Stevenson Robert Louis

The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson – Swanston Edition. Volume...

Роберт Льюис Стивенсон

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Содержание

Stevenson Robert Louis
The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson – Swanston Edition, Vol. 5

MORE NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS
THE DYNAMITER

WRITTEN IN COLLABORATION WITH MRS. STEVENSON

TO

MESSRS. COLE AND COX

POLICE OFFICERS

Gentlemen,

In the volume now in your hands, the authors have touched upon that ugly devil of crime, with which it is your glory to have contended. It were a waste of ink to do so in a serious spirit. Let us dedicate our horror to acts of a more mingled strain, where crime preserves some features of nobility, and where reason and humanity can still relish the temptation. Horror, in this case, is due to Mr. Parnell: he sits before posterity silent, Mr. Forster's appeal echoing down the ages. Horror is due to ourselves, in that we have so long coquetted with political crime; not seriously weighing, not acutely following it from cause to consequence; but with a generous, unfounded heat of sentiment, like the schoolboy with the penny tale, applauding what was specious. When it touched ourselves (truly in a vile shape), we proved false to these imaginations; discovered, in a clap, that crime was no less cruel and no less ugly under sounding names; and recoiled from our false deities.

But seriousness comes most in place when we are to speak of our defenders. Whoever be in the right in this great and confused war of politics; whatever elements of greed, whatever traits of the bully, dishonour both parties in this inhuman contest; – your side, your part, is at least pure of doubt. Yours is the side of the child, of the breeding woman, of individual pity and public trust. If our society were the mere kingdom of the devil (as indeed it wears some of his colours), it yet embraces many precious elements and many innocent persons whom itis a glory to defend. Courage and devotion, so common in the ranks of the police, so little recognised, so meagrely rewarded, have at length found their commemoration in an historical act. History, which will represent Mr. Parnell sitting silent under the appeal of Mr. Forster, and Gordon setting forth upon his tragic enterprise, will not forget Mr. Cole carrying the dynamite in his defenceless hands, nor Mr. Cox coming coolly to his aid.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.
FANNY VAN DE GRIFT STEVENSON.

A NOTE FOR THE READER

It is within the bounds of possibility that you may take up this volume, and yet be unacquainted with its predecessor: the first series of New Arabian Nights. *The loss is yours – and mine; or, to be more exact, my publishers'. But if you are thus unlucky, the least I can do is to pass you a hint. When you shall find a reference in the following pages to one Theophilus Godall of the Bohemian Cigar Divan in Rupert Street, Soho, you must be prepared to recognise under his features no less a person than Prince Florizel of Bohemia, formerly one of the magnates of Europe, now dethroned, exiled, impoverished, and embarked in the tobacco trade.*

R. L. S.

MORE NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS
THE DYNAMITER

PROLOGUE OF THE CIGAR DIVAN

In the city of encounters, the Bagdad of the West, and, to be more precise, on the broad northern pavement of Leicester Square, two young men of five- or six-and-twenty met after years of separation. The first, who was of a very smooth address, and clothed in the best fashion, hesitated to recognise the pinched and shabby air of his companion.

"What!" he cried, "Paul Somerset!"

"I am indeed Paul Somerset," returned the other, "or what remains of him after a well-deserved experience of poverty and law. But in you, Challoner, I can perceive no change; and time may be said, without hyperbole, to write no wrinkle on your azure brow."

"All," replied Challoner, "is not gold that glitters. But we are here in an ill posture for confidences, and interrupt the movement of these ladies. Let us, if you please, find a more private corner."

"If you will allow me to guide you," replied Somerset, "I will offer you the best cigar in London."

And taking the arm of his companion, he led him in silence and at a brisk pace to the door of a quiet establishment in Rupert Street, Soho. The entrance was adorned with one of those gigantic Highlanders of wood which have almost risen to the standing of antiquities; and across the window-glass, which sheltered the usual display of pipes, tobacco, and cigars, there ran the gilded legend: "Bohemian Cigar Divan, by T. Godall." The interior of the shop was small, but commodious and ornate; the salesman grave, smiling, and urbane; and the two young men, each puffing a select regalia, had soon taken their places on a sofa of mouse-coloured plush, and proceeded to exchange their stories.

"I am now," said Somerset, "a barrister; but Providence and the attorneys have hitherto denied me the opportunity to shine. A select society at the Cheshire Cheese engaged my evenings; my afternoons, as Mr. Godall could testify, have been generally passed in this divan; and my mornings, I have taken the precaution to abbreviate by not rising before twelve. At this rate, my little patrimony was very rapidly and, I am proud to remember, most agreeably expended. Since then a gentleman, who has really nothing else to recommend him beyond the fact of being my maternal uncle, deals me the small sum of ten shillings a week; and if you behold me once more revisiting the glimpses of the street lamps in my favourite quarter, you will readily divine that I have come into a fortune."

"I should not have supposed so," replied Challoner. "But doubtless I met you on the way to your tailors."

"It is a visit that I purpose to delay," returned Somerset, with a smile. "My fortune has definite limits. It consists, or rather this morning it consisted, of one hundred pounds."

"That is certainly odd," said Challoner; "yes, certainly the coincidence is strange. I am myself reduced to the same margin."

"You!" cried Somerset. "And yet Solomon in all his glory – "

"Such is the fact. I am, dear boy, on my last legs," said Challoner. "Besides the clothes in which you see me, I have scarcely a decent trouser in my wardrobe; and if I knew how, I would this instant set about some sort of work or commerce. With a hundred pounds for capital, a man should push his way."

"It may be," returned Somerset; "but what to do with mine is more than I can fancy. – Mr. Godall," he added, addressing the salesman, "you are a man who knows the world: what can a young fellow of reasonable education do with a hundred pounds?"

"It depends," replied the salesman, withdrawing his cheroot. "The power of money is an article of faith in which I profess myself a sceptic. A hundred pounds will with difficulty support you for a year; with somewhat more difficulty you may spend it in a night; and without any difficulty at all you may lose it in five minutes on the Stock Exchange. If you are of that stamp of man that rises, a penny would be as useful; if you belong to those that fall, a penny would be no more useless. When I was myself thrown unexpectedly upon the world, it was my fortune to possess an art: I knew a good cigar. Do you know nothing, Mr. Somerset?"

"Not even law," was the reply.

"The answer is worthy of a sage," returned Mr. Godall. – "And you, sir," he continued, turning to Challoner, "as the friend of Mr. Somerset, may I be allowed to address you the same question?"

"Well," replied Challoner, "I play a fair hand at whist."

"How many persons are there in London," returned the salesman, "who have two-and-thirty teeth? Believe me, young gentleman, there are more still who play a fair hand at whist. Whist, sir, is wide as the world; 'tis an accomplishment like breathing. I once knew a youth who announced that he was studying to be Chancellor of England; the design was certainly ambitious; but I find it less excessive than that of the man who aspires to make a livelihood by whist."

"Dear me," said Challoner, "I am afraid I shall have to fall to be a working man."

"Fall to be a working man?" echoed Mr. Godall. "Suppose a rural dean to be unfrocked, does he fall to be a major? suppose a captain were cashiered, would he fall to be a puisne judge? The ignorance of your middle class surprises me. Outside itself, it thinks the world to lie quite ignorant and equal, sunk in a common degradation; but to the eye of the observer, all ranks are seen to stand in ordered hierarchies, and each adorned with its particular aptitudes and knowledge. By the defects of your education you are more disqualified to be a working man than to be the ruler of an empire. The gulf, sir, is below; and the true learned arts – those which alone are safe from the competition of insurgent laymen – are those which give his title to the artisan."

"This is a very pompous fellow," said Challoner in the ear of his companion.

"He is immense," said Somerset.

Just then the door of the divan was opened, and a third young fellow made his appearance, and rather bashfully requested some tobacco. He was younger than the others; and, in a somewhat meaningless and altogether English way, he was a handsome lad. When he had been served, and had lighted his pipe and taken his place upon the sofa, he recalled himself to Challoner by the name of Desborough.

"Desborough, to be sure," cried Challoner. "Well, Desborough, and what do you do?"

"The fact is," said Desborough, "that I am doing nothing."

"A private fortune, possibly?" inquired the other.

"Well, no," replied Desborough, rather sulkily. "The fact is that I am waiting for something to turn up."

"All in the same boat!" cried Somerset. "And have you, too, one hundred pounds?"

"Worse luck," said Mr. Desborough.

"This is a very pathetic sight, Mr. Godall," said Somerset: "three futiles."

"A character of this crowded age," returned the salesman.

"Sir," said Somerset, "I deny that the age is crowded; I will admit one fact, and one fact only: that I am futile, that he is futile, and that we are all three as futile as the devil. What am I? I have smattered law, smattered letters, smattered geography, smattered mathematics; I have even a working knowledge of judicial astrology; and here I stand, all London roaring by at the street's end, as impotent as any baby. I have a prodigious contempt for my maternal uncle; but without him, it is idle to deny it, I should simply resolve into my elements like an unstable mixture. I begin to perceive that it is necessary to know some one thing to the bottom – were it only literature. And yet, sir, the man of the world is a great feature of this age; he is possessed of an extraordinary mass and variety of knowledge;

he is everywhere at home; he has seen life in all its phases; and it is impossible but that this great habit of existence should bear fruit. I count myself a man of the world, accomplished, *cap-à-pie*. So do you, Challoner. And you, Mr. Desborough?"

"Oh yes," returned the young man.

"Well, then, Mr. Godall, here we stand, three men of the world, without a trade to cover us, but planted at the strategic centre of the universe (for so you will allow me to call Rupert Street), in the midst of the chief mass of people, and within earshot of the most continuous chink of money on the surface of the globe. Sir, as civilised men, what do we do? I will show you. You take in a paper?"

"I take," said Mr. Godall solemnly, "the best paper in the world, the *Standard*."

"Good," resumed Somerset. "I now hold it in my hand, the voice of the world, a telephone repeating all men's wants. I open it, and where my eye first falls – well, no, not Morrison's Pills – but here, sure enough, and but a little above, I find the joint that I was seeking; here is the weak spot in the armour of society. Here is a want, a plaint, an offer of substantial gratitude: '*Two Hundred Pounds Reward*. – The above reward will be paid to any person giving information as to the identity and whereabouts of a man observed yesterday in the neighbourhood of the Green Park. He was over six feet in height, with shoulders disproportionately broad, close shaved, with black moustaches, and wearing a sealskin great-coat.' There, gentlemen, our fortune, if not made, is founded."

"Do you then propose, dear boy, that we should turn detectives?" inquired Challoner.

"Do I propose it? No, sir," cried Somerset. "It is reason, destiny, the plain face of the world, that commands and imposes it. Here all our merits tell; our manners, habit of the world, powers of conversation, vast stores of unconnected knowledge, all that we are and have builds up the character of the complete detective. It is, in short, the only profession for a gentleman."

"The proposition is perhaps excessive," replied Challoner; "for hitherto I own I have regarded it as of all dirty, sneaking, and ungentlemanly trades, the least and lowest."

"To defend society?" asked Somerset; "to stake one's life for others? to deracinate occult and powerful evil? I appeal to Mr. Godall. He, at least, as a philosophic looker-on at life, will spit upon such philistine opinions. He knows that the policeman, as he is called upon continually to face greater odds, and that both worse equipped and for a better cause, is in form and essence a more noble hero than the soldier. Do you, by any chance, deceive yourself into supposing that a general would either ask or expect, from the best army ever marshalled, and on the most momentous battlefield, the conduct of a common constable at Peckham Rye?"[1]

"I did not understand we were to join the force," said Challoner.

"Nor shall we. These are the hands; but here – here, sir, is the head," cried Somerset. "Enough; it is decreed. We shall hunt down this miscreant in the sealskin coat."

"Suppose that we agreed," retorted Challoner, "you have no plan, no knowledge; you know not where to seek for a beginning."

"Challoner!" cried Somerset, "is it possible that you hold the doctrine of Free Will? And are you devoid of any tincture of philosophy, that you should harp on such exploded fallacies? Chance, the blind Madonna of the Pagan, rules this terrestrial bustle; and in Chance I place my sole reliance. Chance has brought us three together; when we next separate and go forth our several ways, Chance will continually drag before our careless eyes a thousand eloquent clues, not to this mystery only, but to the countless mysteries by which we live surrounded. Then comes the part of the man of the world, of the detective born and bred. This clue, which the whole town beholds without comprehension, swift as a cat, he leaps upon it, makes it his, follows it with craft and passion, and from one trifling circumstance divines a world."

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[1] Hereupon the Arabian author enters on one of his digressions. Fearing, apparently, that the somewhat eccentric views of Mr. Somerset should throw discredit on a part of truth, he calls upon the English people to remember with more gratitude the services of the police; to what unobserved and solitary acts of heroism they are called; against what odds of numbers and of arms, and for how small a reward, either in fame or money: matter, it has appeared to the translators, too serious for this place.

"Just so," said Challoner; "and I am delighted that you should recognise these virtues in yourself. But in the meanwhile, dear boy, I own myself incapable of joining. I was neither born nor bred as a detective, but as a placable and very thirsty gentleman; and, for my part, I begin to weary for a drink. As for clues and adventures, the only adventure that is ever likely to occur to me will be an adventure with a bailiff."

"Now there is the fallacy," cried Somerset. "There I catch the secret of your futility in life. The world teems and bubbles with adventure; it besieges you along the streets; hands waving out of windows, swindlers coming up and swearing they knew you when you were abroad, affable and doubtful people of all sorts and conditions begging and truckling for your notice. But not you: you turn away, you walk your seedy mill round, you must go the dullest way. Now here, I beg of you, the next adventure that offers itself, embrace it in with both your arms; whatever it looks, grimy or romantic, grasp it. I will do the like; the devil is in it, but at least we shall have fun; and each in turn we shall narrate the story of our fortunes to my philosophic friend of the divan, the great Godall, now hearing me with inward joy. Come, is it a bargain? Will you, indeed, both promise to welcome every chance that offers, to plunge boldly into every opening, and, keeping the eye wary and the head composed, to study and piece together all that happens? Come, promise: let me open to you the doors of the great profession of intrigue."

"It is not much in my way," said Challoner, "but, since you make a point of it, amen."

"I don't mind promising," said Desborough, "but nothing will happen to me."

"O faithless ones!" cried Somerset. "But at least I have your promises; and Godall, I perceive, is transported with delight."

"I promise myself at least much pleasure from your various narratives," said the salesman, with the customary calm polish of his manner.

"And now, gentlemen," concluded Somerset, "let us separate. I hasten to put myself in fortune's way. Hark how, in this quiet corner, London roars like the noise of battle; four million destinies are here concentred; and in the strong panoply of one hundred pounds, payable to the bearer, I am about to plunge into that web."

CHALLONER'S ADVENTURE:

THE SQUIRE OF DAMES

Mr. Edward Challoner had set up lodgings in the suburb of Putney, where he enjoyed a parlour and bedroom and the sincere esteem of the people of the house. To this remote home he found himself, at a very early hour in the morning of the next day, condemned to set forth on foot. He was a young man of a portly habit; no lover of the exercises of the body; bland, sedentary, patient of delay, a prop of omnibuses. In happier days he would have chartered a cab; but these luxuries were now denied him; and with what courage he could muster he addressed himself to walk.

It was then the height of the season and the summer; the weather was serene and cloudless; and as he paced under the blinded houses and along the vacant streets, the chill of the dawn had fled, and some of the warmth and all the brightness of the July day already shone upon the city. He walked at first in a profound abstraction, bitterly reviewing and repenting his performances at whist; but as he advanced into the labyrinth of the south-west, his ear was gradually mastered by the silence. Street after street looked down upon his solitary figure, house after house echoed upon his passage with a ghostly jar, shop after shop displayed its shuttered front and its commercial legend; and meanwhile he steered his course, under day's effulgent dome and through this encampment of diurnal sleepers, lonely as a ship.

"Here," he reflected, "if I were like my scatter-brained companion, here were indeed the scene where I might look for an adventure. Here, in broad day, the streets are secret as in the blackest night of January, and in the midst of some four million sleepers, solitary as the woods of Yucatan. If I but raise my voice I could summon up the number of an army, and yet the grave is not more silent than this city of sleep."

He was still following these quaint and serious musings when he came into a street of more mingled ingredients than was common in the quarter. Here, on the one hand, framed in walls and the green tops of trees, were several of those discreet, *bijou* residences on which propriety is apt to look askance. Here, too, were many of the brick-fronted barracks of the poor; a plaster cow, perhaps, serving as ensign to a dairy, or a ticket announcing the business of the mangler. Before one such house, that stood a little separate among walled gardens, a cat was playing with a straw, and Challoner paused a moment, looking on this sleek and solitary creature, who seemed an emblem of the neighbouring peace. With the cessation of the sound of his own steps the silence fell dead; the house stood smokeless; the blinds down, the whole machinery of life arrested; and it seemed to Challoner that he should hear the breathing of the sleepers.

As he so stood, he was startled by a dull and jarring detonation from within. This was followed by a monstrous hissing and simmering as from a kettle of the bigness of St. Paul's; and at the same time from every chink of door and window spurted an ill-smelling vapour. The cat disappeared with a cry. Within the lodging-house feet pounded on the stairs; the door flew back, emitting clouds of smoke; and two men and an elegantly dressed young lady tumbled forth into the street and fled without a word. The hissing had already ceased, the smoke was melting in the air, the whole event had come and gone as in a dream, and still Challoner was rooted to the spot. At last his reason and his fear awoke together, and with the most unwonted energy he fell to running.

Little by little this first dash relaxed, and presently he had resumed his sober gait and begun to piece together, out of the confused report of his senses, some theory of the occurrence. But the occasion of the sounds and stench that had so suddenly assailed him, and the strange conjunction of fugitives whom he had seen to issue from the house, were mysteries beyond his plummet. With an obscure awe he considered them in his mind, continuing, meanwhile, to thread the web of streets, and once more alone in morning sunshine.

In his first retreat he had entirely wandered; and now, steering vaguely west, it was his luck to light upon an unpretending street, which presently widened so as to admit a strip of gardens in the midst. Here was quite a stir of birds; even at that hour, the shadow of the leaves was grateful; instead of the burnt atmosphere of cities, there was something brisk and rural in the air; and Challoner paced forward, his eyes upon the pavement and his mind running upon distant scenes, till he was recalled, upon a sudden, by a wall that blocked his further progress. This street, whose name I have forgotten, is no thoroughfare.

He was not the first who had wandered there that morning; for, as he raised his eyes with an agreeable deliberation, they alighted on the figure of a girl, in whom he was struck to recognise the third of the incongruous fugitives. She had run there, seemingly, blindfold; the wall had checked her career; and being entirely wearied, she had sunk upon the ground beside the garden railings, soiling her dress among the summer dust. Each saw the other in the same instant of time; and she, with one wild look, sprang to her feet and began to hurry from the scene.

Challoner was doubly startled to meet once more the heroine of his adventure and to observe the fear with which she shunned him. Pity and alarm, in nearly equal forces, contested the possession of his mind; and yet, in spite of both, he saw himself condemned to follow in the lady's wake. He did so gingerly, as fearing to increase her terrors; but, tread as lightly as he might, his footfalls eloquently echoed in the empty street. Their sound appeared to strike in her some strong emotion; for scarce had he begun to follow ere she paused. A second time she addressed herself to flight; and a second time she paused. Then she turned about, and, with doubtful steps and the most attractive appearance

of timidity, drew near to the young man. He on his side continued to advance with similar signals of distress and bashfulness. At length, when they were but some steps apart, he saw her eyes brim over, and she reached out both her hands in eloquent appeal.

"Are you an English gentleman?" she cried.

The unhappy Challoner regarded her with consternation. He was the spirit of fine courtesy, and would have blushed to fail in his devoirs to any lady; but, in the other scale, he was a man averse from amorous adventures. He looked east and west; but the houses that looked down upon this interview remained inexorably shut; and he saw himself, though in the full glare of the day's eye, cut off from any human intervention. His looks returned at last upon the suppliant. He remarked with irritation that she was charming both in face and figure, elegantly dressed and gloved: a lady undeniable; the picture of distress and innocence; weeping and lost in the city of diurnal sleep.

"Madam," he said, "I protest you have no cause to fear intrusion; and if I have appeared to follow you, the fault is in this street, which has deceived us both."

An unmistakable relief appeared upon the lady's face. "I might have guessed it!" she exclaimed. "Thank you a thousand times! But at this hour, in this appalling silence, and among all these staring windows, I am lost in terrors – oh, lost in them!" she cried, her face blanching at the words. "I beg you to lend me your arm," she added with the loveliest, suppliant inflection. "I dare not go alone; my nerve is gone – I had a shock, O what a shock! I beg of you to be my escort."

"My dear madam," responded Challoner heavily, "my arm is at your service."

She took it and clung to it for a moment, struggling with her sobs; and the next, with feverish hurry, began to lead him in the direction of the city. One thing was plain, among so much that was obscure: it was plain her fears were genuine. Still, as she went, she spied around as if for dangers; and now she would shiver like a person in a chill, and now clutch his arm in hers. To Challoner her terror was at once repugnant and infectious; it gained and mastered, while it still offended him; and he wailed in spirit and longed for release.

"Madam," he said at last, "I am, of course, charmed to be of use to any lady; but I confess I was bound in a direction opposite to that you follow, and a word of explanation – "

"Hush!" she sobbed, "not here – not here!"

The blood of Challoner ran cold. He might have thought the lady mad; but his memory was charged with more perilous stuff; and in view of the detonation, the smoke, and the flight of the ill-assorted trio, his mind was lost among mysteries. So they continued to thread the maze of streets in silence, with the speed of a guilty flight, and both thrilling with incommunicable terrors. In time, however, and above all by their quick pace of walking, the pair began to rise to firmer spirits; the lady ceased to peer about the corners; and Challoner, emboldened by the resonant tread and distant figure of a constable, returned to the charge with more of spirit and directness.

"I thought," he said, in the tone of conversation, "that I had indistinctly perceived you leaving a villa in the company of two gentlemen."

"Oh!" she said, "you need not fear to wound me by the truth. You saw me flee from a common lodging-house, and my companions were not gentlemen. In such a case, the best of compliments is to be frank."

"I thought," resumed Challoner, encouraged as much as he was surprised by the spirit of her reply, "to have perceived, besides, a certain odour. A noise, too – I do not know to what I should compare it – "

"Silence!" she cried. "You do not know the danger you invoke. Wait, only wait; and as soon as we have left those streets and got beyond the reach of listeners, all shall be explained. Meanwhile, avoid the topic. What a sight is this sleeping city!" she exclaimed; and then, with a most thrilling voice, "'Dear God,'" she quoted, "'the very houses seem asleep, and all that mighty heart is lying still.'"

"I perceive, madam," said he, "you are a reader."

"I am more than that," she answered, with a sigh. "I am a girl condemned to thoughts beyond her age; and so untoward is my fate, that this walk upon the arm of a stranger is like an interlude of peace."

They had come by this time to the neighbourhood of the Victoria Station; and here, at a street corner, the young lady paused, withdrew her arm from Challoner's, and looked up and down as though in pain or indecision. Then, with a lovely change of countenance, and laying her gloved hand upon his arm:

"What you already think of me," she said, "I tremble to conceive; yet I must here condemn myself still further. Here I must leave you, and here I beseech you to wait for my return. Do not attempt to follow me or spy upon my actions. Suspend yet awhile your judgment of a girl as innocent as your own sister; and do not, above all, desert me. Stranger as you are, I have none else to look to. You see me in sorrow and great fear; you are a gentleman, courteous and kind; and when I beg for a few minutes' patience, I make sure beforehand you will not deny me."

Challoner grudgingly promised; and the young lady, with a grateful eye-shot, vanished round the corner. But the force of her appeal had been a little blunted; for the young man was not only destitute of sisters, but of any female relative nearer than a great-aunt in Wales. Now he was alone, besides, the spell that he had hitherto obeyed began to weaken; he considered his behaviour with a sneer; and plucking up the spirit of revolt, he started in pursuit. The reader, if he has ever plied the fascinating trade of the noctambulist, will not be unaware that, in the neighbourhood of the great railway centres, certain early taverns inaugurate the business of the day. It was into one of these that Challoner, coming round the corner of the block, beheld his charming companion disappear. To say he was surprised were inexact, for he had long since left that sentiment behind him. Acute disgust and disappointment seized upon his soul; and with silent oaths he damned this commonplace enchantress. She had scarce been gone a second ere the swing-doors reopened, and she appeared again in company with a young man of mean and slouching attire. For some five or six exchanges they conversed together with an animated air; then the fellow shouldered again into the tap; and the young lady, with something swifter than a walk, retraced her steps towards Challoner. He saw her coming, a miracle of grace; her ankle, as she hurried, flashing from her dress; her movements eloquent of speed and youth; and though he still entertained some thoughts of flight, they grew miserably fainter as the distance lessened. Against mere beauty he was proof: it was her unmistakable gentility that now robbed him of the courage of his cowardice. With a proved adventuress he had acted strictly on his right; with one whom, in spite of all, he could not quite deny to be a lady, he found himself disarmed. At the very corner from whence he had spied upon her interview, she came upon him, still transfixed, and – "Ah!" she cried, with a bright flush of colour. "Ah! Ungenerous!"

The sharpness of the attack somewhat restored the Squire of Dames to the possession of himself.

"Madam," he returned, with a fair show of stoutness, "I do not think that hitherto you can complain of any lack of generosity; I have suffered myself to be led over a considerable portion of the metropolis; and if I now request you to discharge me of my office of protector, you have friends at hand who will be glad of the succession."

She stood a moment dumb.

"It is well," she said. "Go! go, and may God help me! You have seen me – me, an innocent girl! fleeing from a dire catastrophe and haunted by sinister men; and neither pity, curiosity, nor honour move you to await my explanation or to help in my distress. Go!" she repeated. "I am lost indeed." And with a passionate gesture she turned and fled along the street.

Challoner observed her retreat and disappear, an almost intolerable sense of guilt contending with the profound sense that he was being gulled. She was no sooner gone than the first of these feelings took the upper hand; he felt, if he had done her less than justice, that his conduct was a perfect model of the ungracious; the cultured tone of her voice, her choice of language, and the elegant

decorum of her movements, cried out aloud against a harsh construction; and between penitence and curiosity he began slowly to follow in her wake. At the corner he had her once more full in view. Her speed was failing like a stricken bird's. Even as he looked, she threw her arm out gropingly, and fell and leaned against the wall. At the spectacle, Challoner's fortitude gave way. In a few strides he overtook her, and, for the first time removing his hat, assured her in the most moving terms of his entire respect and firm desire to help her. He spoke at first unheeded; but gradually it appeared that she began to comprehend his words; she moved a little, and drew herself upright; and finally, as with a sudden movement of forgiveness, turned on the young man a countenance in which reproach and gratitude were mingled. "Ah, madam," he cried, "use me as you will!" And once more, but now with a great air of deference, he offered her the conduct of his arm. She took it with a sigh that struck him to the heart; and they began once more to trace the deserted streets. But now her steps, as though exhausted by emotion, began to linger on the way; she leaned the more heavily upon his arm; and he, like the parent bird, stooped fondly above his drooping convoy. Her physical distress was not accompanied by any failing of her spirits; and hearing her strike so soon into a playful and charming vein of talk, Challoner could not sufficiently admire the elasticity of his companion's nature. "Let me forget," she had said, "for one half-hour, let me forget"; and sure enough, with the very word, her sorrows appeared to be forgotten. Before every house she paused, invented a name for the proprietor, and sketched his character: here lived the old general whom she was to marry on the fifth of the next month, there was the mansion of the rich widow who had set her heart on Challoner; and though she still hung wearily on the young man's arm, her laughter sounded low and pleasant in his ears. "Ah," she sighed, by way of commentary, "in such a life as mine I must seize tight hold of any happiness that I can find."

When they arrived, in this leisurely manner, at the head of Grosvenor Place, the gates of the park were opening, and the bedraggled company of night-walkers were being at last admitted into that paradise of lawns. Challoner and his companion followed the movement, and walked for awhile in silence in that tatterdemalion crowd; but as one after another, weary with the night's patrolling of the city pavement, sank upon the benches or wandered into separate paths, the vast extent of the park had soon utterly swallowed up the last of these intruders; and the pair proceeded on their way alone in the grateful quiet of the morning.

Presently they came in sight of a bench, standing very open on a mound of turf. The young lady looked about her with relief.

"Here," she said, "here at last we are secure from listeners. Here, then, you shall learn and judge my history. I could not bear that we should part, and that you should still suppose your kindness squandered upon one who was unworthy."

Thereupon she sat down upon the bench, and motioning Challoner to take a place immediately beside her, began in the following words, and with the greatest appearance of enjoyment, to narrate the story of her life.

STORY OF THE DESTROYING ANGEL

My father was a native of England, son of a cadet of a great ancient but untitled family; and by some event, fault, or misfortune he was driven to flee from the land of his birth and to lay aside the name of his ancestors. He sought the States; and instead of lingering in effeminate cities, pushed at once into the Far West with an exploring party of frontiersmen. He was no ordinary traveller; for he was not only brave and impetuous by character, but learned in many sciences, and above all in botany, which he particularly loved. Thus it fell that, before many months, Fremont himself, the nominal leader of the troop, courted and bowed to his opinion.

They had pushed, as I have said, into the still unknown regions of the West. For some time they followed the track of Mormon caravans, guiding themselves in that vast and melancholy desert

by the skeletons of men and animals. Then they inclined their route a little to the north, and, losing even these dire memorials, came into a country of forbidding stillness. I have often heard my father dwell upon the features of that ride: rock, cliff, and barren moor alternated; the streams were very far between; and neither beast nor bird disturbed the solitude. On the fortieth day they had already run so short of food that it was judged advisable to call a halt and scatter upon all sides to hunt. A great fire was built, that its smoke might serve to rally them; and each man of the party mounted and struck off at a venture into the surrounding desert.

My father rode for many hours with a steep range of cliffs upon the one hand, very black and horrible; and upon the other an unwatered vale dotted with boulders like the site of some subverted city. At length he found the slot of a great animal, and from the claw-marks and the hair among the brush, judged that he was on the track of a cinnamon bear of most unusual size. He quickened the pace of his steed, and, still following the quarry, came at last to the division of two watersheds. On the far side the country was exceeding intricate and difficult, heaped with boulders, and dotted here and there with a few pines, which seemed to indicate the neighbourhood of water. Here, then, he picketed his horse, and, relying on his trusty rifle, advanced alone into that wilderness.

Presently, in the great silence that reigned, he was aware of the sound of running water to his right; and leaning in that direction, was rewarded by a scene of natural wonder and human pathos strangely intermixed. The stream ran at the bottom of a narrow and winding passage, whose wall-like sides of rock were sometimes for miles together unscalable by man. The water, when the stream was swelled with rains, must have filled it from side to side; the sun's rays only plumbed it in the hour of noon; the wind, in that narrow and damp funnel, blew tempestuously. And yet, in the bottom of this den, immediately below my father's eyes as he leaned over the margin of the cliff, a party of some half a hundred men, women, and children lay scattered uneasily among the rocks. They lay, some upon their backs, some prone, and not one stirring; their upturned faces seemed all of an extraordinary paleness and emaciation; and from time to time, above the washing of the stream, a faint sound of moaning mounted to my father's ears.

While he thus looked, an old man got staggering to his feet, unwound his blanket, and laid it, with great gentleness, on a young girl who sat hard by propped against a rock. The girl did not seem to be conscious of the act; and the old man, after having looked upon her with the most engaging pity, returned to his former bed and lay down again uncovered on the turf. But the scene had not passed without observation even in that starving camp. From the very outskirts of the party, a man with a white beard and seemingly of venerable years, rose up on his knees and came crawling stealthily among the sleepers towards the girl; and judge of my father's indignation, when he beheld this cowardly miscreant strip from her both the coverings and return with them to his original position. Here he lay down for a while below his spoils, and, as my father imagined, feigned to be asleep; but presently he had raised himself again upon one elbow, looked with sharp scrutiny at his companions, and then swiftly carried his hand into his bosom and thence to his mouth. By the movement of his jaws he must be eating; in that camp of famine he had reserved a store of nourishment; and, while his companions lay in the stupor of approaching death, secretly restored his powers.

My father was so incensed at what he saw that he raised his rifle; and but for an accident, he has often declared, he would have shot the fellow dead upon the spot. How different would then have been my history! But it was not to be: even as he raised the barrel, his eye lighted on the bear, as it crawled along a ledge some way below him; and ceding to the hunter's instinct, it was at the brute, not at the man, that he discharged his piece. The bear leaped and fell into a pool of the river; the cañon re-echoed the report; and in a moment the camp was afoot. With cries that were scarce human, stumbling, falling, and throwing each other down, these starving people rushed upon the quarry; and before my father, climbing down by the ledge, had time to reach the level of the stream, many were already satisfying their hunger on the raw flesh, and a fire was being built by the more dainty.

His arrival was for some time unremarked. He stood in the midst of these tottering and clay-faced marionettes; he was surrounded by their cries; but their whole soul was fixed on the dead carcase; even those who were too weak to move, lay, half-turned over, with their eyes riveted upon the bear; and my father, seeing himself stand as though invisible in the thick of this dreary hubbub, was seized with a desire to weep. A touch upon the arm restrained him. Turning about, he found himself face to face with the old man he had so nearly killed; and yet, at the second glance, recognised him for no old man at all, but one in the full strength of his years, and of a strong, speaking, and intellectual countenance stigmatised by weariness and famine. He beckoned my father near the cliff, and there, in the most private whisper, begged for brandy. My father looked at him with scorn: "You remind me," he said, "of a neglected duty. Here is my flask; it contains enough, I trust, to revive the women of your party; and I will begin with her whom I saw you robbing of her blankets." And with that, not heeding his appeals, my father turned his back upon the egoist.

The girl still lay reclined against the rock; she lay too far sunk in the first stage of death to have observed the bustle round her couch; but when my father had raised her head, put the flask to her lips, and forced or aided her to swallow some drops of the restorative, she opened her languid eyes and smiled upon him faintly. Never was there a smile of a more touching sweetness; never were eyes more deeply violet, more honestly eloquent of the soul! I speak with knowledge, for these were the same eyes that smiled upon me in the cradle. From her who was to be his wife, my father, still jealously watched and followed by the man with the grey beard, carried his attentions to all the women of the party, and gave the last drainings of his flask to those among the men who seemed in the most need.

"Is there none left? not a drop for me?" said the man with the beard.

"Not one drop," replied my father; "and if you find yourself in want, let me counsel you to put your hand into the pocket of your coat."

"Ah!" cried the other, "you misjudge me. You think me one who clings to life for selfish and commonplace considerations. But let me tell you, that were all this caravan to perish, the world would but be lightened of a weight. These are but human insects, pullulating, thick as may-flies, in the slums of European cities, whom I myself have plucked from degradation and misery, from the dung-heap and gin-palace door. And you compare their lives with mine!"

"You are then a Mormon missionary?" asked my father.

"Oh!" cried the man, with a strange smile, "a Mormon missionary if you will! I value not the title. Were I no more than that, I could have died without a murmur. But with my life as a physician is bound up the knowledge of great secrets and the future of man. This it was, when we missed the caravan, tried for a short cut and wandered to this desolate ravine, that ate into my soul and, in five days, has changed my beard from ebony to silver."

"And you are a physician," mused my father, looking on his face, "bound by oath to succour man in his distresses."

"Sir," returned the Mormon, "my name is Grierson: you will hear that name again; and you will then understand that my duty was not to this caravan of paupers, but to mankind at large."

My father turned to the remainder of the party, who were now sufficiently revived to hear; told them that he would set off at once to bring help from his own party; "and," he added, "if you be again reduced to such extremities, look round you, and you will see the earth strewn with assistance. Here, for instance, growing on the underside of fissures in this cliff, you will perceive a yellow moss. Trust me, it is both edible and excellent."

"Ha!" said Dr. Grierson, "you know botany!"

"Not I alone," returned my father, lowering his voice; "for see where these have been scraped away. Am I right? Was that your secret store?"

My father's comrades, he found, when he returned to the signal-fire, had made a good day's hunting. They were thus the more easily persuaded to extend assistance to the Mormon caravan; and the next day beheld both parties on the march for the frontiers of Utah. The distance to be traversed

was not great; but the nature of the country and the difficulty of procuring food extended the time to nearly three weeks; and my father had thus ample leisure to know and appreciate the girl whom he had succoured. I will call my mother Lucy. Her family name I am not at liberty to mention; it is one you would know well. By what series of undeserved calamities this innocent flower of maidenhood, lovely, refined by education, ennobled by the finest taste, was thus cast among the horrors of a Mormon caravan, I must not stay to tell you. Let it suffice, that even in these untoward circumstances, she found a heart worthy of her own. The ardour of attachment which united my father and mother was perhaps partly due to the strange manner of their meeting; it knew, at least, no bounds, either divine or human; my father, for her sake, determined to renounce his ambition and abjure his faith; and a week had not passed upon the march before he had resigned from his party, accepted the Mormon doctrine, and received the promise of my mother's hand on the arrival of the party at Salt Lake.

The marriage took place, and I was its only offspring. My father prospered exceedingly in his affairs, remained faithful to my mother; and, though you may wonder to hear it, I believe there were few happier homes in any country than that in which I saw the light and grew to girlhood. We were, indeed, and in spite of all our wealth, avoided as heretics and half-believers by the more precise and pious of the faithful: Young himself, that formidable tyrant, was known to look askance upon my father's riches; but of this I had no guess. I dwelt, indeed, under the Mormon system, with perfect innocence and faith. Some of our friends had many wives; but such was the custom; and why should it surprise me more than marriage itself? From time to time one of our rich acquaintances would disappear, his family be broken up, his wives and houses shared among the elders of the church, and his memory only recalled with bated breath and dreadful head-shakings. When I had been very still, and my presence perhaps was forgotten, some such topic would arise among my elders by the evening fire; I would see them draw the closer together and look behind them with scared eyes; and I might gather from their whisperings how some one, rich, honoured, healthy, and in the prime of his days, some one, perhaps, who had taken me on his knees a week before, had in one hour been spirited from home and family, and vanished like an image from a mirror, leaving not a print behind. It was terrible, indeed; but so was death, the universal law. And even if the talk should wax still bolder, full of ominous silences and nods, and I should hear named in a whisper the Destroying Angels, how was a child to understand these mysteries? I heard of a Destroying Angel as some more happy child might hear in England of a bishop or a rural dean, with vague respect and without the wish for further information. Life anywhere, in society as in nature, rests upon dread foundations; I beheld safe roads, a garden blooming in the desert, pious people crowding to worship; I was aware of my parents' tenderness and all the harmless luxuries of my existence; and why should I pry beneath this honest seeming surface for the mysteries on which it stood?

We dwelt originally in the city; but at an early date we moved to a beautiful house in a green dingle, musical with splashing water, and surrounded on almost every side by twenty miles of poisonous and rocky desert. The city was thirty miles away; there was but one road, which went no farther than my father's door; the rest were bridle-tracks impassable in winter; and we thus dwelt in a solitude inconceivable to the European. Our only neighbour was Dr. Grierson. To my young eyes, after the hair-oiled, chin-bearded elders of the city, and the ill-favoured and mentally stunted women of their harems, there was something agreeable in the correct manner, the fine bearing, the thin white hair and beard, and the piercing looks of the old doctor. Yet, though he was almost our only visitor, I never wholly overcame a sense of fear in his presence; and this disquietude was rather fed by the awful solitude in which he lived and the obscurity that hung about his occupations. His house was but a mile or two from ours, but very differently placed. It stood overlooking the road on the summit of a steep slope, and planted close against a range of overhanging bluffs. Nature, you would say, had here desired to imitate the works of man; for the slope was even, like the glacis of a fort, and the cliffs of a constant height, like the ramparts of a city. Not even spring could change one feature of that desolate scene; and the windows looked down across a plain, snowy with alkali, to ranges of

cold stone sierras on the north. Twice or thrice I remember passing within view of this forbidding residence; and seeing it always shuttered, smokeless, and deserted, I remarked to my parents that some day it would certainly be robbed.

"Ah, no," said my father, "never robbed"; and I observed a strange conviction in his tone.

At last, and not long before the blow fell on my unhappy family, I chanced to see the doctor's house in a new light. My father was ill; my mother confined to his bedside; and I was suffered to go, under the charge of our driver, to the lonely house some twenty miles away, where our packages were left for us. The horse cast a shoe; night overtook us half-way home; and it was well on for three in the morning when the driver and I, alone in a light waggon, came to that part of the road which ran below the doctor's house. The moon swam clear; the cliffs and mountains in this strong light lay utterly deserted; but the house, from its station on the top of the long slope and close under the bluff, not only shone abroad from every window like a place of festival, but from the great chimney at the west end poured forth a coil of smoke so thick and so voluminous, that it hung for miles along the windless night-air, and its shadow lay far abroad in the moonlight upon the glittering alkali. As we continued to draw near, besides, a regular and panting throb began to divide the silence. First it seemed to me like the beating of a heart; and next it put into my mind the thought of some giant, smothered under mountains, and still, with incalculable effort, fetching breath. I had heard of the railway, though I had not seen it, and I turned to ask the driver if this resembled it. But some look in his eye, some pallor, whether of fear or moonlight on his face, caused the words to die upon my lips. We continued, therefore, to advance in silence, till we were close below the lighted house; when suddenly, without premonitory rustle, there burst forth a report of such a bigness that it shook the earth and set the echoes of the mountains thundering from cliff to cliff. A pillar of amber flame leaped from the chimney-top and fell in multitudes of sparks; and at the same time the lights in the windows turned for one instant ruby red and then expired. The driver had checked his horse instinctively, and the echoes were still rumbling farther off among the mountains, when there broke from the now darkened interior a series of yells – whether of man or woman it was impossible to guess – the door flew open, and there ran forth into the moonlight, at the top of the long slope, a figure clad in white, which began to dance and leap and throw itself down, and roll as if in agony, before the house. I could no more restrain my cries; the driver laid his lash about the horse's flank, and we fled up the rough track at the peril of our lives; and did not draw rein till, turning the corner of the mountain, we beheld my father's ranch and deep, green groves and gardens, sleeping in the tranquil light.

This was the one adventure of my life, until my father had climbed to the very topmost point of material prosperity, and I myself had reached the age of seventeen. I was still innocent and merry like a child; tended my garden or ran upon the hills in glad simplicity; gave not a thought to coquetry or to material cares; and if my eye rested on my own image in a mirror or some sylvan spring, it was to seek and recognise the features of my parents. But the fears which had long pressed on others were now to be laid on my youth. I had thrown myself, one sultry, cloudy afternoon, on a divan; the windows stood open on the verandah, where my mother sat with her embroidery; and when my father joined her from the garden, their conversation, clearly audible to me, was of so startling a nature that it held me enthralled where I lay.

"The blow has come," my father said, after a long pause.

I could hear my mother start and turn, but in words she made no reply.

"Yes," continued my father, "I have received to-day a list of all that I possess; of all, I say; of what I have lent privately to men whose lips are sealed with terror; of what I have buried with my own hand on the bare mountain, when there was not a bird in heaven. Does the air, then, carry secrets? Are the hills of glass? Do the stones we tread upon preserve the footprint to betray us? Oh, Lucy, Lucy, that we should have come to such a country!"

"But this," returned my mother, "is no very new or very threatening event. You are accused of some concealment. You will pay more taxes in the future, and be mulcted in a fine. It is disquieting,

indeed, to find our acts so spied upon, and the most private known. But is this new? Have we not long feared and suspected every blade of grass?"

"Ay, and our shadows!" cried my father. "But all this is nothing. Here is the letter that accompanied the list."

I heard my mother turn the pages; and she was some time silent.

"I see," she said at last; and then, with the tone of one reading; "'From a believer so largely blessed by Providence with this world's goods,'" she continued, "'the Church awaits in confidence some signal mark of piety.' There lies the sting. Am I not right? These are the words you fear?"

"These are the words," replied my father. "Lucy, you remember Priestley? Two days before he disappeared, he carried me to the summit of an isolated butte; we could see around us for ten miles; sure, if in any quarter of this land a man were safe from spies, it were in such a station; but it was in the very ague-fit of terror that he told me, and that I heard, his story. He had received a letter such as this; and he submitted to my approval an answer in which he offered to resign a third of his possessions. I conjured him, as he valued life, to raise his offering; and, before we parted, he had doubled the amount. Well, two days later he was gone – gone from the chief street of the city in the hour of noon – and gone for ever. O God!" cried my father, "by what art do they thus spirit out of life the solid body? What death do they command that leaves no traces? that this material structure, these strong arms, this skeleton that can resist the grave for centuries, should be thus reft in a moment from the world of sense? A horror dwells in that thought more awful than mere death."

"Is there no hope in Grierson?" asked my mother.

"Dismiss the thought," replied my father. "He now knows all that I can teach, and will do naught to save me. His power, besides, is small, his own danger not improbably more imminent than mine; for he, too, lives apart; he leaves his wives neglected and unwatched; he is openly cited for an unbeliever; and unless he buys security at a more awful price – but no; I will not believe it: I have no love for him, but I will not believe it."

"Believe what?" asked my mother; and then, with a change of note, "But oh, what matters it?" she cried. "Abimelech, there is but one way open: we must fly!"

"It is in vain," returned my father. "I should but involve you in my fate. To leave this land is hopeless: we are closed in it as men are closed in life; and there is no issue but the grave."

"We can but die then," replied my mother. "Let us at least die together. Let not Asenath[2] and myself survive you. Think to what a fate we should be doomed!"

My father was unable to resist her tender violence; and though I could see he nourished not one spark of hope, he consented to desert his whole estate, beyond some hundreds of dollars that he had by him at the moment, and to flee that night, which promised to be dark and cloudy. As soon as the servants were asleep, he was to load two mules with provisions; two others were to carry my mother and myself; and, striking through the mountains by an unfrequented trail, we were to make a fair stroke for liberty and life. As soon as they had thus decided, I showed myself at the window, and, owning that I had heard all, assured them that they could rely on my prudence and devotion. I had no fear, indeed, but to show myself unworthy of my birth; I held my life in my hand without alarm; and when my father, weeping upon my neck, had blessed Heaven for the courage of his child, it was with a sentiment of pride and some of the joy that warriors take in war, that I began to look forward to the perils of our flight.

Before midnight, under an obscure and starless heaven, we had left far behind us the plantations of the valley, and were mounting a certain cañon in the hills, narrow, encumbered with great rocks, and echoing with the roar of a tumultuous torrent. Cascade after cascade thundered and hung up its flag of whiteness in the night, or fanned our faces with the wet wind of its descent. The trail was break-neck, and led to famine-guarded deserts; it had been long since deserted for more practicable

[2] In this name the accent falls upon the *e*; the *s* is sibilant.

routes; and it was now a part of the world untrod from year to year by human footing. Judge of our dismay when, turning suddenly an angle of the cliffs, we found a bright bonfire blazing by itself under an impending rock; and on the face of the rock, drawn very rudely with charred wood, the great Open Eye which is the emblem of the Mormon faith. We looked upon each other in the firelight; my mother broke into a passion of tears; but not a word was said. The mules were turned about; and leaving that great eye to guard the lonely cañon, we retraced our steps in silence. Day had not yet broken ere we were once more at home, condemned beyond reprieve.

What answer my father sent I was not told; but two days later, a little before sundown, I saw a plain, honest-looking man ride slowly up the road in a great pother of dust. He was clad in homespun, with a broad straw hat; wore a patriarchal beard; and had an air of a simple rustic farmer, that was, in my eyes, very reassuring. He was, indeed, a very honest man and pious Mormon; with no liking for his errand, though neither he nor any one in Utah dared to disobey; and it was with every mark of diffidence that he had had himself announced as Mr. Aspinwall, and entered the room where our unhappy family was gathered. My mother and me he awkwardly enough dismissed; and as soon as he was alone with my father laid before him a blank signature of President Young's, and offered him a choice of services: either to set out as a missionary to the tribes about the White Sea, or to join the next day, with a party of Destroying Angels, in the massacre of sixty German immigrants. The last, of course, my father could not entertain, and the first he regarded as a pretext: even if he could consent to leave his wife defenceless, and to collect fresh victims for the tyranny under which he was himself oppressed, he felt sure he would never be suffered to return. He refused both; and Aspinwall, he said, betrayed sincere emotion, part religious, as the spectacle of such disobedience, but part human, in pity for my father and his family. He besought him to reconsider his decision; and at length, finding he could not prevail, gave him till the moon rose to settle his affairs, and say farewell to wife and daughter. "For," said he, "then, at the latest, you must ride with me."

I dare not dwell upon the hours that followed: they fled all too fast; and presently the moon outtopped the eastern range, and my father and Mr. Aspinwall set forth, side by side, on their nocturnal journey. My mother, though still bearing an heroic countenance, had hastened to shut herself in her apartment, thenceforward solitary; and I, alone in the dark house, and consumed by grief and apprehension, made haste to saddle my Indian pony, to ride up to the corner of the mountain, and to enjoy one farewell sight of my departing father. The two men had set forth at a deliberate pace; nor was I long behind them, when I reached the point of view. I was the more amazed to see no moving creature in the landscape. The moon, as the saying is, shone bright as day; and nowhere, under the whole arch of night, was there a growing tree, a bush, a farm, a patch of tillage, or any evidence of man, but one. From the corner where I stood, a rugged bastion of the line of bluffs concealed the doctor's house; and across the top of that projection the soft night wind carried and unwound about the hills a coil of sable smoke. What fuel could produce a vapour so sluggish to dissipate in that dry air, or what furnace pour it forth so copiously, I was unable to conceive; but I knew well enough that it came from the doctor's chimney; I saw well enough that my father had already disappeared; and in despite of reason, I connected in my mind the loss of that dear protector with the ribbon of foul smoke that trailed along the mountains.

Days passed, and still my mother and I waited in vain for news; a week went by, a second followed, but we heard no word of the father and husband. As smoke dissipates, as the image glides from the mirror, so in the ten or twenty minutes that I had spent in getting my horse and following upon his trail, had that strong and brave man vanished out of life. Hope, if any hope we had, fled with every hour; the worst was now certain for my father, the worst was to be dreaded for his defenceless family. Without weakness, with a desperate calm at which I marvel when I look back upon it, the widow and the orphan awaited the event. On the last day of the third week we rose in the morning to find ourselves alone in the house, alone, so far as we searched, on the estate; all our attendants, with one accord, had fled, and as we knew them to be gratefully devoted, we drew the darkest intimations

from their flight. The day passed, indeed, without event; but in the fall of the evening we were called at last into the verandah by the approaching clink of horse's hoofs.

The doctor, mounted on an Indian pony, rode into the garden, dismounted, and saluted us. He seemed much more bent, and his hair more silvery than ever; but his demeanour was composed, serious, and not unkind.

"Madam," said he, "I am come upon a weighty errand; and I would have you recognise it as an effect of kindness in the President, that he should send as his ambassador your only neighbour and your husband's oldest friend in Utah."

"Sir," said my mother, "I have but one concern, one thought. You know well what it is. Speak: my husband?"

"Madam," returned the doctor, taking a chair on the verandah, "if you were a silly child my position would now be painfully embarrassing. You are, on the other hand, a woman of great intelligence and fortitude: you have, by my forethought, been allowed three weeks to draw your own conclusions and to accept the inevitable. Further words from me are, I conceive, superfluous."

My mother was as pale as death, and trembled like a reed; I gave her my hand, and she kept it in the folds of her dress and wrung it till I could have cried aloud. "Then, sir," said she at last, "you speak to deaf ears. If this be indeed so, what have I to do with errands? what do I ask of Heaven but to die?"

"Come," said the doctor, "command yourself. I bid you dismiss all thoughts of your late husband, and bring a clear mind to bear upon your own future and the fate of that young girl."

"You bid me dismiss – " began my mother. "Then you know!" she cried.

"I know," replied the doctor.

"You know?" broke out the poor woman. "Then it was you who did the deed! I tear off the mask, and with dread and loathing see you as you are – you, whom the poor fugitive beholds in nightmares, and awakes raving – you, the Destroying Angel!"

"Well, madam, and what then?" returned the doctor. "Have not my fate and yours been similar? Are we not both immured in this strong prison of Utah? Have you not tried to flee, and did not the Open Eye confront you in the cañon? Who can escape the watch of that unsleeping eye of Utah? Not I, at least. Horrible tasks have, indeed, been laid upon me; and the most ungrateful was the last; but had I refused my offices, would that have spared your husband? You know well it would not. I, too, had perished along with him; nor would I have been able to alleviate his last moments, nor could I to-day have stood between his family and the hand of Brigham Young."

"Ah!" cried I, "and could you purchase life by such concessions?"

"Young lady," answered the doctor, "I both could and did; and you will live to thank me for that baseness. You have a spirit, Asenath, that it pleases me to recognise. But we waste time. Mr. Fonblanque's estate reverts, as you doubtless imagine, to the church; but some part of it has been reserved for him who is to marry the family; and that person, I should perhaps tell you without more delay, is no other than myself."

At this odious proposal my mother and I cried out aloud, and clung together like lost souls.

"It is as I supposed," resumed the doctor, with the same measured utterance. "You recoil from this arrangement. Do you expect me to convince you? You know very well that I have never held the Mormon view of women. Absorbed in the most arduous studies, I have left the slatterns whom they call my wives to scratch and quarrel among themselves; of me, they have had nothing but my purse; such was not the union I desired, even if I had the leisure to pursue it. No, you need not, madam, and my old friend – " and here the doctor rose and bowed with something of gallantry – "you need not apprehend my importunities. On the contrary, I am rejoiced to read in you a Roman spirit; and if I am obliged to bid you follow me at once, and that in the name, not of my wish, but of my orders, I hope it will be found that we are of a common mind."

So, bidding us dress for the road, he took a lamp (for the night had now fallen) and set off to the stable to prepare our horses.

"What does it mean? – what will become of us?" I cried.

"Not that, at least," replied my mother, shuddering. "So far we can trust him. I seem to read among his words a certain tragic promise. Asenath, if I leave you, if I die, you will not forget your miserable parents?"

Thereupon we fell to cross-purposes: I beseeching her to explain her words; she putting me by, and continuing to recommend the doctor for a friend. "The doctor!" I cried at last; "the man who killed my father?"

"Nay," said she, "let us be just. I do believe, before Heaven, he played the friendliest part. And he alone, Asenath, can protect you in this land of death."

At this the doctor returned, leading our two horses; and when we were all in the saddle, he bade me ride on before, as he had matter to discuss with Mrs. Fonblanque. They came at a foot's-pace, eagerly conversing in a whisper; and presently after the moon rose and showed them looking eagerly into each other's faces as they went, my mother laying her hand upon the doctor's arm, and the doctor himself, against his usual custom, making vigorous gestures of protest or asseveration.

At the foot of the track which ascended the talus of the mountain to his door, the doctor overtook me at a trot.

"Here," he said, "we shall dismount; and as your mother prefers to be alone, you and I shall walk together to my house."

"Shall I see her again?" I asked.

"I give you my word," he said, and helped me to alight. "We leave the horses here," he added. "There are no thieves in this stone wilderness."

The track mounted gradually, keeping the house in view. The windows were once more bright; the chimney once more vomited smoke; but the most absolute silence reigned, and, but for the figure of my mother very slowly following in our wake, I felt convinced there was no human soul within a range of miles. At the thought, I looked upon the doctor, gravely walking by my side, with his bowed shoulders and white hair, and then once more at his house, lit up and pouring smoke like some industrious factory. And then my curiosity broke forth. "In Heaven's name," I cried, "what do you make in this inhuman desert?"

He looked at me with a peculiar smile, and answered with an evasion:

"This is not the first time," said he, "that you have seen my furnaces alight. One morning, in the small hours, I saw you driving past; a delicate experiment miscarried; and I cannot acquit myself of having startled either your driver or the horse that drew you."

"What!" cried I, beholding again in fancy the antics of the figure, "could that be you?"

"It was I," he replied; "but do not fancy that I was mad. I was in agony. I had been scalded cruelly."

We were now near the house, which, unlike the ordinary houses of the country, was built of hewn stone and very solid. Stone, too, was its foundation, stone its background. Not a blade of grass sprouted among the broken mineral about the walls, not a flower adorned the windows. Over the door, by way of sole adornment, the Mormon Eye was rudely sculptured; I had been brought up to view that emblem from my childhood; but since the night of our escape, it had acquired a new significance, and set me shrinking. The smoke rolled voluminously from the chimney-top, its edges ruddy with the fire; and from the far corner of the building, near the ground, angry puffs of steam shone snow-white in the moon and vanished.

The doctor opened the door and paused upon the threshold. "You ask me what I make here," he observed: "Two things: Life and Death." And he motioned me to enter.

"I shall await my mother," said I.

"Child," he replied, "look at me: am I not old and broken? Of us two, which is the stronger, the young maiden or the withered man?"

I bowed and, passing by him, entered a vestibule or kitchen, lit by a good fire and a shaded reading-lamp. It was furnished only with a dresser, a rude table, and some wooden benches; and on one of these the doctor motioned me to take a seat; and passing by another door into the interior of the house, he left me to myself. Presently I heard the jar of iron from the far end of the building; and this was followed by the same throbbing noise that had startled me in the valley, but now so near at hand as to be menacing by loudness, and even to shake the house with every recurrence of the stroke. I had scarce time to master my alarm when the doctor returned, and almost in the same moment my mother appeared upon the threshold. But how am I to describe to you the peace and ravishment of that face? Years seemed to have passed over her head during that brief ride, and left her younger and fairer; her eyes shone, her smile went to my heart; she seemed no more a woman, but the angel of ecstatic tenderness. I ran to her in a kind of terror; but she shrank a little back and laid her finger on her lips, with something arch and yet unearthly. To the doctor, on the contrary, she reached out her hand as to a friend and helper; and so strange was the scene that I forgot to be offended.

"Lucy," said the doctor, "all is prepared. Will you go alone, or shall your daughter follow us?"

"Let Asenath come," she answered, "dear Asenath! At this hour when I am purified of fear and sorrow, and already survive myself and my affections, it is for your sake, and not for mine, that I desire her presence. Were she shut out, dear friend, it is to be feared she might misjudge your kindness."

"Mother," I cried wildly, "mother, what is this?"

But my mother, with her radiant smile, said only "Hush!" as though I were a child again, and tossing in some fever-fit; and the doctor bade me be silent and trouble her no more. "You have made a choice," he continued, addressing my mother, "that has often strangely tempted me. The two extremes: all, or else nothing; never, or this very hour upon the clock – these have been my incongruous desires. But to accept the middle term, to be content with a half-gift, to flicker awhile and to burn out – never for an hour, never since I was born, has satisfied the appetite of my ambition." He looked upon my mother fixedly, much of admiration and some touch of envy in his eyes; then, with a profound sigh, he led the way into the inner room.

It was very long. From end to end it was lit up by many lamps, which by the changeful colour of their light, and by the incessant snapping sounds with which they burned, I have since divined to be electric. At the extreme end an open door gave us a glimpse into what must have been a lean-to shed beside the chimney; and this, in strong contrast to the room, was painted with a red reverberation as from furnace-doors. The walls were lined with books and glazed cases, the tables crowded with the implements of chemical research; great glass accumulators glittered in the light; and through a hole in the gable near the shed door a heavy driving-belt entered the apartment and ran overhead upon steel pulleys, with clumsy activity and many ghostly and fluttering sounds. In one corner I perceived a chair resting upon crystal feet, and curiously wreathed with wire. To this my mother advanced with a decisive swiftness.

"Is this it?" she asked.

The doctor bowed in silence.

"Asenath," said my mother, "in this sad end of my life I have found one helper. Look upon him: it is Doctor Grierson. Be not, O my daughter, be not ungrateful to that friend!"

She sat upon the chair, and took in her hands the globes that terminated the arms.

"Am I right?" she asked, and looked upon the doctor with such a radiancy of face that I trembled for her reason. Once more the doctor bowed, but this time leaning hard against the wall. He must have touched a spring. The least shock agitated my mother where she sat; the least passing jar appeared to cross her features; and she sank back in the chair like one resigned to weariness. I was at her knees that moment; but her hands fell loosely in my grasp; her face, still beatified with the same touching smile, sank forward on her bosom: her spirit had for ever fled.

I do not know how long may have elapsed before, raising for a moment my tearful face, I met the doctor's eyes. They rested upon mine with such a depth of scrutiny, pity, and interest, that even from the freshness of my sorrow I was startled into attention.

"Enough," he said, "to lamentation. Your mother went to death as to a bridal, dying where her husband died. It is time, Asenath, to think of the survivors. Follow me to the next room."

I followed him, like a person in a dream; he made me sit by the fire, he gave me wine to drink; and then, pacing the stone floor, he thus began to address me:

"You are now, my child, alone in the world, and under the immediate watch of Brigham Young. It would be your lot, in ordinary circumstances, to become the fiftieth bride of some ignoble elder, or by particular fortune, as fortune is counted in this land, to find favour in the eyes of the President himself. Such a fate for a girl like you were worse than death; better to die as your mother died than to sink daily deeper in the mire of this pit of woman's degradation. But is escape conceivable? Your father tried; and you beheld yourself with what security his jailers acted, and how a dumb drawing on a rock was counted a sufficient sentry over the avenues of freedom. Where your father failed, will you be wiser or more fortunate? or are you, too, helpless in the toils?"

I had followed his words with changing emotion, but now I believed I understood.

"I see," I cried; "you judge me rightly. I must follow where my parents led; and oh! I am not only willing, I am eager!"

"No," replied the doctor, "not death for you. The flawed vessel we may break, but not the perfect. No, your mother cherished a different hope, and so do I. I see," he cried, "the girl develop to the completed woman, the plan reach fulfilment, the promise – ay, outdone! I could not bear to arrest so lively, so comely a process. It was your mother's thought," he added, with a change of tone, "that I should marry you myself." I fear I must have shown a perfect horror of aversion from this fate, for he made haste to quiet me. "Reassure yourself, Asenath," he resumed. "Old as I am, I have not forgotten the tumultuous fancies of youth. I have passed my days, indeed, in laboratories; but in all my vigils I have not forgotten the tune of a young pulse. Age asks with timidity to be spared intolerable pain; youth, taking fortune by the beard, demands joy like a right. These things I have not forgotten; none, rather, has more keenly felt, none more jealously considered them; I have but postponed them to their day. See, then: you stand without support; the only friend left to you, this old investigator, old in cunning, young in sympathy. Answer me but one question: Are you free from the entanglement of what the world calls love? Do you still command your heart and purposes? or are you fallen in some bond-slavery of the eye and ear?"

I answered him in broken words; my heart, I think I must have told him, lay with my dead parents.

"It is enough," he said. "It has been my fate to be called on often, too often, for those services of which we spoke to-night; none in Utah could carry them so well to a conclusion; hence there has fallen into my hands a certain share of influence which I now lay at your service, partly for the sake of my dead friends, your parents; partly for the interest I bear you in your own right. I shall send you to England, to the great city of London, there to await the bridegroom I have selected. He shall be a son of mine, a young man suitable in age, and not grossly deficient in that quality of beauty that your years demand. Since your heart is free, you may well pledge me the sole promise that I ask in return for much expense and still more danger: to await the arrival of that bridegroom with the delicacy of a wife."

I sat awhile stunned. The doctor's marriages, I remembered to have heard, had been unfruitful; and this added perplexity to my distress. But I was alone, as he had said, alone in that dark land; the thought of escape, of any equal marriage, was already enough to revive in me some dawn of hope; and, in what words I know not, I accepted the proposal.

He seemed more moved by my consent than I could reasonably have looked for. "You shall see," he cried; "you shall judge for yourself." And hurrying to the next room he returned with a small

portrait somewhat coarsely done in oils. It showed a man in the dress of nearly forty years before, young indeed, but still recognisable to be the doctor. “Do you like it?” he asked. “That is myself when I was young. My – my boy will be like that, like, but nobler; with such health as angels might condescend to envy; and a man of mind, Asenath, of commanding mind. That should be a man, I think; that should be one among ten thousand. A man like that – one to combine the passions of youth with the restraint, the force, the dignity of age – one to fill all the parts and faculties, one to be man’s epitome – say, will that not satisfy the needs of an ambitious girl? Say, is not that enough?” And as he held the picture close before my eyes, his hand shook.

I told him briefly I would ask no better, for I was transpierced with this display of fatherly emotion; but even as I said the words, the most insolent revolt surged through my arteries. I held him in horror, him, his portrait, and his son; and had there been any choice but death or a Mormon marriage, I declare before Heaven I had embraced it.

“It is well,” he replied, “and I had rightly counted on your spirit. Eat, then, for you have far to go.” So saying, he set meat before me; and while I was endeavouring to obey, he left the room and returned with an armful of coarse raiment. “There,” said he, “is your disguise. I leave you to your toilet.”

The clothes had probably belonged to a somewhat lubberly boy of fifteen; and they hung about me like a sack, and cruelly hampered my movements. But what filled me with uncontrollable shudderings was the problem of their origin and the fate of the lad to whom they had belonged. I had scarcely effected the exchange when the doctor returned, opened a back window, helped me out into the narrow space between the house and the overhanging bluffs, and showed me a ladder of iron foot-holds mortised in the rock. “Mount,” he said, “swiftly. When you are at the summit, walk, so far as you are able, in the shadow of the smoke. The smoke will bring you, sooner or later, to a cañon; follow that down, and you will find a man with two horses. Him you will implicitly obey. And remember, silence! That machinery which I now put in motion for your service may by one word be turned against you. Go; Heaven prosper you!”

The ascent was easy. Arrived at the top of the cliff, I saw before me on the other side a vast and gradual declivity of stone, lying bare to the moon and the surrounding mountains. Nowhere was any vantage or concealment; and knowing how these deserts were beset with spies, I made haste to veil my movements under the blowing trail of smoke. Sometimes it swam high, rising on the night wind, and I had no more substantial curtain than its moon-thrown shadow; sometimes again it crawled upon the earth, and I would walk in it, no higher than to my shoulders, like some mountain fog. But, one way or another, the smoke of that ill-omened furnace protected the first steps of my escape, and led me unobserved to the cañon.

There, sure enough, I found a taciturn and sombre man beside a pair of saddle-horses; and thenceforward, all night long, we wandered in silence by the most occult and dangerous paths among the mountains. A little before the dayspring we took refuge in a wet and gusty cavern at the bottom of a gorge; lay there all day concealed; and the next night, before the glow had faded out of the west, resumed our wanderings. About noon we stopped again, in a lawn upon a little river, where was a screen of bushes; and here my guide, handing me a bundle from his pack, bade me change my dress once more. The bundle contained clothing of my own, taken from our house, with such necessaries as a comb and soap. I made my toilet by the mirror of a quiet pool; and as I was so doing and smiling with some complacency to see myself restored to my own image, the mountains rang with a scream of far more than human piercingness; and where I still stood astonished, there sprang up and swiftly increased a storm of the most awful and earth-rending sounds. Shall I own to you that I fell upon my face and shrieked? And yet this was but the overland train winding among the near mountains: the very means of my salvation: the strong wings that were to carry me from Utah!

When I was dressed the guide gave me a bag, which contained, he said, both money and papers; and, telling me that I was already over the borders in the territory of Wyoming, bade me follow the

stream until I reached the railway station, half a mile below. “Here,” he added, “is your ticket as far as Council Bluffs. The East express will pass in a few hours.” With that, he took both horses and, without further words or any salutation, rode off by the way that we had come.

Three hours afterwards, I was seated on the end platform of the train as it swept eastward through the gorges and thundered in tunnels of the mountains. The change of scene, the sense of escape, the still throbbing terror of pursuit – above all the astounding magic of my new conveyance, kept me from any logical or melancholy thought. I had gone to the doctor’s house two nights before prepared to die, prepared for worse than death; what had passed, terrible although it was, looked almost bright compared to my anticipations; and it was not till I had slept a full night in the flying palace car that I awoke to the sense of my irreparable loss and to some reasonable alarm about the future. In this mood I examined the contents of the bag. It was well supplied with gold; it contained tickets and complete directions for my journey as far as Liverpool, and a long letter from the doctor, supplying me with a fictitious name and story, recommending the most guarded silence, and bidding me to await faithfully the coming of his son. All then had been arranged beforehand: he had counted upon my consent, and, what was tenfold worse, upon my mother’s voluntary death. My horror of my only friend, my aversion for this son who was to marry me, my revolt against the whole current and conditions of my life, were now complete. I was sitting stupefied by my distress and helplessness, when, to my joy, a very pleasant lady offered me her conversation. I clutched at the relief; and I was soon glibly telling her the story in the doctor’s letter: how I was a Miss Gould, of Nevada City, going to England to an uncle, what money I had, what family, my age, and so forth, until I had exhausted my instructions, and, as the lady still continued to ply me with questions, began to embroider on my own account. This soon carried one of my inexperience beyond her depth; and I had already remarked a shadow on the lady’s face, when a gentleman drew near and very civilly addressed me:

“Miss Gould, I believe?” said he; and then, excusing himself to the lady by the authority of my guardian, drew me to the fore platform of the Pullman car. “Miss Gould,” he said in my ear, “is it possible that you suppose yourself in safety? Let me completely undeceive you. One more such indiscretion and you return to Utah. And, in the meanwhile, if this woman should again address you, you are to reply with these words:‘Madam, I do not like you, and I will be obliged if you will suffer me to choose my own associates.’”

Alas, I had to do as I was bid; this lady, to whom I already felt myself drawn with the strongest cords of sympathy, I dismissed with insult; and thenceforward, through all that day I sat in silence, gazing on the bare plains and swallowing my tears. Let that suffice: it was the pattern of my journey. Whether on the train, at the hotels, or on board the ocean steamer, I never exchanged a friendly word with any fellow-traveller but I was certain to be interrupted. In every place, on every side, the most unlikely persons, man or woman, rich or poor, became protectors to forward me upon my journey or spies to observe and regulate my conduct. Thus I crossed the States, thus passed the ocean, the Mormon Eye still following my movements; and when at length a cab had set me down before that London lodging-house from which you saw me flee this morning, I had already ceased to struggle and ceased to hope.

The landlady, like every one else through all that journey, was expecting my arrival. A fire was lighted in my room, which looked upon the garden; there were books on the table, clothes in the drawers; and there (I had almost said with contentment, and certainly with resignation) I saw month follow month over my head. At times my landlady took me for a walk or an excursion, but she would never suffer me to leave the house alone; and I, seeing that she also lived under the shadow of that widespread Mormon terror, felt too much pity to resist. To the child born on Mormon soil, as to the man who accepts the engagements of a secret order, no escape is possible; so I had clearly read, and I was thankful even for this respite. Meanwhile, I tried honestly to prepare my mind for my approaching nuptials. The day drew near when my bridegroom was to visit me, and gratitude and fear alike obliged me to consent. A son of Dr. Grierson’s be he what he pleased, must still be young,

and it was even probable he should be handsome; on more than that I felt I dared not reckon; and in moulding my mind towards consent I dwelt the more carefully on these physical attractions which I felt I might expect, and averted my eyes from moral or intellectual considerations. We have a great power upon our spirits; and as time passed I worked myself into a frame of acquiescence, nay, and I began to grow impatient for the hour. At night sleep forsook me; I sat all day by the fire, absorbed in dreams, conjuring up the features of my husband, and anticipating in fancy the touch of his hand and the sound of his voice. In the dead level and solitude of my existence, this was the one eastern window and the one door of hope. At last I had so cultivated and prepared my will, that I began to be besieged with fears upon the other side. How if it was I that did not please? How if this unseen lover should turn from me with disaffection? And now I spent hours before the glass, studying and judging my attractions, and was never weary of changing my dress or ordering my hair.

When the day came I was long about my toilet; but at last, with a sort of hopeful desperation, I had to own that I could do no more, and must now stand or fall by nature. My occupation ended, I fell a prey to the most sickening impatience, mingled with alarms; giving ear to the swelling rumour of the streets, and at each change of sound or silence, starting, shrinking, and colouring to the brow. Love is not to be prepared, I know, without some knowledge of the object; and yet, when the cab at last rattled to the door, and I heard my visitor mount the stairs, such was the tumult of hopes in my poor bosom that love itself might have been proud to own their parentage. The door opened, and it was Dr. Grierson that appeared. I believe I must have screamed aloud, and I know, at least, that I fell fainting to the floor.

When I came to myself he was standing over me, counting my pulse. “I have startled you,” he said. “A difficulty unforeseen – the impossibility of obtaining a certain drug in its full purity – has forced me to resort to London unprepared. I regret that I should have shown myself once more without those poor attractions which are much, perhaps, to you, but to me are no more considerable than rain that falls into the sea. Youth is but a state, as passing as that syncope from which you are but just awakened, and, if there be truth in science, as easy to recall; for I find, Asenath, that I must now take you for my confidant. Since my first years I have devoted every hour and act of life to one ambitious task; and the time of my success is at hand. In these new countries, where I was so long content to stay, I collected indispensable ingredients; I have fortified myself on every side from the possibility of error; what was a dream now takes the substance of reality; and when I offered you a son of mine I did so in a figure. That son – that husband, Asenath, is myself – not as you now behold me, but restored to the first energy of youth. You think me mad? It is the customary attitude of ignorance. I will not argue; I will leave facts to speak. When you behold me purified, invigorated, renewed, restamped in the original image – when you recognise in me (what I shall be) the first perfect expression of the powers of mankind – I shall be able to laugh with a better grace at your passing and natural incredulity. To what can you aspire – fame, riches, power, the charm of youth, the dear-bought wisdom of age – that I shall not be able to afford you in perfection? Do not deceive yourself. I already excel you in every human gift but one: when that gift also has been restored to me you will recognise your master.”

Hereupon, consulting his watch, he told me he must now leave me to myself; and bidding me consult reason, and not girlish fancies, he withdrew. I had not the courage to move; the night fell, and found me still where he had laid me during my faint, my face buried in my hands, my soul drowned in the darkest apprehensions. Late in the evening he returned, carrying a candle, and, with a certain irritable tremor, bade me rise and sup. “Is it possible,” he added, “that I have been deceived in your courage? A cowardly girl is no fit mate for me.”

I flung myself before him on my knees, and with floods of tears besought him to release me from this engagement, assuring him that my cowardice was abject, and that in every point of intellect and character I was his hopeless and derisible inferior.

"Why, certainly," he replied. "I know you better than yourself; and I am well enough acquainted with human nature to understand this scene. It is addressed to me," he added with a smile, "in my character of the still untransformed. But do not alarm yourself about the future. Let me but attain my end, and not you only, Asenath, but every woman on the face of the earth becomes my willing slave."

Thereupon he obliged me to rise and eat; sat down with me to table; helped and entertained me with the attentions of a fashionable host; and it was not till a late hour that, bidding me courteously good-night, he once more left me alone to my misery.

In all this talk of an elixir and the restoration of his youth, I scarce knew from which hypothesis I should the more eagerly recoil. If his hopes reposed on any base of fact, if, indeed, by some abhorrent miracle, he should discard his age, death were my only refuge from that most unnatural, that most ungodly union. If, on the other hand, these dreams were merely lunatic, the madness of a life waxed suddenly acute, my pity would become a load almost as heavy to bear as my revolt against the marriage. So passed the night, in alternations of rebellion and despair, of hate and pity; and with the next morning I was only to comprehend more fully my enslaved position. For though he appeared with a very tranquil countenance, he had no sooner observed the marks of grief upon my brow than an answering darkness gathered on his own. "Asenath," he said, "you owe me much already; with one finger I still hold you suspended over death; my life is full of labour and anxiety; and I choose," said he, with a remarkable accent of command, "that you shall greet me with a pleasant face." He never needed to repeat the recommendation: from that day forward I was always ready to receive him with apparent cheerfulness; and he rewarded me with a good deal of his company, and almost more than I could bear of his confidence. He had set up a laboratory in the back part of the house, where he toiled day and night at his elixir, and he would come thence to visit me in my parlour: now with passing humours of discouragement; now, and far more often, radiant with hope. It was impossible to see so much of him, and not to recognise that the sands of his life were running low; and yet all the time he would be laying out vast fields of future, and planning, with all the confidence of youth, the most unbounded schemes of pleasure and ambition. How I replied I know not; but I found a voice and words to answer, even while I wept and raged to hear him.

A week ago the doctor entered my room with the marks of great exhilaration contending with pitiful bodily weakness. "Asenath," said he, "I have now obtained the last ingredient. In one week from now the perilous moment of the last projection will draw nigh. You have once before assisted, although unconsciously, at the failure of a similar experiment. It was the elixir which so terribly exploded one night when you were passing my house; and it is idle to deny that the conduct of so delicate a process, among the million jars and trepidations of so great a city, presents a certain element of danger. From this point of view, I cannot but regret the perfect stillness of my house among the deserts; but, on the other hand, I have succeeded in proving that the singularly unstable equilibrium of the elixir, at the moment of projection, is due rather to the impurity than to the nature of the ingredients; and as all are now of an equal and exquisite nicety, I have little fear for the result. In a week then from to-day, my dear Asenath, this period of trial will be ended." And he smiled upon me in a manner unusually paternal.

I smiled back with my lips, but at my heart there raged the blackest and most unbridled terror. What if he failed? And oh, tenfold worse! what if he succeeded? What detested and unnatural changeling would appear before me to claim my hand? And could there, I asked myself with a dreadful sinking, be any truth in his boasts of an assured victory over my reluctance? I knew him, indeed, to be masterful, to lead my life at a sign. Suppose, then, this experiment to succeed; suppose him to return to me, hideously restored, like a vampire in a legend; and suppose that, by some devilish fascination… My head turned; all former fears deserted me; and I felt I could embrace the worst in preference to this.

My mind was instantly made up. The doctor's presence in London was justified by the affairs of the Mormon polity. Often, in our conversation, he would gloat over the details of that great

organisation, which he feared even while yet he wielded it; and would remind me that, even in the humming labyrinth of London, we were still visible to that unsleeping eye in Utah. His visitors, indeed, who were of every sort, from the missionary to the destroying angel, and seemed to belong to every rank of life, had, up to that moment, filled me with unmixed repulsion and alarm. I knew that if my secret were to reach the ear of any leader my fate were sealed beyond redemption; and yet in my present pass of horror and despair, it was to these very men that I turned for help. I waylaid upon the stair one of the Mormon missionaries, a man of a low class, but not inaccessible to pity; told him I scarce remember what elaborate fable to explain my application; and by his intermediacy entered into correspondence with my father's family. They recognised my claim for help, and on this very day I was to begin my escape.

Last night I sat up fully dressed, awaiting the result of the doctor's labours, and prepared against the worst. The nights at this season and in this northern latitude are short; and I had soon the company of the returning daylight. The silence in and around the house was only broken by the movements of the doctor in the laboratory; to these I listened, watch in hand, awaiting the hour of my escape, and yet consumed by anxiety about the strange experiment that was going forward overhead. Indeed, now that I was conscious of some protection for myself, my sympathies had turned more directly to the doctor's side; I caught myself even praying for his success; and when some hours ago a low, peculiar cry reached my ears from the laboratory, I could no longer control my impatience, but mounted the stairs and opened the door.

The doctor was standing in the middle of the room; in his hand a large, round-bellied, crystal flask, some three parts full of a bright amber-coloured liquid; on his face a rapture of gratitude and joy unspeakable. As he saw me he raised the flask at arm's-length. "Victory!" he cried. "Victory, Asenath!" And then – whether the flask escaped his trembling fingers, or whether the explosion was spontaneous, I cannot tell – enough that we were thrown, I against the door-post, the doctor into the corner of the room; enough that we were shaken to the soul by the same explosion that must have startled you upon the street; and that, in the brief space of an indistinguishable instant, there remained nothing of the labours of the doctor's lifetime but a few shards of broken crystal and those voluminous and ill-smelling vapours that pursued me in my flight.

THE SQUIRE OF DAMES (*concluded*)

What with the lady's animated manner and dramatic conduct of her voice, Challoner had thrilled to every incident with genuine emotion. His fancy, which was not perhaps of a very lively character, applauded both the matter and the style; but the more judicial functions of his mind refused assent. It was an excellent story; and it might be true, but he believed it was not. Miss Fonblanque was a lady, and it was doubtless possible for a lady to wander from the truth; but how was a gentleman to tell her so? His spirits for some time had been sinking, but they now fell to zero; and long after her voice had died away he still sat with a troubled and averted countenance, and could find no form of words to thank her for her narrative. His mind, indeed, was empty of everything beyond a dull longing for escape. From this pause, which grew the more embarrassing with every second, he was roused by the sudden laughter of the lady. His vanity was alarmed; he turned and faced her; their eyes met; and he caught from hers a spark of such frank merriment as put him instantly at ease.

"You certainly," he said, "appear to bear your calamities with excellent spirit."

"Do I not?" she cried, and fell once more into delicious laughter. But from this access she more speedily recovered. "This is all very well," said she, nodding at him gravely, "but I am still in a most distressing situation, from which, if you deny me your help, I shall find it difficult indeed to free myself."

At this mention of help Challoner fell back to his original gloom.

"My sympathies are much engaged with you," he said, "and I should be delighted, I am sure. But our position is most unusual; and circumstances over which I have, I can assure you, no control, deprive me of the power – the pleasure – Unless, indeed," he added, somewhat brightening at the thought, "I were to recommend you to the care of the police?"

She laid her hand upon his arm and looked hard into his eyes; and he saw with wonder that, for the first time since the moment of their meeting, every trace of colour had faded from her cheek.

"Do so," she said, "and – weigh my words well – you kill me as certainly as with a knife."

"God bless me!" exclaimed Challoner.

"Oh," she cried, "I can see you disbelieve my story, and make light of the perils that surround me; but who are you to judge? My family share my apprehensions; they help me in secret; and you saw yourself by what an emissary, and in what a place, they have chosen to supply me with the funds for my escape. I admit that you are brave and clever, and have impressed me most favourably; but how are you to prefer your opinion before that of my uncle, an ex-minister of State, a man with the ear of the Queen, and of a long political experience? If I am mad, is he? And you must allow me, besides, a special claim upon your help. Strange as you may think my story, you know that much of it is true; and if you who heard the explosion, and saw the Mormon at Victoria, refuse to credit and assist me, to whom am I to turn?"

"He gave you money then?" asked Challoner, who had been dwelling singly on that fact.

"I begin to interest you," she cried. "But, frankly, you are condemned to help me. If the service I had to ask of you were serious, were suspicious, were even unusual, I should say no more. But what is it? To take a pleasure trip (for which, if you will suffer me, I propose to pay) and to carry from one lady to another a sum of money! What can be more simple?"

"Is the sum," asked Challoner, "considerable?"

She produced a packet from her bosom; and observing that she had not yet found time to make the count, tore open the cover and spread upon her knees a considerable number of Bank of England notes. It took some time to make the reckoning, for the notes were of every degree of value; but at last, and counting a few loose sovereigns, she made out the sum to be a little under £710 sterling. The sight of so much money worked an immediate revolution in the mind of Challoner.

"And you propose, madam," he cried, "to intrust that money to a perfect stranger?"

"Ah!" said she, with a charming smile, "but I no longer regard you as a stranger."

"Madam," said Challoner, "I perceive I must make you a confession. Although of a very good family – through my mother, indeed, a lineal descendant of the patriot Bruce – I dare not conceal from you that my affairs are deeply, very deeply, involved. I am in debt; my pockets are practically empty; and, in short, I am fallen to that state when a considerable sum of money would prove to many men an irresistible temptation."

"Do you not see," returned the young lady, "that by these words you have removed my last hesitation? Take them." And she thrust the notes into the young man's hand.

He sat so long, holding them, like a baby at the font, that Miss Fonblanque once more bubbled into laughter.

"Pray," she said, "hesitate no further; put them in your pocket; and to relieve our position of any shadow of embarrassment, tell me by what name I am to address my knight-errant, for I find myself reduced to the awkwardness of the pronoun."

Had borrowing been in question, the wisdom of our ancestors had come lightly to the young man's aid; but upon what pretext could he refuse so generous a trust? Upon none, he saw, that was not unpardonably wounding; and the bright eyes and the high spirits of his companion had already made a breach in the rampart of Challoner's caution. The whole thing, he reasoned, might be a mere mystification, which it were the height of solemn folly to resent. On the other hand, the explosion, the interview at the public-house, and the very money in his hands, seemed to prove beyond denial the existence of some serious danger; and if that were so, could he desert her? There was a choice

of risks: the risk of behaving with extraordinary incivility and unhandsomeness to a lady, and the risk of going on a fool's errand. The story seemed false; but then the money was undeniable. The whole circumstances were questionable and obscure; but the lady was charming, and had the speech and manners of society. While he still hung in the wind, a recollection returned upon his mind with some of the dignity of prophecy. Had he not promised Somerset to break with the traditions of the commonplace, and to accept the first adventure offered? Well, here was the adventure.

He thrust the money into his pocket.

"My name is Challoner," said he.

"Mr. Challoner," she replied, "you have come very generously to my aid when all was against me. Though I am myself a very humble person, my family commands great interest; and I do not think you will repent this handsome action."

Challoner flushed with pleasure.

"I imagine that, perhaps, a consulship," she added, her eyes dwelling on him with a judicial admiration, "a consulship in some great town or capital – or else – But we waste time; let us set about the work of my delivery."

She took his arm with a frank confidence that went to his heart; and once more laying by all serious thoughts, she entertained him, as they crossed the park, with her agreeable gaiety of mind. Near the Marble Arch they found a hansom, which rapidly conveyed them to the terminus at Euston Square; and here, in the hotel, they sat down to an excellent breakfast. The young lady's first step was to call for writing materials, and write, upon one corner of the table, a hasty note; still, as she did so, glancing with smiles at her companion. "Here," said she, "here is the letter which will introduce you to my cousin." She began to fold the paper. "My cousin, although I have never seen her, has the character of a very charming woman and a recognised beauty; of that I know nothing, but at least she has been very kind to me; so has my lord her father; so have you – kinder than all – kinder than I can bear to think of." She said this with unusual emotion; and, at the same time, sealed the envelope. "Ah!" she cried, "I have shut my letter! It is not quite courteous; and yet, as between friends, it is perhaps better so. I introduce you, after all, into a family secret; and though you and I are already old comrades, you are still unknown to my uncle. You go, then, to this address, Richard Street, Glasgow; go, please, as soon as you arrive; and give this letter with your own hands into those of Miss Fonblanque, for that is the name by which she is to pass. When we next meet, you will tell me what you think of her," she added, with a touch of the provocative.

"Ah," said Challoner, almost tenderly, "she can be nothing to me."

"You do not know," replied the young lady, with a sigh. "By the by, I had forgotten – it is very childish, and I am almost ashamed to mention it – but when you see Miss Fonblanque, you will have to make yourself a little ridiculous; and I am sure the part in no way suits you. We had agreed upon a watchword. You will have to address an earl's daughter in these words:'*Nigger*, *nigger, never die*'; but reassure yourself," she added, laughing, "for the fair patrician will at once finish the quotation. Come now, say your lesson."

"'Nigger, nigger, never die,'" repeated Challoner, with undisguised reluctance.

Miss Fonblanque went into fits of laughter. "Excellent," said she, "it will be the most humorous scene!" And she laughed again.

"And what will be the counterword?" asked Challoner stiffly.

"I will not tell you till the last moment," said she; "for I perceive you are growing too imperious."

Breakfast over, she accompanied the young man to the platform, bought him the *Graphic*, the *Athenæum*, and a paper-cutter, and stood on the step conversing till the whistle sounded. Then she put her head into the carriage. "*Black face and shining eye!*" she whispered, and instantly leaped down upon the platform, with a trill of gay and musical laughter. As the train steamed out of the great arch of glass, the sound of that laughter still rang in the young man's ears.

Challoner's position was too unusual to be long welcome to his mind. He found himself projected the whole length of England, on a mission beset with obscure and ridiculous circumstances, and yet, by the trust he had accepted, irrevocably bound to persevere. How easy it appeared, in the retrospect, to have refused the whole proposal, returned the money, and gone forth again upon his own affairs, a free and happy man! And it was now impossible: the enchantress who had held him with her eye had now disappeared, taking his honour in pledge; and as she had failed to leave him an address, he was denied even the inglorious safety of retreat. To use the paper-knife, or even to read the periodicals with which she had presented him, was to renew the bitterness of his remorse; and as he was alone in the compartment, he passed the day staring at the landscape in impotent repentance, and long before he was landed on the platform of St. Enoch's, had fallen to the lowest and coldest zones of self-contempt.

As he was hungry, and elegant in his habits, he would have preferred to dine and to remove the stains of travel; but the words of the young lady, and his own impatient eagerness, would suffer no delay. In the late, luminous, and lamp-starred dusk of the summer evening he accordingly set forward with brisk steps.

The street to which he was directed had first seen the day in the character of a row of small suburban villas on a hillside; but the extension of the city had, long since and on every hand, surrounded it with miles of streets. From the top of the hill a range of very tall buildings, densely inhabited by the poorest classes of the population and variegated by drying-poles from every second window, overplumbed the villas and their little gardens like a sea-board cliff. But still, under the grime of years of city smoke, these antiquated cottages, with their venetian blinds and rural porticoes, retained a somewhat melancholy savour of the past.

The street, when Challoner entered it, was perfectly deserted. From hard by, indeed, the sound of a thousand footfalls filled the ear; but in Richard Street itself there was neither light nor sound of human habitation. The appearance of the neighbourhood weighed heavily on the mind of the young man; once more, as in the streets of London, he was impressed by the sense of city deserts; and as he approached the number indicated, and somewhat falteringly rang the bell, his heart sank within him.

The bell was ancient, like the house; it had a thin and garrulous note; and it was some time before it ceased to sound from the rear quarters of the building. Following upon this an inner door was stealthily opened, and careful and catlike steps drew near along the hall. Challoner, supposing he was to be instantly admitted, produced his letter and, as well as he was able, prepared a smiling face. To his indescribable surprise, however, the footsteps ceased, and then, after a pause and with the like stealthiness, withdrew once more, and died away in the interior of the house. A second time the young man rang violently at the bell; a second time, to his keen hearkening, a certain bustle of discreet footing moved upon the hollow boards of the old villa; and again the faint-hearted garrison only drew near to retreat. The cup of the visitor's endurance was now full to overflowing; and, committing the whole family of Fonblanque to every mood and shade of condemnation, he turned upon his heel and redescended the steps. Perhaps the mover in the house was watching from a window, and plucked up courage at the sight of this desistance; or perhaps, where he lurked trembling in the back parts of the villa, reason in its own right had conquered his alarms. Challoner, at least, had scarce set foot upon the pavement when he was arrested by the sound of the withdrawal of an inner bolt; one followed another, rattling in their sockets; the key turned harshly in the lock; the door opened; and there appeared upon the threshold a man of a very stalwart figure in his shirt sleeves. He was a person neither of great manly beauty nor of a refined exterior; he was not the man, in ordinary moods, to attract the eyes of the observer; but as he now stood in the doorway he was marked so legibly with the extreme passion of terror that Challoner stood wonder-struck. For a fraction of a minute they gazed upon each other in silence; and then the man of the house, with ashen lips and gasping voice, inquired the business of his visitor. Challoner replied, in tones from which he strove to banish his surprise, that he was the bearer of a letter to a certain Miss Fonblanque. At this name, as at a talisman, the man fell back

and impatiently invited him to enter; and no sooner had the adventurer crossed the threshold than the door was closed behind him and his retreat cut off.

It was already long past eight at night; and though the late twilight of the north still lingered in the streets, in the passage it was already groping dark. The man led Challoner directly to a parlour looking on the garden to the back. Here he had apparently been supping; for by the light of a tallow dip, the table was seen to be covered with a napkin, and set out with a quart of bottled ale and the heel of a Gouda cheese. The room, on the other hand, was furnished with faded solidity, and the walls were lined with scholarly and costly volumes in glazed cases. The house must have been taken furnished; for it had no congruity with this man of the shirt sleeves and the mean supper. As for the earl's daughter, the earl and the visionary consulships in foreign cities, they had long ago begun to fade in Challoner's imagination. Like Dr. Grierson and the Mormon angels, they were plainly woven of the stuff of dreams. Not an illusion remained to the knight-errant; not a hope was left him but to be speedily relieved from this disreputable business.

The man had continued to regard his visitor with undisguised anxiety, and began once more to press him for his errand.

"I am here," said Challoner, "simply to do a service between two ladies; and I must ask you, without further delay, to summon Miss Fonblanque, into whose hands alone I am authorised to deliver the letter that I bear."

A growing wonder began to mingle on the man's face with the lines of solicitude. "I am Miss Fonblanque," he said; and then, perceiving the effect of this communication, "Good God!" he cried, "what are you staring at? I tell you I am Miss Fonblanque."

Seeing the speaker wore a chin-beard of considerable length, and the remainder of his face was blue with shaving, Challoner could only suppose himself the subject of a jest. He was no longer under the spell of the young lady's presence; and with men, and above all with his inferiors, he was capable of some display of spirit.

"Sir," said he, pretty roundly, "I have put myself to great inconvenience for persons of whom I know too little, and I begin to be weary of the business. Either you shall immediately summon Miss Fonblanque, or I leave this house and put myself under the direction of the police."

"This is horrible!" exclaimed the man. "I declare before Heaven I am the person meant, but how shall I convince you? It must have been Clara, I perceive, that sent you on this errand – a madwoman, who jests with the most deadly interests; and here we are, incapable, perhaps, of an agreement, and Heaven knows what may depend on our delay!"

He spoke with a really startling earnestness; and at the same time there flashed upon the mind of Challoner the ridiculous jingle which was to serve as password. "This may, perhaps, assist you," he said; and then, with some embarrassment: "'Nigger, nigger, never die.'"

A light of relief broke upon the troubled countenance of the man with the chin-beard. "'Black face and shining eye' – give me the letter," he panted, in one gasp.

"Well," said Challoner, though still with some reluctance, "I suppose I must regard you as the proper recipient; and though I may justly complain of the spirit in which I have been treated, I am only too glad to be done with all responsibility. Here it is," and he produced the envelope.

The man leaped upon it like a beast, and with hands that trembled in a manner painful to behold, tore it open and unfolded the letter. As he read, terror seemed to mount upon him to the pitch of nightmare. He struck one hand upon his brow, while with the other, as if unconsciously, he crumpled the paper to a ball. "My gracious powers!" he cried; and then, dashing to the window, which stood open on the garden, he clapped forth his head and shoulders and whistled long and shrill. Challoner fell back into a corner, and resolutely grasping his staff, prepared for the most desperate events; but the thoughts of the man with the chin-beard were far removed from violence. Turning again into the room, and once more beholding his visitor, whom he appeared to have forgotten, he fairly danced

with trepidation. “Impossible!” he cried. “Oh, quite impossible! O Lord, I have lost my head.” And then, once more striking his hand upon his brow, “The money!” he exclaimed. “Give me the money.”

“My good friend,” replied Challoner, “this is a very painful exhibition; and until I see you reasonably master of yourself, I decline to proceed with any business.”

“You are quite right,” said the man. “I am of a very nervous habit; a long course of the dumb ague has undermined my constitution. But I know you have money; it may be still the saving of me; and oh, dear young gentleman, in pity’s name be expeditious!”

Challoner, sincerely uneasy as he was, could scarce refrain from laughter; but he was himself in a hurry to be gone, and without more delay produced the money. “You will find the sum, I trust, correct,” he observed; “and let me ask you to give me a receipt.”

But the man heeded him not. He seized the money, and disregarding the sovereigns that rolled loose upon the floor, thrust the bundle of notes into his pocket.

“A receipt,” repeated Challoner, with some asperity. “I insist on a receipt.”

“Receipt?” repeated the man, a little wildly. “A receipt? Immediately! Await me here.”

Challoner, in reply, begged the gentleman to lose no unnecessary time, as he was himself desirous of catching a particular train.

“Ah, by God, and so am I!” exclaimed the man with the chin-beard; and with that he was gone out of the room, and had rattled upstairs, four at a time, to the upper story of the villa.

“This is certainly a most amazing business,” thought Challoner; “certainly a most disquieting affair; and I cannot conceal from myself that I have become mixed up with either lunatics or malefactors. I may truly thank my stars that I am so nearly and so creditably done with it.” Thus thinking, and perhaps remembering the episode of the whistle, he turned to the open window. The garden was still faintly clear; he could distinguish the stairs and terraces with which the small domain had been adorned by former owners, and the blackened bushes and dead trees that had once afforded shelter to the country birds; beyond these he saw the strong retaining wall, some thirty feet in height, which enclosed the garden to the back; and again above that, the pile of dingy buildings rearing its frontage high into the night. A peculiar object lying stretched upon the lawn for some time baffled his eyesight; but at length he had made it out to be a long ladder, or series of ladders bound into one; and he was still wondering of what service so great an instrument could be in such a scant enclosure, when he was recalled to himself by the noise of some one running violently down the stairs. This was followed by the sudden, clamorous banging of the house door; and that again, by rapid and retreating footsteps in the street.

Challoner sprang into the passage. He ran from room to room, upstairs and downstairs; and in that old dingy and worm-eaten house, he found himself alone. Only in one apartment looking to the front were there any traces of the late inhabitant: a bed that had been recently slept in and not made, a chest of drawers disordered by a hasty search and on the floor a roll of crumpled paper. This he picked up. The light in this upper story looking to the front was considerably brighter than in the parlour; and he was able to make out that the paper bore the mark of the hotel at Euston, and even, by peering closely, to decipher the following lines in a very elegant and careful female hand:

> “Dear M’Guire, – It is certain your retreat is known. We have just had another failure, clockwork thirty hours too soon, with the usual humiliating result. Zero is quite disheartened. We are all scattered, and I could find no one but the *solemn ass* who brings you this and the money. I would love to see your meeting. – Ever yours, *“Shining Eye.”*

Challoner was stricken to the heart. He perceived by what facility, by what unmanly fear of ridicule, he had been brought down to be the gull of this intriguer; and his wrath flowed forth in almost equal measure against himself, against the woman, and against Somerset, whose idle counsels had impelled him to embark on that adventure. At the same time a great and troubled curiosity,

and a certain chill of fear, possessed his spirits. The conduct of the man with the chin-beard, the terms of the letter, and the explosion of the early morning, fitted together like parts in some obscure and mischievous imbroglio. Evil was certainly afoot; evil, secrecy, terror, and falsehood were the conditions and the passions of the people among whom he had begun to move, like a blind puppet; and he who began as a puppet, his experience told him, was often doomed to perish as a victim.

From the stupor of deep thought into which he had glided with the letter in his hand, he was awakened by the clatter of the bell. He glanced from the window; and conceive his horror and surprise when he beheld, clustered on the steps, in the front garden and on the pavement of the street, a formidable posse of police! He started to the full possession of his powers and courage. Escape, and escape at any cost, was the one idea that possessed him. Swiftly and silently he redescended the creaking stairs; he was already in the passage when a second and more imperious summons from the door awoke the echoes of the empty house; nor had the bell ceased to jangle before he had bestridden the window-sill of the parlour and was lowering himself into the garden. His coat was hooked upon the iron flower-basket; for a moment he hung dependent heels and head below; and then, with the noise of rending cloth and followed by several pots, he dropped upon the sod. Once more the bell was rung, and now with furious and repeated peals. The desperate Challoner turned his eyes on every side. They fell upon the ladder, and he ran to it, and with strenuous but unavailing effort sought to raise it from the ground. Suddenly the weight, which was thus resisting his whole strength, began to lighten in his hands; the ladder, like a thing of life, reared its bulk from off the sod; and Challoner, leaping back with a cry of almost superstitious terror, beheld the whole structure mount, foot by foot, against the face of the retaining-wall. At the same time, two heads were dimly visible above the parapet, and he was hailed by a guarded whistle. Something in its modulation recalled, like an echo, the whistle of the man with the chin-beard.

Had he chanced upon a means of escape prepared beforehand by those very miscreants, whose messenger and gull he had become? Was this, indeed, a means of safety, or but the starting-point of further complication and disaster? He paused not to reflect. Scarce was the ladder reared to its full length than he had sprung already on the rounds; hand over hand, swift as an ape, he scaled the tottering stairway. Strong arms received, embraced, and helped him; he was lifted and set once more upon the earth; and with the spasm of his alarm yet unsubsided, found himself, in the company of two rough-looking men, in the paved back-yard of one of the tall houses that crowned the summit of the hill. Meanwhile, from below, the note of the bell had been succeeded by the sound of vigorous and redoubling blows.

“Are you all out?” asked one of his companions; and as soon as he had babbled an answer in the affirmative, the rope was cut from the top round, and the ladder thrust roughly back into the garden, where it fell and broke with clattering reverberations. Its fall was hailed with many broken cries; for the whole of Richard Street was now in high emotion, the people crowding to the windows or clambering on the garden walls. The same man who had already addressed Challoner seized him by the arm; whisked him through the basement of the house and across the street upon the other side; and before the unfortunate adventurer had time to realise his situation, a door was opened, and he was thrust into a low and dark compartment.

“Bedad,” observed his guide, “there was no time to lose. Is M’Guire gone, or was it you that whistled?”

“M’Guire is gone,” said Challoner.

The guide now struck a light. “Ah,” said he, “this will never do. You dare not go upon the streets in such a figure. Wait quietly here and I will bring you something decent.”

With that the man was gone, and Challoner, his attention thus rudely awakened, began ruefully to consider the havoc that had been worked in his attire. His hat was gone; his trousers were cruelly ripped; and the best part of one tail of his very elegant frock-coat had been left hanging from the iron crockets of the window. He had scarce had time to measure these disasters when his host re-

entered the apartment and proceeded, without a word, to envelop the refined and urbane Challoner in a long ulster of the cheapest material and of a pattern so gross and vulgar that his spirit sickened at the sight. This calumnious disguise was crowned and completed by a soft felt hat of the Tyrolese design and several sizes too small. At another moment Challoner would simply have refused to issue forth upon the world thus travestied; but the desire to escape from Glasgow was now too strongly and too exclusively impressed upon his mind. With one haggard glance at the spotted tails of his new coat, he inquired what was to pay for this accoutrement. The man assured him that the whole expense was easily met from funds in his possession, and begged him, instead of wasting time, to make his best speed out of the neighbourhood.

The young man was not loath to take the hint. True to his usual courtesy, he thanked the speaker and complimented him upon his taste in greatcoats; and leaving the man somewhat abashed by these remarks and the manner of their delivery, he hurried forth into the lamp-lit city. The last train was gone ere, after many deviations, he had reached the terminus. Attired as he was he dared not present himself at any reputable inn; and he felt keenly that the unassuming dignity of his demeanour would serve to attract attention, perhaps mirth, and possibly suspicion, in any humbler hostelry. He was thus condemned to pass the solemn and uneventful hours of a whole night in pacing the streets of Glasgow; supperless; a figure of fun for all beholders; waiting the dawn, with hope indeed, but with unconquerable shrinkings; and above all things, filled with a profound sense of the folly and weakness of his conduct. It may be conceived with what curses he assailed the memory of the fair narrator of Hyde Park; her parting laughter rang in his ears all night with damning mockery and iteration; and when he could spare a thought from this chief artificer of his confusion, it was to expend his wrath on Somerset and the career of the amateur detective. With the coming of the day, he found in a shy milk-shop the means to appease his hunger. There were still many hours to wait before the departure of the south express; these he passed wandering with indescribable fatigue in the obscurer by-streets of the city; and at length slipped quietly into the station and took his place in the darkest corner of a third-class carriage. Here, all day long, he jolted on the bare boards, distressed by heat and continually reawakened from uneasy slumbers. By the half return ticket in his purse, he was entitled to make the journey on the easy cushions and with the ample space of the first-class; but alas! in his absurd attire, he durst not, for decency, commingle with his equals; and this small annoyance, coming last in such a series of disasters, cut him to the heart.

That night, when, in his Putney lodging, he reviewed the expense, anxiety, and weariness of his adventure; when he beheld the ruins of his last good trousers and his last presentable coat; and above all, when his eye by any chance alighted on the Tyrolese hat or the degrading ulster, his heart would overflow with bitterness, and it was only by a serious call on his philosophy that he maintained the dignity of his demeanour.

SOMERSET'S ADVENTURE

THE SUPERFLUOUS MANSION

Mr. Paul Somerset was a young gentleman of a lively and fiery imagination, with very small capacity for action. He was one who lived exclusively in dreams and in the future: the creature of his own theories, and an actor in his own romances. From the cigar divan he proceeded to parade the streets, still heated with the fire of his eloquence, and scouting upon every side for the offer of some fortunate adventure. In the continual stream of passers-by, on the sealed fronts of houses, on the posters that covered the hoardings, and in every lineament and throb of the great city, he saw a mysterious and hopeful hieroglyph. But although the elements of adventure were streaming by him as thick as drops of water in the Thames, it was in vain that, now with a beseeching, now with

something of a braggadocio air, he courted and provoked the notice of the passengers; in vain that, putting fortune to the touch, he even thrust himself into the way and came into direct collision with those of the more promising demeanour. Persons brimful of secrets, persons pining for affection, persons perishing for lack of help or counsel, he was sure he could perceive on every side; but by some contrariety of fortune, each passed upon his way without remarking the young gentleman, and went farther (surely to fare worse!) in quest of the confidant, the friend, or the adviser. To thousands he must have turned an appealing countenance, and yet not one regarded him.

A light dinner, eaten to the accompaniment of his impetuous aspirations, broke in upon the series of his attempts on fortune; and when he returned to the task, the lamps were already lighted, and the nocturnal crowd was dense upon the pavement. Before a certain restaurant, whose name will readily occur to any student of our Babylon, people were already packed so closely that passage had grown difficult; and Somerset, standing in the kennel, watched, with a hope that was beginning to grow somewhat weary, the faces and the manners of the crowd. Suddenly he was startled by a gentle touch upon the shoulder, and facing about, he was aware of a very plain and elegant brougham, drawn by a pair of powerful horses, and driven by a man in sober livery. There were no arms upon the panel; the window was open, but the interior was obscure; the driver yawned behind his palm; and the young man was already beginning to suppose himself the dupe of his own fancy, when a hand, no larger than a child's and smoothly gloved in white, appeared in a corner of the window and privily beckoned him to approach. He did so, and looked in. The carriage was occupied by a single small and very dainty figure, swathed head and shoulders in impenetrable folds of white lace; and a voice, speaking low and silvery, addressed him in these words:

"Open the door and get in."

"It must be," thought the young man, with an almost unbearable thrill, "it must be that duchess at last!" Yet, although the moment was one to which he had long looked forward, it was with a certain share of alarm that he opened the door, and, mounting into the brougham, took his seat beside the lady of the lace. Whether or no she had touched a spring, or given some other signal, the young man had hardly closed the door before the carriage, with considerable swiftness, and with a very luxurious and easy movement on its springs, turned and began to drive towards the west.

Somerset, as I have written, was not unprepared; it had long been his particular pleasure to rehearse his conduct in the most unlikely situations; and this, among others, of the patrician ravisher, was one he had familiarly studied. Strange as it may seem, however, he could find no apposite remark; and as the lady, on her side, vouchsafed no further sign, they continued to drive in silence through the streets. Except for alternate flashes from the passing lamps, the carriage was plunged in obscurity; and beyond the fact that the fittings were luxurious, and that the lady was singularly small and slender in person and, all but one gloved hand, still swathed in her costly veil, the young man could decipher no detail of an inspiring nature. The suspense began to grow unbearable. Twice he cleared his throat, and twice the whole resources of the language failed him. In similar scenes, when he had forecast them on the theatre of fancy, his presence of mind had always been complete, his eloquence remarkable; and at this disparity between the rehearsal and the performance, he began to be seized with a panic of apprehension. Here, on the very threshold of adventure, suppose him ignominiously to fail; suppose that after ten, twenty, or sixty seconds of still uninterrupted silence, the lady should touch the check-string and re-deposit him, weighed and found wanting, on the common street! Thousands of persons of no mind at all, he reasoned, would be found more equal to the part; could, that very instant, by some decisive step, prove the lady's choice to have been well inspired, and put a stop to this intolerable silence.

His eye, at this point, lighted on the hand. It was better to fall by desperate councils than to continue as he was; and with one tremulous swoop he pounced on the gloved fingers and drew them to himself. One overt step, it had appeared to him, would dissolve the spell of his embarrassment; in act, he found it otherwise: he found himself no less incapable of speech or further progress; and, with the

lady's hand in his, sat helpless. But worse was in store. A peculiar quivering began to agitate the form of his companion; the hand that lay unresistingly in Somerset's trembled as with ague; and presently there broke forth, in the shadow of the carriage, the bubbling and musical sound of laughter, resisted but triumphant. The young man dropped his prize; had it been possible, he would have bounded from the carriage. The lady, meanwhile, lying back upon the cushions, passed on from trill to trill of the most heartfelt, high-pitched, clear, and fairy-sounding merriment.

"You must not be offended," she said at last, catching an opportunity between two paroxysms. "If you have been mistaken in the warmth of your attentions, the fault is solely mine; it does not flow from your presumption, but from my eccentric manner of recruiting friends; and, believe me, I am the last person in the world to think the worse of a young man for showing spirit. As for to-night, it is my intention to entertain you to a little supper; and if I shall continue to be as much pleased with your manners as I was taken with your face, I may perhaps end by making you an advantageous offer."

Somerset sought in vain to find some form of answer, but his discomfiture had been too recent and complete.

"Come," returned the lady, "we must have no display of temper; that is for me the one disqualifying fault; and as I perceive we are drawing near our destination, I shall ask you to descend and offer me your arm."

Indeed, at that very moment the carriage drew up before a stately and severe mansion in a spacious square; and Somerset, who was possessed of an excellent temper, with the best grace in the world assisted the lady to alight. The door was opened by an old woman of a grim appearance, who ushered the pair into a dining-room somewhat dimly lighted, but already laid for supper, and occupied by a prodigious company of large and valuable cats. Here, as soon as they were alone, the lady divested herself of the lace in which she was enfolded; and Somerset was relieved to find, that although still bearing the traces of great beauty, and still distinguished by the fire and colour of her eye, her hair was of silvery whiteness and her face lined with years.

"And now, *mon preux*," said the old lady, nodding at him with a quaint gaiety, "you perceive that I am no longer in my first youth. You will soon find that I am all the better company for that."

As she spoke, the maid re-entered the apartment with a light but tasteful supper. They sat down, accordingly, to table, the cats with savage pantomime surrounding the old lady's chair; and what with the excellence of the meal and the gaiety of his entertainer, Somerset was soon completely at his ease. When they had well eaten and drunk, the old lady leaned back in her chair, and taking a cat upon her lap, subjected her guest to a prolonged but evidently mirthful scrutiny.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.