big blue eyes, I should be safe at —— by this time, if, indeed, the grim father had not murdered me by the road. However, we'll baulk him yet: another half-hour, and I am on the moor: we must give him time. And in the meanwhile here is the poker. At the worst it is but one to one; but the churl is strongly built."

Although the traveller thus endeavoured to cheer his courage, his heart beat more loudly than its wont. He kept his eyes stationed on the door by which the cottagers had vanished, and his hand on the massive poker.

While the stranger was thus employed below, Alice, instead of turning to her own narrow cell, went into her father's room.

The cottager was seated at the foot of his bed muttering to himself, and with eyes fixed on the ground.

The girl stood before him, gazing on his face, and with her arms lightly crossed above her bosom.

"It must be worth twenty guineas," said the host, abruptly to himself.

"What is it to you, father, what the gentleman's watch is worth?"

The man started.

"You mean," continued Alice, quietly, "you mean to do some injury to that young man; but you shall not."

The cottager's face grew black as night. "How," he began in a loud voice, but suddenly dropped the tone into a deep growl—"how dare you talk to me so?—go to bed—go to bed."

"No, father."

"No?"

"I will not stir from this room until daybreak."

"We will soon see that," said the man, with an oath.

"Touch me, and I will alarm the gentleman, and tell him that—"

"What?"

The girl approached her father, placed her lips to his ear, and whispered, "That you intend to murder him."

The cottager's frame trembled from head to foot; he shut his eyes, and gasped painfully for breath. "Alice," said he, gently, after a pause—"Alice, we are often nearly starving."

"/I/ am—/you/ never!"

"Wretch, yes, if I do drink too much one day, I pinch for it the next. But go to bed, I say—I mean no harm to the young man. Think you I would twist myself a rope?—no, no; go along, go along."

Alice's face, which had before been earnest and almost intelligent, now relapsed into its wonted vacant stare.

"To be sure, father, they would hang you if you cut his throat. Don't forget that;—good night;" and so saying, she walked to her own opposite chamber.

Left alone, the host pressed his hand tightly to his forehead, and remained motionless for nearly half an hour.

"If that cursed girl would but sleep," he muttered at last, turning round, "it might be done at once. And there's the pond behind, as deep as a well; and I might say at daybreak that the boy had bolted. He seems quite a stranger here—nobody'll miss him. He must have plenty of blunt to give half a guinea to a guide across a common! I want money, and I won't work—if I can help it, at least."

While he thus soliloquised the air seemed to oppress him; he opened the window, he leant out—the rain beat upon him. He closed the window with an oath; took off his shoes, stole to the threshold, and, by the candle, which he shaded with his hand, surveyed the opposite door. It was closed. He then bent anxiously forward and listened.

"All's quiet," thought he, "perhaps he sleeps already. I will steal down. If Jack Walters would but come tonight, the job would be done charmingly."

With that he crept gently down the stairs. In a corner, at the foot of the staircase, lay sundry matters, a few faggots, and a cleaver. He caught up the last. "Aha," he muttered; "and there's the sledge-hammer somewhere for Walters." Leaning himself against the door, he then applied his eye to a chink which admitted a dim view of the room within, lighted fitfully by the fire.

CHAPTER II

*"What have we here?
A carrion death!"*

/Merchant of Venice/, Act ii. Sc. 7.

IT was about this time that the stranger deemed it advisable to commence his retreat. The slight and suppressed sound of voices, which at first he had heard above in the conversation of the father and child, had died away. The stillness at once encouraged and warned him. He stole to the front door, softly undid the bolt, and found the door locked, and the key missing. He had not observed that during his repast, and ere his suspicions had been aroused, his host, in replacing the bar, and relocking the entrance, had abstracted the key. His fears were now confirmed. His next thought was the window—the shutter only protected it half-way, and was easily removed; but the aperture of the lattice, which only opened in part like most cottage casements, was far too small to admit his person. His only means of escape was in breaking the whole window; a matter not to be effected without noise and consequent risk.

He paused in despair. He was naturally of a strong-nerved and gallant temperament, nor unaccustomed to those perils of life and limb which German students delight to brave; but his heart well-nigh failed him at that moment. The silence became distinct and burdensome to him, and a chill moisture gathered to his brow. While he stood irresolute and in suspense, striving to collect his thoughts, his ear, preternaturally sharpened by fear, caught the faint muffled sound of creeping footsteps—he heard the stairs creak. The sound broke the spell. The previous vague apprehension gave way, when the danger became actually at hand. His presence of mind returned at once. He went back quickly to the fireplace, seized the poker, and began stirring the fire, and coughing loud, and indicating as vigorously as possible that he was wide awake.

He felt that he was watched—he felt that he was in momentarily peril. He felt that the appearance of slumber would be the signal for a mortal conflict. Time passed, all remained silent; nearly half an hour had elapsed since he had heard the steps upon the stairs. His situation began to prey upon his nerves, it irritated them—it became intolerable. It was not now fear that he experienced, it was the overwrought sense of mortal enmity—the consciousness that a man may feel who knows that the eye of a tiger is on him, and who, while in suspense he has regained his courage, foresees that sooner or later the spring must come; the suspense itself becomes an agony, and he desires to expedite the deadly struggle he cannot shun.

Utterly incapable any longer to bear his own sensations, the traveller rose at last, fixed his eyes upon the fatal door, and was about to cry aloud to the listener to enter, when he heard a slight tap at the window; it was twice repeated; and at the third time a low voice pronounced the name of Darvil. It was clear, then, that accomplices had arrived; it was no longer against one man that he would have to contend. He drew his breath hard, and listened with throbbing ears. He heard steps without upon the plashing soil; they retired—all was still.

He paused a few minutes, and walked deliberately and firmly to the inner door, at which he fancied his host stationed; with a steady hand he attempted to open the door; it was fastened on the opposite side. "So!" said he, bitterly, and grinding his teeth, "I must die like a rat in a cage. Well, I'll die biting."

He returned to his former post, drew himself up to his full height, and stood grasping his homely weapon, prepared for the worst, and not altogether unelated with a proud consciousness of his own natural advantages of activity, stature, strength and daring. Minutes rolled on; the silence was broken

by some one at the inner door; he heard the bolt gently withdrawn. He raised his weapon with both hands; and started to find the intruder was only Alice. She came in with bare feet, and pale as marble, her finger on her lips.

She approached—she touched him.

"They are in the shed behind," she whispered, "looking for the sledge-hammer—they mean to murder you; get you gone—quick."

"How?—the door is locked."

"Stay. I have taken the key from his room."

She gained the door, applied the key—the door yielded. The traveller threw his knapsack once more over his shoulder, and made but one stride to the threshold. The girl stopped him. "Don't say anything about it; he is my father, they would hang him."

"No, no. But you?—are safe, I trust?—depend on my gratitude.—I shall be at —— tomorrow—the best inn—seek me if you can. Which way now?"

"Keep to the left."

The stranger was already several paces distant; through the darkness, and in the midst of the rain, he fled on with the speed of youth. The girl lingered an instant, sighed, then laughed aloud; closed and re-barred the door, and was creeping back, when from the inner entrance advanced the grim father, and another man, of broad, short, sinewy frame, his arms bare, and wielding a large hammer.

"How?" asked the host; "Alice here, and—hell and the devil! have you let him go?"

"I told you that you should not harm him."

With a violent oath the ruffian struck his daughter to the ground, sprang over her body, unbarred the door, and, accompanied by his comrade, set off in vague pursuit of his intended victim.

CHAPTER III

*"You knew—none so well, of my daughter's flight."
/Merchant of Venice/, Act iii. Sc. 1.*

THE day dawned; it was a mild, damp, hazy morning; the sod sank deep beneath the foot, the roads were heavy with mire, and the rain of the past night lay here and there in broad shallow pools. Towards the town, waggons, carts, pedestrian groups were already moving; and, now and then, you caught the sharp horn of some early coach, wheeling its be-cloaked outside and be-nightcapped inside passengers along the northern thoroughfare.

A young man bounded over a stile into the road just opposite to the milestone, that declared him to be one mile from ———.

"Thank Heaven!" he said, almost aloud. "After spending the night wandering about morasses like a will-o'-the-wisp, I approach a town at last. Thank Heaven again, and for all its mercies this night! I breathe freely. I AM SAFE."

He walked on somewhat rapidly; he passed a slow waggon—he passed a group of mechanics—he passed a drove of sheep, and now he saw walking leisurely before him a single figure. It was a girl, in a worn and humble dress, who seemed to seek her weary way with pain and languor. He was about also to pass her, when he heard a low cry. He turned, and beheld in the wayfarer his preserver of the previous night.

"Heavens! is it indeed you? Can I believe my eyes?"

"I was coming to seek you, sir," said the girl, faintly. "I too have escaped; I shall never go back to father; I have no roof to cover my head now."

"Poor child! but how is this? Did they ill use you for releasing me?"

"Father knocked me down, and beat me again when he came back; but that is not all," she added, in a very low tone.

"What else?"

The girl grew red and white by turns. She set her teeth rigidly, stopped short, and then walking on quicker than before, replied: "It don't matter; I will never go back—I'm alone now. What, what shall I do?" and she wrung her hands.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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