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THE GYPSY QUEEN'S VOW

BY

MRS. MAY AGNES FLEMING

AUTHOR OF "THE DARK SECRET," "THE QUEEN OF THE ISLE," "THE HEIRESS OF CASTLE CLIFF," "MAGDALEN'S VOW," "THE MIDNIGHT QUEEN," "THE RIVAL BROTHERS," ETC.

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THE GYPSY QUEEN'S VOW.

CHAPTER I.

NIGHT AND STORM.

"The night grows wondrous dark; deep-swelling gusts
And sultry stillness take the rule by turn,
While o'er our heads the black and heavy clouds
Roll slowly on. This surely bodes a storm."
—BAILLIE.

Overhead, the storm-clouds were scudding wildly across the sky, until all above was one dense pall of impenetrable gloom. A chill, penetrating rain was falling, and the wind came sweeping in long, fitful gusts—piercingly cold; for it was a night in March.

It was the north road to London. A thick, yellow fog, that had been rising all day from the bosom of the Thames, wrapped the great city in a blackness that might almost be felt; and its innumerable lights were shrouded in the deep gloom. Yet the solitary figure, flitting through the pelting rain and bleak wind, strained her eyes as she fled along, as though, despite the more than Egyptian darkness, she would force, by her fierce, steady glare, the obscure lights of the city to show themselves.

The night lingered and lingered, the gloom deepened and deepened, the rain plashed dismally; the wind blew in moaning, lamentable gusts, penetrating through the thick mantle she held closely around her. And still the woman fled on, stopping neither for wind, nor rain, nor storm—unheeding, unfeeling them all—keeping her fierce, devouring gaze fixed, with a look that might have pierced the very heavens, on the still far-distant city.

There was no one on the road but herself. The lateness of the hour—for it was almost midnight—and the increasing storm, kept pedestrians within doors that cheerless March night. Now and then she would pass cottages in which lights were still glaring, but most of the houses were wrapped in silence and darkness.

And still on, through night, and storm, and gloom, fled the wanderer, with the pitiless rain beating in her face—the chill blasts fluttering her thin-worn garments and long, wild, black hair. Still on, pausing not, resting not, never removing her steadfast gaze from the distant city—like a lost soul hurrying to its doom.

Suddenly, above the wailing of the wind and plashing of the rain, arose the thunder of horses' hoofs and the crash of approaching carriage wheels. Rapidly they came on, and the woman paused for a moment and leaned again a cottage porch, as if waiting until it should pass.

A bright light was still burning in the window, and it fell on the lonely wayfarer as she stood, breathing hard and waiting, with burning, feverish impatience, for the carriage to pass. It displayed the form of a woman of forty, or thereabouts, with a tall, towering, commanding figure, gaunt and bony. Her complexion was dark; its naturally swarthy hue having been tanned by sun and wind to a dark-brown. The features were strong, stern, and prominent, yet you could see at a glance that the face had once been a handsome one. Now, however—thin, haggard, and fleshless, with the high, prominent cheek-bones; the gloomy, overhanging brows; the stern, set, unyielding mouth; the rigid, corrugated brow; the fierce, devouring, maniac, black eyes—it looked positively hideous. Such eyes!—such burning, blazing orbs of fire, never was seen in human head before! They glowed like two live coals in a bleached skull. There was utter misery, there was despair unspeakable, mingled with fierce determination, in those lurid, flaming eyes. And that dark, stern terrific face was stamped with the unmistakable impress of a despised, degraded race. The woman was a gipsy. It needed not her peculiar dress, the costume of her tribe, to tell this, though that was significant enough. Her thick, coarse, jet-black hair, streaked with threads of gray, was pushed impatiently off her face; and her only head-covering was a handkerchief of crimson and black silk knotted under her chin. A cloak, of coarse, red woolen stuff, covered her shoulders, and a dress of the same material, but in color blue, reached hardly to her ankles. The brilliant head-dress, and unique, fiery costume, suited well the dark, fierce, passionate face of the wearer.

For an instant she paused, as if to let the carriage pass; then, as if even the delay of an instant was maddening, she started

wildly up, and keeping her hungry, devouring gaze fixed on the vision of the still unseen city, she sped on more rapidly than before.

CHAPTER II.

MR. TOOSYPEGS.

"He bears him like a portly gentleman;
And, to say truth, Vernon brags of him
To be a virtuous and well-governed youth."
—SHAKSPEARE.

The vehicle that the gipsy had heard approaching was a light wagon drawn by two swift horses. It had two seats capable of holding four persons, though the front seat alone was now occupied.

The first of these (for his age claims the precedence) was a short, stout, burly, thick-set, little man, buttoned up in a huge great-coat, suffering under a severe eruption of capes and pockets. An immense fur cap, that, by its antediluvian looks, might have been worn by Noah's grandfather, adorned his head, and was pulled so far down on his face that nothing was visible but a round, respectable-looking bottle-nose, and a pair of small, twinkling gray eyes. This individual, who was also the driver, rejoiced in the cognomen of Mr. Bill Harkins, and made it his business to take belated wayfarers to London (either by land or water), when arriving too late for the regular conveyances. On the present occasion his sole freight consisted of a young gentleman with a brilliant-hued carpet-bag, glowing with straw-colored roses and dark-blue lilies, rising from a back-ground resembling London smoke. The young gentleman was a very remarkable young gentleman indeed. He was exceedingly tall and thin, with legs like a couple of pipe-stems, and a neck so long and slender that it reminded you of a gander's, and made you tremble for the safety of the head balanced on such a frail support. His hair and complexion were both of that indefinite color known to the initiated as "whity brown"—the latter being profusely sprinkled with large yellow freckles, and the former as straight and sleek as bear's grease could make it. For the rest, he was characterized by nothing in particular, but for being the possessor of a pair of large, pale-blue eyes, not remarkable for either brilliancy or expression, and for wearing the meekest possible expression, of countenance. He might have been eighteen years old, as far as years went; but his worldly wisdom was by no means equal to his years.

"By jingo! that 'ere was a blast!" said Mr. Harkins, bending his head as a gale swept shrieking by.

"Yes, it *does* blow, but *I* don't mind it—I'm very much obliged to you," said the pale young man, with the white hair and freckles, holding his carpet-bag in his arms, as if it were a baby.

"Who said you did?" growled Bill Harkins. "You'll be safe in Lunnon in half an 'our, while I'll be a-drivin' back through this 'ere win' and rain, getting wetted right through. If you don't mind it, *I* does, Mr. Toosypegs."

"Mr. Harkins," said Mr. Toosypegs, humbly, "I'm very sorry to put you to so much trouble, I'm sure, but if two extra crowns—"

"Mr. Toosypegs," interrupted Mr. Harkins, with a sudden burst of feeling, "give us yer hand; yer a trump. It's easy to be perceived, them as is gentlemen from them as isn't. You're one o' the right sort; oughter to be a lord, by jingo! Get up, hold lazybones," said Mr. Harkins, touching the near-wheeler daintily with his whip.

"Mr. Harkins, it's very good of you to say so, and I'm very much obliged to you, I'm sure," said Mr. Toosypegs, gratefully; "but, at the same time, if you'll please to recollect. I'm an American, and consequently couldn't be a lord. There aren't any lords over in America, Mr. Harkins; though if there was, I dare say I would be one. It's real kind of you to wish it, though, and I'm much obliged to you," added Mr. Toosypegs, with emotion.

"Hamerica must be a hodd sorter place," said Mr. Harkins, reflectively. "I've heern tell that your king—"

"He isn't a king, Mr. Harkins; he's only the President," broke in Mr. Toosypegs, with energy.

"Well, President, then," said Mr. Harkins, adopting the amendment with a look of disgust. "I've heern they call him

‘mister,’ jest like hany hother man.”

“So they do; and he glories in the triumphant title—a title which, as an American citizen’s, is a prouder one than that of king or kaiser!” said Mr. Toosypegs, enthusiastically, while he repeated the sentence he had read out of a late novel: “—It is a title for which emperors might lay down their scepters—for which potentates might doff the royal purple—for which the great ones of the earth might—a—might’”—Mr. Toosypegs paused and knit his brows, having evidently lost his cue.

“Kick the bucket!” suggested Mr. Harkins, coming to his aid.

“Mr. Harkins, I’m very much obliged to you; but that wasn’t exactly the word,” said Mr. Toosypegs, politely, “—Might’—oh, yes!—‘might resign name and fame, and dwell under the shadow of the American eagle, whose glorious wings extend to the four quarters of the earth, and before whose soul-piercing eye the nations of the world must blush forevermore!’”

And Mr. Toosypegs, carried away by national enthusiasm, gave his arm such a flourish that it came in contact with the head of Mr. Harkins, and set more stars dancing before his eyes than there would have been had the night been ever so fine.

The outraged Mr. Harkins indignantly sprung round, and collared Mr. Toosypegs, whose complexion had turned from whity-brown to gray, with terror, and whose teeth chattered with mingled shame and fear.

“You himpertanent wagabond!” shouted Mr. Harkins, “to go for to strike a hunnoffending man like that! Blessed! if I hain’t a good mind to chuck yer ’ead fust hout the waggin.”

“Mr. Har—Har—Harkins,” stammered the half-strangled advocate of the American eagle, “I didn’t mean to do it, I’m very much obliged to you! I do assure you, Mr. Harkins, I hadn’t the faintest idea of hitting you; and if money—”

“How much?” demanded Mr. Harkins, fiercely, looking bayonets at his trembling victim.

“Mr. Harkins, if five or even ten dollars—”

“Which is how many pounds?” demanded the somewhat mollified Mr. Harkins.

“Two pounds sterling,” said Mr. Toosypegs, in a trembling falsetto; “and I do assure you, Mr. Harkins, I hadn’t the faintest idea of hitting you that time. If two pound—”

“Done!” cried Mr. Harkins. “Never say it ag’in. I ain’t a man to bear spite at no one—which is a Christian maxim, Mr. Toosypegs. A clip side the head’s neither here nor there. Same time, I’ll take them two-pound flimsies now, if’s all the same to you?”

“Certainly—certainly, Mr. Harkins,” said Mr. Toosypegs, drawing out a purse well-filled with gold, and opening it nervously. “Three—five—ten dollars, and two for the drive’s twelve; and one to buy sugar-plums for your infant family—if you’ve got such a thing about you—is thirteen. Here’s thirteen dollars, Mr. Harkins. I’m very much obliged to you.”

“Same to you, Mr. Toosypegs,” said Mr. Harkins, pocketing the money, with a broad grin. “‘May you ne’er want a frien,’ nor a bottle to give him,’ as the poic says.”

“Mr. Harkins, I’m obliged to you,” said Mr. Toosypegs, grasping his hand, which Mr. Harkins resigned with a grunt. “You have a soul, Mr. Harkins. I know it—I feel it. Everybody mightn’t find it out; but I can—I perceived it from the first.”

Mr. Harkins heard this startling fact with the greatest indifference, merely saying, “Humph!”

“And now, how far do you suppose we are from the city, Mr. Harkins!” said Mr. Toosypegs, in his most insinuating tone.

“’Bout a mile or so.”

“Could you recommend any hotel to me, Mr. Harkins. I’m a stranger in the city, you know, and should feel grateful if you would,” said Mr. Toosypegs, humbly.

“Why, yes, I can,” said Mr. Harkins, brightening suddenly up. “There’s the ‘Blue Pig,’ one of the finest ’otels in Lunnon, with the best o’ ’commodations for man and beast. You’ve heern o’ the ‘Blue Pig’ over there in Hamerica, hain’t you?”

Mr. Toosypegs wasn’t sure. It was very likely he had; but, owing to his bad memory, he had forgotten.

“Well, anyhow, you won’t find many ’otels to beat that ’ere. Best o’ ’commodation—but I told you that hafore.”

“Where is it located?” asked Mr. Toosypegs.

“St. Giles. You know where that is, in course—hevery-body does. The nicest ’otel in Lunnon—best o’ ’commodations. But I told you that hafore. My hold frien’ Bruisin’ Bob keeps it. You’ll like it, I know.”

“Yes, Mr. Harkins, I dare say I will. I am very much obliged to you,” said Mr. Toosypegs, in a somewhat dubious tone.

“That ’ere man’s the greatest cove a-goin’,” said Mr. Harkins, getting enthusiastic. “Been married ten times if he’s been married once. One wife died; one left his bread-board, and run hoff with a hofficer dragoon; one was lagged for stealin’ wipes, and he’s got three livin’ at this present writin’. Great fellar is Bob.”

“I haven’t the slightest doubt of it, Mr. Harkins,” said the proprietor of the freckles, politely; “and I anticipate a great deal of pleasure in making the acquaintance of your friends, Mr. and Mrs. Bob. But, good gracious! Mr. Harkins, just look there—if that ain’t a woman hurrying on there after,” said Mr. Toosypegs, pointing, in intense surprise, to the form of the gipsy, as she darted swiftly away from the cottage.

“Well, what o’ that? Some tramper a-goin’ to Lunnon,” said Mr. Harkins, gruffly.

“But, Mr. Harkins, a woman out in such a storm at this hour of the night! Why, it ain’t right,” said Mr. Toosypegs, getting excited.

Mr. Harkins picked up his hat, turned down the collar of his coat, faced abruptly round, and looked Mr. Toosypegs straight in the eyes.

“Do call to her to get in, Mr. Harkins. There’s plenty of room for her on the back seat,” said Mr. Toosypegs, unheeding Mr. Harkins’ astounded look at his philanthropy. “A woman traveling on foot in such a storm! Why, it ain’t right!” repeated Mr. Toosypegs, getting still more excited.

“Mr. Toosypegs, Hamericans don’t never be a little hout their mind, do they?” said Mr. Harkins, blandly.

“Not often, Mr. Harkins, I’m very much obliged to you,” said Mr. Toosypegs, with his customary politeness.

“Because if they did, you know,” said Mr. Harkins, in the same bland tone, “I should say you wasn’t quite right yourself, you know!”

“Good gracious! Mr. Harkins, what do you mean?” exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, in a tone of mild remonstrance. “You don’t think I’m crazy, do you?”

“Mr. Toosypegs, I don’t like to be personal; so I’ll only say it’s my private opinion you’re a brick!” said Mr. Harkins, mildly. “Perhaps, though, its the hair of Hingland wot doesn’t agree with you. I thought you was wery sensible a little w’ile ago, when you gin me them two poun’.”

“I’m very much obliged to you for your good opinion, Mr. Harkins,” said Mr. Toosypegs, blushing. “And if you’ll only call to that woman to get into the wagon, I’ll be still more so.”

“And have your pockets picked?” said Mr. Harkins, sharply. “I shan’t do no sich thing.”

“Mr. Harkins!” said Mr. Toosypegs, warmly, “she’s a woman—ain’t she?”

“Well, wot if she be?” said Mr. Harkins, sullenly.

“Why, that no woman should be walking at this hour when men are riding; more particularly when there is a back seat with nobody in it. Why, it ain’t right!” said Mr. Toosypegs, who seemed unable to get beyond this point.

“Well, I don’t care!” said Mr. Harkins, snappishly. “Do you s’pose, Mr. Toosypegs, I have nothing to do but buy waggins to kerry sich lumber as that ’ere? I won’t do it for no one. Likely as not she’s nothin’ but a gipsy, or something as bad. This ’ere waggin ain’t goin’ to be perluted with no sich trash.”

“Mr. Harkins,” said Mr. Toosypegs, briskly, thrusting his hand into his pocket, “what will you take and bring her to London?”

“Hey? ‘A fool and his money’—hum! What’ll you give?”

“There’s a crown.”

“Done!” said Mr. Harkins, closing his digits on the coin, while his little eyes snapped. “Hullo! you, woman!” he shouted, rising his voice.

The gipsy—who, though but a yard or so ahead, was indistinguishable in the darkness—sped on without paying the slightest attention to his call.

"Hallo, there! Hallo!" again called Mr. Harkins, while Mr. Toosypegs followed him:

"Stop a moment, if you please, madam."

But neither for the sharp, surly order of the driver, nor the bland, courteous request of Mr. Toosypegs, did the woman stop. Casting a brief, fleeting glance over her shoulder, she again flitted on.

"You confounded old witch! Stop and take a ride to town—will you?" yelled the polite and agreeable Mr. Harkins, holding up a dark lantern and reining in his horse by the woman's side.

The dark, stern face, with its fierce, black eyes and wildly-streaming hair, was turned, and a hard, deep voice asked what he wanted.

"A gipsy! I knew it!" muttered Mr. Harkins, shrinking involuntarily from her lurid glances. "Ugh! What a face! Looks like the witch in the play?" Then aloud: "Get in, ma'am, and I'll take ye to town."

"Go play your jokes on some one else," said the woman, curtly, turning away.

"I ain't a-jokin'. Nice time o' night this to stop and play jokes—ain't it?" said Mr. Harkins, in a tone of intense irony. "This 'ere young man, which is a Hamerican from the New Knighted States, has paid yer fare to Lunnon outer his hown blessed pocket. So jump in, and don't keep me waitin' here in the wet."

"Is what he says true?" said the dark woman, turning the sharp light of her stiletto-like eyes on the freckles and pale-blue eyes of good-natured Mr. Toosypegs.

"Yes, ma'am. I'm happy to say it is," said Mr. Toosypegs. "Allow me to hand you in."

And Mr. Toosypegs got up to fulfill his offer; but Dobbin at that moment gave the wagon a malicious jerk, and dumped our patriotic American back in his seat. Before he could recover his breath, the gipsy had declined his assistance, with a wave of her hand, and had entered the wagon unassisted, and taken her seat.

"I know that tramper," said Mr. Harkins in a nervous whisper to Mr. Toosypegs. "It's the gipsy queen, Ketura, from Yetholm; most wonderful woman that ever was, 'cept Deborah, the woman the Bible tells about, you know, wot druv the nail through the fellar's head when she found him takin' a snooze. Heard a minister take her for his tex' once, and preach all about it. Our cow's name's Deborah, too," said Mr. Harkins, absently.

"And she's a gipsy queen? Lord bless us!" exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, turning round and looking in some alarm at the fixed, stern, dark face before him—like the face of a statue in bronze. "Does she tell fortunes?"

"Yes; but you'd better not hask her to-night," said Mr. Harkins, in the same cautious whisper. "Her son's in prison, and sentenced to transportation for life for robbin' the plate of the Hearl De Courcy. He's goin' off with a lot of hothers airly to-morrow mornin'. Now, don't go exclaiming that way;" said Mr. Harkins, in a tone expressive of disgust, as he gave his companion a dig in the side.

"Poor thing! poor thing!" said Mr. Toosypegs, in a tone of sympathy. "Why, it's too bad; it really is, Mr. Harkins."

"Sarved him right, it's my opinion," said Mr. Harkins, sententiously. "Wot business had he for to go for to rob Hearl de Courcy, I want ter know? His mother, the hold lady ahind here, went and sot him up for a gentleman, and see wot's come hof hit. She, a hold gipsy queen, goin' and sendin' her son to Heton with hall the young lordses, and baronetses, and dukeses, and makin' believe he was somethin' above the common. And now see what her fine gentleman's gone and done and come to. Wonder wot she'll think of herself, when she sees him takin' a sea voyage for the good of his 'ealth at the 'spense of the government, to-morrow?"

"Poor thing! poor thing!" said Mr. Toosypegs, looking deeply sorry.

"Poor hold thing hindeed!" said Mr. Harkins, turning up his nose contemptuously. "Sarved 'im right, I say ag'in. That 'ere son o' hern was the most stuck-hup chap I ever clapped my two blessed heyes on. Hafter he left Heton, I see'd 'im, one day, in the streets, hand guess who with? W'y, with nobody less than young Lord Williers, honly son o' the Hearl De Courcy, as he has gone and robbed. There's hingratitude for you! I didn't know 'im then; but I 'cognized him hafterward in the court-room hat 'is trial."

"How could *he* afford to go to Eton—he, a gipsy?" said Mr. Toosypegs, in surprise.

"Dunno! Hold woman sent 'im, I s'pose—'owever she got the money. He was a fine-looking fellow, too, I must say, though rayther tawny, but 'andsome as Lord Williers himself. Hold Ketura was 'andsome once, too; see'd 'er w'en she was a reg'lar hout-and-hout beauty; though you mightn't think it now. Times changes folks, yer know," said Mr. Harkins, in a moralizing tone.

"What made him steal, if his mother was so rich?" said Mr. Toosypegs.

"His mother wasn't rich no more'n I be. S'pose she made enough tellin' fortunes, poachin', and stealin' to pay fur'im at school; hand then when he growed hup, and his cash gave out, he took hand stole the hearl's plate. He denied it hall hat 'is trial; but then they hall do that. By jingo! he looked fierce enough to knock the judge and jury, and all the rest on 'em, hinto the middle hof next week, hif not further, that day. 'Twas no go, though; hand hover the water he goes to-morrow."

"Poor fellow! Mr. Harkins, I'm sorry for him—I really am," said Mr. Toosypegs, in a tone of real sincerity.

Mr. Harkins burst into a gruff laugh.

"Well, hif this ain't good! Wot fools folks is! Sorry for a cove yer never saw! Wonder hif hall Hamericans is as green as you be?"

After this sentence, which came out in a series of little jerks, with strong notes of admiration appended to each, Mr. Harkins relapsed into silence and the collar of his great-coat, and began whistling "The Devil Among the Tailors," in a voice like a frog with the influenza.

They were now rapidly approaching the city—the loud crash and din of which had somewhat subsided, owing to the inclemency of the weather and the lateness of the hour. The gipsy, who had not heard a word of the foregoing conversation—it having been carried on in a prudently-subdued tone—had wrapped her coarse cloak closer around her, while the gaze of her devouring eyes grew more intense, as the lights of the city began to appear. One by one, they came gleaming out through the dense fog with bug-like stars here and there; and in every direction.

The city was gained; and they were soon in the very midst of the great, throbbing heart of mighty London.

The wagon stopped, and Mr. Toosypegs sprung out to assist the woman to alight.

But waving him away with an impatient motion, she sprung out unassisted, and without one word or look of thanks, turned and flitted away in the chill night wind.

"There! I knowed that would be all the thanks ye'd get," said Mr. Harkins, with a hoarse chuckle. "Hoff she goes, and you'll never see her again."

"Well, that don't matter any. I didn't want thanks, I'm sure," said the kind-hearted Mr. Toosypegs. "Good-by, Mr. Harkins. Give my respects to Mrs. Harkins."

"Good-night, hold fellar," said Mr. Harkins, giving Mr. Toosypegs' hand a cordial shake. "You're a brick! How I'd like to come hacross one like you hev'ry night! Go right to Bob's, sign o' the 'Blue Pig,' St. Giles, best o' 'commodation for man and beast; but I told you that before. Tell Bob I sent you, and I'll call and see you in a few days."

"You're very good, Mr. Harkins. I'll certainly tell Mr. Bob so when I see him!" said Mr. Toosypegs, with a severe twinge of conscience at the deception he felt himself to be using; "and I'll be very glad to see you whenever you call. I'm very much obliged to you."

CHAPTER III.

THE LOVERS.

"Oh, thou shalt be all else to me,
That heart can feel, or tongue can feign;
I'll praise, admire, and worship thee,
But must not, dare not, love again."
—MOORE.

While the solitary wagon was driving, through wind and rain, along the lonely north road, bearing its three strangely-contrasted inmates—the gruff, avaricious driver, the simple, kind-hearted youth, and the dark, fierce, stern woman—a far different scene was passing in another quarter of the city. At that same hour the town mansion of Hugh Seyton—Earl De Courcy—was all ablaze with lights, music and mirth. Gorgeous drawing-rooms, fretted with gold and carving, dazzling with numberless jets of light from the pendant chandeliers, odorous with the heavy perfume of costly exotics, the very air quivering with softest music, were thrown open, and were filled with the proud, the high-born, the beautiful, of London. Peers and peeresses, gallant nobles and ladies bright, moved through the glittering rooms, and with singing, talking, flirting, dancing, the night was waning apace.

Two young men stood together within the deep shadow of a bay-window, in the music-room, watching a group assembled round a young lady at the piano, and conversing in low tones.

One of these was decidedly the handsomest man present that night. In stature he was tall, somewhat above the common height, and faultless in form and figure, with a certain air of DISTINGUE about him that stamped him as one of noble birth. His clear, fair complexion, his curling chestnut hair, and large blue eyes, betrayed his Saxon blood. His face might have seemed slightly effeminate; but no one, in looking at the high, kingly brow, the dark, flashing eyes, and firm-set mouth, would have thought that long. A dark mustache shaded his upper lip, and a strange, nameless beauty lit up and softened his handsome face whenever he smiled. Adored by the ladies, envied by the men, Lord Ernest Villiers, only son of Earl De Courcy, seemed to have nothing on earth left to wish for.

And yet, at times, over that white, intellectual brow a dark shadow would flit; from the depths of those dark, handsome eyes the bright light of a happy heart would pass; the mouth would grow stern, and a look of troubled care would darken his young face.

His companion, a good-looking young man, with a certain air about him as if he were somebody and knew it, with a listless look, and most desirable curling whiskers, leaned against a marble Hebe, and listened languidly to the singing. He wore the undress uniform of an officer, and being interpreted, was no other than Captain George Jernyngham, of the Guards.

“What a wonderful affair this is of Germaine’s—eh, Villiers?” said Captain Jernyngham, carressing his mustache. “Just like a thing in a play, or a story, where everybody turns out the most unexpected things. The Duke of B—— is going crazy about it. He had invited Germaine to his house, and the fellow was making the fiercest sort of love to his pretty daughter, when all of a sudden, it turns out that he is a robber, a gipsy, a burglar, and all sorts of horrors. How the deuce came it to pass that he entered Eton with us, and passed himself off as a gentleman?”

“I cannot tell; the whole affair is involved in mystery.”

“You and he were pretty intimate—were you not, my lord?”

“Yes, I took a fancy to Germaine from the first; and I don’t believe, yet, he is guilty of the crime they charge him with.”

“You don’t, eh? See what it is to have faith in human nature! How are you to get over the evidence.”

“It was only circumstantial.”

“Granted; but it was most conclusive. There is not another man in London has the slightest doubt of his guilt but yourself.”

“Poor Germaine!” said Lord Villiers, in a tone of deep feeling; “with all his brilliant talents, his high endowments, and refined nature, to come to such a sad end! To be obliged to mate with the lowest of the low, the vilest of the vile—men degraded by every species of crime, below the level of the brute! And this for life! Poor Germaine!”

The young guardsman shrugged his shoulders.

“If refined men *will* steal—oh, I forgot! you don’t believe it,” he said, as Lord Villiers made an impatient motion, “Well, I confess, I thought better things of Germaine myself. There was always something of the dare-devil in him, and he was reckless and extravagant to a fault; but upon my honor, I never thought he could have come to this. Have you seen him since his trial?”

“No, I had not the heart to meet him. Death would be preferable to such a fate.”

“There was a devil in his eye, if there ever was in any man’s, when he heard his sentence,” observed the young captain. “No one that saw him is likely to forget, in a hurry, the way he folded his arms and smiled in the judge’s face, as he

pronounced it. By Jove! I'm not given to nervousness, but I felt a sensation akin to an ague-shiver, as I watched him."

"With his fierce, passionate nature, it will, turn him into a perfect demon," said Lord Villiers; "and if ever he escapes, woe to those who have caused his disgrace! He is as implacable as death or doom in his hate—as relentless as a Corsican in his vengeance."

"Has he any friends or relatives among the gipsies?"

"I don't know, I think I heard of a mother, or brother, or something. I intend paying him a last visit to-night, and will deliver any message he may send to his friends."

"Will your rigorous father approve of such a visit, since it was he that prosecuted Germaine?"

"Certainly, Jernyngham. My father, believing in his guilt, thought it his duty to do so; but he bears no feeling of personal anger toward him," said Lord Villiers, gravely.

"Well, I wish Germaine a safe passage across the ocean," said Captain Jernyngham, as he listlessly admired his hand in its well-fitting glove. "He was a confoundedly good-looking fellow; cut me completely out with that pretty little prize widow of old Sir Rob Landers; but I'll be magnanimous and forgive him now. Oh, by Jove! Villiers, there goes Lady Maude Percy!" cried the guardsman, starting suddenly up, all his listlessness disappearing as if by magic. "Ye gods! what a perfectly dazzling beauty! Ah! my lord, I thought you would find the subject more interesting than that of poor Germaine," he added, with a mischievous smile at his companion's look of intense admiration.

Lord Villiers laughed, and his clear face flushed.

"The handsomest girl in London, and the greatest heiress," said the guardsman, resuming his half-drawl and languid caressing of his whiskers. "What an intensely enviable fellow you are, Villiers, if rumor is true."

"And what says rumor?" said Lord Villiers, coldly.

"Why, that you are the accepted lover of the fair Lady Maude."

Before the somewhat haughty reply of Lord Villiers was spoken, a young lady, suddenly entering the room, caught sight of them, and coming over, she addressed the guardsman with:

"George, you abominably lazy fellow, have you forgotten you are engaged for this set to Miss Ashton? Really, my lord, you and this idle brother of mine ought to be ashamed to make hermits of yourselves in this way, while so many bright eyes are watching for your coming. Lady Maude is here, and I will report you."

And, raising her finger warningly, Miss Jernyngham tripped away.

"'Fare thee well—and if forever!'" said Captain Jernyngham, in a tragic tone, as he turned away.

"'Why, forever fare thee well!'" said Lord Villiers laughing as he finished the quotation, and turned in an opposite direction.

The dancing was at its height as he passed from the music-room. Standing a little apart, his eyes went wandering over the fair forms tripping through the "mazy dance," while they rested on one form fairer than all the rest, and his handsome face brightened, and his fine eyes lit up, as a man's alone does, when he watches the woman he loves.

Standing at the head of one of the quadrilles was the object of his gaze—the peerless, high-born Lady Maude Percy. Eighteen summers had scarce passed over her young head, yet a thoughtful, almost sad, expression ever fell like a shadow on her beautiful face. Her form was rounded, exquisite, perfect; her oval face perfectly colorless, save for the full, crimson lips, her eyes large, dark and lustrous as stars, and fringed by long, silken-blacken lashes; her shining hair fell in soft, glittering, spiral curls, like raveled silk, round her fair, moonlight face; and her pallor seemed deepened by its raven hue. Her dress was of white brocade, fringed with seed-pearls; and her snowy arms and neck gleamed through misty clouds of point-lace. Pale, oriental pearls, wreathed her midnight hair, and ran in rivers of light around her neck. Queenly, peerless, dazzling, she moved through the brilliant train of beauties, eclipsing them all, as a meteor outshines lesser stars.

Drinking in the enchanting draught of her beauty to intoxication, Lord Ernest Villiers stood leaning against a marble pillar until the dance was concluded; and then moving toward her, as she stood for an instant alone, he bent over her, and whispered, in a voice that was low but full of passion:

"Maude! Maude! why have you tried to avoid me all the evening? I must see you! I must speak to you in private! I must

hear my destiny from your lips tonight!"

At the first sound of his voice she had started quickly, and the "eloquent blood" had flooded cheek and bosom with its rosy light; but as he went on it faded away, and a sort of shiver passed through her frame as he ceased.

"Come with me into the music-room—it is deserted now," he said, drawing her arm through his. "There, apart from all those prying eyes, I can learn my fate."

Paler still grew the pale face of the lady; but, without a word, she suffered herself to be led to the shadowy and deserted room he had just left.

"And now, Maude—my own love—may I claim an answer to the question I asked you last night?" he said, bending over her.

"I answered you then, my lord," she said, sadly.

"Yes; you told me to go—to forget you; as if such a thing were possible. Maude, I cannot, I will take that for an answer. Tell me, do you love me?"

"Oh, Ernest—oh, my dear lord! you *know* I do!" she cried, passionately.

"Then, Maude—my beautiful one—will you not be mine—my wife?"

"Oh, I cannot! I cannot! Oh, Ernest, I cannot!" she said, with a convulsive shudder.

"*Cannot!* And *why,* in Heaven's name?"

"My lord, that is my secret. I can never, *never* be your wife. Choose some one worthier of you, and forget Maude Percy."

She tried to steady her voice, but a stifled sob finished the sentence.

For all answer he gathered her in his strong arms, and her head dropped on his shoulder.

"My poor little romantic Maude, what is this wonderful secret?" he said, smiling. "Tell me, and we will see if your mountain does not turn out a molehill after all. Now, why cannot you be my wife?"

"You think me weak and silly, my lord," she said, raising her head somewhat proudly, and withdrawing from his retaining arms; "but there is a reason, one sufficient to separate us forever—one that neither you nor any living mortal can ever know!"

"And you refuse to tell this reason? My father and yours are eager for this match; in worldly rank we are equals; I love you passionately, with all my heart and soul, and still you refuse. Maude, you never loved me," he said, bitterly.

Her pale sweet face was bent in her hands now, and large tears fell through her fingers.

"Maude, you will not be so cruel," he said, with sudden hope. "Only say I may hope for this dear hand."

"No, no. Hope for nothing but to forget one so miserable as I am. Oh, Lord Ernest! there are so many better and worthier than I am, who will love you. I will be your friend—your sister, if I may; but I can never be your wife."

"Maude, is there guilt, is there crime connected with this secret of yours?" he demanded, stepping before her.

She rose to her feet impetuously, her cheeks crimsoning, her large eyes filling and darkening with indignation, her noble brow expanded, her haughty little head erect.

"And you think me capable of crime, Lord Villiers?—of guilt that needs concealment?" she said, with proud scorn.

"You, Maude? No; sooner would I believe an angel from heaven guilty of crime, than you. But I thought there might be others involved. Oh, Lady Maude! must this secret, that involves the happiness of my whole life, remain hidden from me?"

The bright light had died out from the beautiful eyes of Lady Maude; and her tone was very sad, as she replied:

"Some day, my lord, I will tell you all; but not now. Let us part here, and let this subject never be renewed between us."

"One word, Maude—do you love me?"

"I do! I do! Heaven forgive me!"

“Now, why, ‘Heaven forgive me?’ Maude! Maude! you will drive me mad! Is it such a crime to love me then?”

“In some it is,” she said, in her low, sad voice.

“And why, fairest saint?”

“Do not ask me, my lord. Oh, Ernest! let me go, I am tired and sick, and very, very unhappy. Dearest Ernest, leave me, and never speak of this again.”

“As you will, Lady Maude,” he said, with a bow, turning haughtily away.

But a light touch, that thrilled to his very heart, was laid on his arm, and the low, sweet voice of Lady Maude said:

“I have offended you, my lord; pray forgive me.”

“I am not offended, Lady Maude Percy; neither have I anything to forgive,” he said; but his fine face was clouded with mortification. “You have rejected me, and I presume the matter ends there.”

“But you are offended, I can hear it in your voice. Oh, Lord Villiers, if you knew how unhappy I am, you would forgive me the pain I have caused you.”

Her tone touched him, and taking her hand gently, he said:

“It is I who should ask forgiveness, Lady Maude. Yes, I will accept the friendship you offer, until such time as I can claim a better reward. Notwithstanding all you have said, I do not despair still.”

He pressed her hand to his lips and was gone.

“Excuse me, your lordship,” insinuated a most aristocratic footman in his ear, at that moment, “but there is an individual downstairs who persists on seeing the earl, and and won’t take no for an answer.”

“Who is it?” inquired Lord Villiers, impatiently.

“A gipsy, my lord, a desperate-looking old tramper, too.”

“What’s that about gipsies?” said the unceremonious little Miss Jernyngham, passing at that moment. “You must know, my lord, I fairly dote on gipsies, ever since I saw that charming young man they are going to transport.”

“How I wish I were a gipsy!” said Lord Villiers, gayly, “for such a reward.”

“Pray spare your pretty speeches for Lady Maude Percy, my lord,” lisped Miss Jernyngham, giving him a tap with her fan; “but about this gipsy—is it a man or woman?”

“A woman, Miss, they call her the gipsy queen, Ketura.”

“A gipsy queen! oh, delightful!” cried the young lady, clapping her hands; “my lord, we must have her up, by all means. I insist on having my fortune told.”

“Your slave hears but to obey, Miss Jernyngham,” said Lord Villiers, with a bow. “Jonson, go and bring the old lady up.”

“Yes, me lud,” said Jonson, hurrying off.

“George—George! do come here!” exclaimed the young lady, as her brother passed; “I want you!”

“What’s all this about?” said the guardsman, lounging up. “My dear Clara, the way you do get the steam up at a moment’s notice is perfectly astonishing. What can I do for you?”

“Do you want to have your fortune told?”

“If any good sibyl would predict for me a rich wife, who would pay my debts, and keep me provided with kid gloves and cigars, I wouldn’t object; but in any other case—”

His speech was cut short by the sudden appearance of the footman with the gipsy queen, of whom he seemed considerably afraid. And truly not without reason; for a lioness in her lair might have looked about as safe an animal as the dark, fierce-eyed gipsy queen. Even the two young men started; and Miss Clara Jernyngham stifled a little scream behind her fan.

“I wish to see Earl De Courcy,” was her abrupt demand.

"And we wish our fortune told, good mother," said Lord Villiers; "my father will attend to you presently."

"Your father!" said the woman, fixing her piercing eyes on his handsome face, "then you are Lord Villiers?"

"You have guessed it. What has the future in store for me?"

"Nothing good for your father's son," she hissed through her clenched teeth. "Give me your hand."

He extended it, with a smile, and she took it in hers, and peered into it. What a contrast they were! his, white, small, and delicate; her hand, bronzed and rough.

"Well, mother, what has destiny in store for me?"

"Much good or more evil. This night decides thy destiny; either thou shalt be blessed for life, or if the scale turns against thee—then woe to thee! Stand aside—the earl comes."

A tall, distinguished-looking man, of middle-age, approached, and looked with grave surprise on the group before him.

"A word with you, lord-earl," said the gipsy, confronting him.

"Speak out, then."

"It must be in private."

"Who are you?" said the earl, surprised and curious.

"I am called the gipsy queen, Ketura," said the woman, drawing herself up.

"And what do you want of me, woman?"

"I tell you I must speak in private. Is your time so precious that you cannot grant ten minutes of it to me?" said the woman, with a fiercely-impatient flash of her black eyes.

"This way, then," said the earl, impressed by the woman's commanding look and tones, as he turned and led the way across a wide, lighted hall to a richly-furnished library.

Seating himself in a softly-cushioned lounging-chair, he waited for his singular visitor to begin.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GIPSY'S VOW.

"May the grass wither from thy feet! the woods
Deny thee shelter! earth, a home! the dust,
A grave! the sun, his light! and heaven, her God!"
—Byron.

"Well, madam, I am waiting," said the earl, after a pause, during which the wild, black eyes of the woman were fixed immovably on his face, until he began to grow uneasy under the steady glare.

"Lord earl, behold at thy feet a mother who comes to plead for her son," said the strange woman, sinking on her knees at his feet, and holding up her clasped hands.

"Madam, I do not understand," said the earl, surprised, and feeling himself obliged, as it were, to use a respectful form of address, by the woman's commanding look.

"My son is in your power! my darling, my only son! my first-born! Oh, spare him!" said the woman, still holding up her clasped hands.

"Your son? Madam, I do not understand," said the earl, knitting his brows in perplexity.

"You have condemned him to transportation! And he is innocent—as innocent of the crime for which he is to suffer as the

angels in heaven," cried the woman, in passionate tones.

"Madam, I assure you, I do not understand. Who is your son?" said the earl, more and more perplexed.

"You know him as Germaine, but he is my son, Reginald—my only son! Oh, my lord! spare him! spare him!" wildly pleaded the gipsy queen.

"Madam, rise."

"Not until you have pardoned my son."

"That I will never do! Your son has been found guilty of wilful robbery, and has been very justly condemned. I can do nothing for him," said the earl, while his brow grew dark, and his mouth hard and stern.

"My lord, he is innocent!" almost shrieked the wretched woman at his feet.

"I do not believe it! He has been proven guilty," said the earl, coldly.

"It is false! as false as the black hearts of the perjurers who swore against him!" fiercely exclaimed the gipsy; "he is innocent of this crime, as innocent of it as thou art, lord earl. Oh, Earl De Courcy, as you hope for pardon from God, pardon him."

"Madam, I command you to rise."

"Never, never! while my son is in chains! Oh, my lord, you do not know, you never can dream, how I have loved that boy! I had no one else in the wide world to love; not a drop of kindred blood ran in any human heart but his; and I loved, I adored, I worshiped him! Oh, Earl De Courcy, I have suffered cold, and hunger, and thirst, and hardship, that he might never want; I have toiled for him night and day, that he might never feel pain; I have stooped to actions I loathed, that he might be happy and free from guilt. And, when he grew older, I gave him up, though it was like rending soul and body apart. I sent him away; I I sent him to school with the money that years and years of unceasing toil had enabled me to save. I sent him to be educated with gentlemen. I never came near him, lest any one should suspect his mother was a gipsy. Yes; I gave him up, though it was like tearing my very heart-strings apart, content in knowing he was happy, and in seeing him at a distance at long intervals. For twenty-three years, my life has been one long dream of him; sleeping or waking, in suffering and trial, the thought that he was near me gave me joy and strength. And now he is condemned for life—condemned to a far-off land, among convicts and felons, where I will never see him again! Oh, Lord De Courcy! mercy, mercy for my son!"

With the wild cry of a mother's agony, she shrieked out that frenzied appeal for mercy, and groveled prone to the floor at his feet.

A spasm of pain passed over the face of the earl, but he answered, sternly:

"Woman, your son is guilty. I cannot pardon him!"

"He is not guilty! Perish the soul so base as to believe such a falsehood of my high-hearted boy!" cried the gipsy, dashing fiercely back her wildly-streaming black hair. "He my proud, glorious, kindly-hearted Reginald, stoop to such a crime! Oh, sooner could the angels themselves be guilty of it than he!"

"Woman, you rave! Once again I tell you, rise!

"Pardon, pardon for my son!"

"Madam, I cannot. I pity you. Heaven knows I do! but he is guilty, and must suffer."

"Oh, my God! how shall I convince him?" cried the wretched woman, wringing her hands in wildest despair. "Oh, Earl De Courcy! you, too, have a son, handsome, gallant and noble, the pride of your old age, the last scion of your proud race! For his sake, for the sake of your son, pardon mine!"

"Once more I tell you, I cannot. Your son is condemned; to-morrow his sentence will be executed, and I have no power to avert it. And, madam, though I pity you deeply, I must again say he deserves it. Nay—hear me out. I know you do not believe it; you think him innocent, and, being his mother, it is natural you should think so; but, believe me, he is none the less guilty. Your son deserves his fate, all the more so for his ingratitude to you, after all you have done for him. I deeply pity you, as Heaven hears me, I do!"

"Oh, then, for my sake, if there is one spark of pity for me in your heart, do not kill me! For, Lord De Courcy, it will be a

double murder, his death and mine, if this sentence is executed."

"The law must take its course; I cannot prevent it. And once more, madam, I beseech you to rise. You should kneel to God alone."

"God would forgive him, had I pleaded to Him thus; but you, tiger-heart, *you* will not!" shrieked the woman, throwing up her arms in the impotence of her despair. "Oh, lord earl, I have never knelt to God or man before; and to have my petition spurned now! You hold my life in the hollow of your hand, and you will not grant it!"

"I tell you I cannot."

"You can—you can! It is in your power? You are great, and rich, and powerful, and can have his sentence annulled. By your soul's salvation, by your hopes of heaven, by your mother's grave, by Him whom you worship, I conjure you to save my son!"

The haggard face was convulsed; the brow was dark, and corrugated with agony; the lips white and quivering; the eyes wild, lurid, blazing with anguish and despair; her clenched hands upraised in passionate prayer for pardon. A fearful sight was that despair-maddened woman, as she knelt at the stern earl's feet, her very voice sharp with inward agony.

He shaded his eyes with his hands to keep out the pitiful sight; but his stern determined look passed not away. His face seemed hardened with iron, despite the deep pity of his heart.

"You are yielding! He will yet be saved! Oh, I knew the iron-heart would soften!" she cried out, with maniac exultation, taking hope from his silence.

"My poor woman, you deceive yourself. I can do nothing for your son," said the earl, sadly.

"What! Do you still refuse? Oh, it cannot be! I am going mad, I think! Tell me—tell me that my son will live!"

"Woman, I have no power over your son's life."

"Oh, you have—you have! Do you think he could live one single day among those with whom you would send him? As you hope for pardon on that last dread day, pardon my son!"

"It is all in vain. Rise, madam."

"You refuse?"

"I do. Rise!"

With the fearful bound of a wild beast, she sprung to her feet, and, awful in her rage, like a tigress robbed of her young, she stood before him. Even the stern earl drew back in dismay.

"Then, heart of steel, hear ME!" she cried, raising one long arm toward heaven, and speaking in a voice terrific in its very depth of despair. "Tiger-heart, listen to me! From this moment I vow, before God and all his angels, to devote my whole life to revenge on you! Living, may ruin, misery, and despair, equal to mine, be your portion; dead, may you never rest in the earth you sprung from! And, when standing before the judgment-seat of God, you sue for pardon, may He hurl your miserable soul back to perdition for an answer! May my curse descend to your children and children's children forever! May misery here and hereafter be their portion! May every earthly and eternal evil follow a wronged mother's curse!"

Appalled, horrified, the iron earl shrunk back from that awful, ghastly look, and that convulsive, terrific face—that face of a fiend, and not of mortal woman. A moment after, when he raised his head, he was alone, and the gipsy, Ketura, was gone. Whither?

CHAPTER V.

MOTHER AND SON.

"Oh, my son, Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! Would to God, I might die for thee! Oh! Absalom! my son, my son!"

That same night; that night of storm and tempest without, and still fiercer storm and tempest within; that same night—three hours later; in a narrow, dark, noisome cell, with grated window and iron-barred door, with a rude pallet of straw comprising the furniture, and one flickering, uncertain lamp lighting its tomb-like darkness, sat two young men.

One of these was a youth of three-and-twenty; tall and slender in form, with a dark, clear complexion; a strikingly-handsome face; a fierce, flashing eye of fire; thick, clustering curls of jet; a daring, reckless air, and an expression of mingled scorn, hatred, defiance and fierceness in his face. There were fetters on his slender wrists and ankles, and he wore the degrading dress of a condemned felon.

By his side sat Lord Ernest Villiers—his handsome face looking deeply sad and grave.

"And this is all, Germaine?" he said, sorrowfully. "Can I do nothing at all for you?"

"Nothing. What do you think I want? Is not the government, in its fatherly care, going to clothe, feed, and provide for me during the remainder of my mortal life? Why, man, do you think me unreasonable?"

He laughed a bitter, mocking laugh, terrible to hear.

"Germaine, Heaven knows, if I could do anything for you, I would!" said Lord Villiers, excitedly. "My father, like all the rest of the world, believes you guilty, and I can do nothing. But if it will be any consolation, remember that you leave one in England who still believes you innocent."

"Thank you, Villiers. There is another, too, who, I think, will hardly believe I have taken to petty pilfering, your father and the rest of the magnates of the land to the contrary, notwithstanding."

"Who is that, Germaine?"

"My mother."

"Where is she? Can I bring her to you?" said Lord Villiers, starting up.

"You are very kind; but it is not in your power to do so," said the prisoner, quietly. "My mother is probably in Yetholm with her tribe. You don't need to be told now I am a gipsy; my interesting family history was pretty generally made known at my trial."

Again he laughed that short, sarcastic laugh so sad to hear.

"My dear fellow, I think none the worse of you for that. Gipsy or Saxon, I cannot forget you once saved my life, and that you have for years been my best friend."

"Well, it is pleasant to know that there is one in the world who cares for me; and if I do die like a dog among my fellow-convicts, my last hour will be cheered by the thought," said the young man, drawing a deep breath. "If ever you see my mother, which is not likely, tell her I was grateful for all she did for me; you need not tell her I was innocent, for she will know that. There is another, too—"

He paused, and his dark face flushed, and then grew paler than before.

"My dear Germaine, if there is any message I can carry for you, you have only to command me," said the young lord, warmly.

"No; it is as well she should not know it—better, perhaps," muttered the prisoner, half to himself. "I thank you for your friendly kindness, Villiers; but it will not be necessary."

"And your mother, Germaine, how am I to know her?"

"Oh, I forgot! Well, she's called the gipsy Ketura, and is queen of her tribe. It is something to be a queen's son is it not?" he said, with another hard, short laugh.

"Ketura, did you say?" repeated Lord Villiers, in surprise.

"Yes. What has surprised you now?"

"Why, the simple fact that I saw her three hours ago."

"Saw her! Where?"

"At my father's house. She came to see him."

Germaine sprung up, and while his eyes fiercely flashed, he exclaimed:

"Came to see Lord De Courcy? My mother came to see him? Villiers, you do not mean to say that my mother came to beg for my life?"

"My dear fellow, I really do not know. The interview was a private one. All I do know is, that half an hour after my father returned among his guests, looking very much as if he had just seen a ghost. In fact, I never saw him with so startled a look in all my life before. Whether your mother had anything to do with it or not, I really cannot say."

"If I thought she could stoop to sue for me," exclaimed the youth, through his clenched teeth; "but no, my mother was too proud to do it. My poor, poor mother! How was she looking, Villiers?"

"Very haggard, very thin, very worn and wild; very wretched, in a word—though that was to be expected."

"Poor mother!" murmured the youth, with quivering lips, as he bowed his face in his manacled hands, and his manly chest rose and fell with strong emotion.

"My dear fellow," said Lord Villiers, with tears in his own eyes, "your mother shall never want while I live."

The prisoner wrung his hand in silence.

"If you like, I will try to discover her, and send her to you before you—"

His voice choked, and he stopped.

"My dear Villiers, you have indeed proven yourself my friend," said the convict, gratefully. "If you could see her, and send her to me before I leave England to-morrow, you would be conferring the greatest possible favor on me. There are several things of which I wish to speak to her, and which I cannot reveal to any one else—not even to you."

"Then I will instantly go in search of her," said Lord Villiers, rising and taking his hat. "My dear Germaine, good by."

"Farewell, Ernest. God bless you!"

The hand of the peer and the gipsy met in a strong clasp, but neither could speak.

And so they parted. The prison door closed between the convicted felon and his high-born friend. Did either dream how strangely they were destined to meet again? With his face shaded by his hand, the prisoner sat; that small white hand, delicate as a lady's, doomed now to the unceasing labor of the convict, when a noise as of persons in altercation in the passage without met his ears. He raised his head to listen, and recognized the gruff, hoarse voice of his jailer; then the sharp, passionate voice of a woman; and, lastly, the calm, clear tones of Lord Ernest Villiers. His words seemed to decide the matter; for the huge key turned in the rusty lock, the heavy door swung back on its hinges, and the tall form of gipsy Ketura passed into the cell.

"Mother!"

The prisoner started to his feet, and with a passionate cry: "Oh, my son! my son!" he was clasped in the arms of his mother—clasped and held there in a fierce embrace, as though she defied Heaven itself to tear them apart.

"Thank Heaven, mother, that I see you again!"

"Heaven!" she broke out, with passionate fierceness; "never mention it again! What is heaven, and God, and mercy, and happiness? All a mockery, and worse than a mockery!"

"My poor mother!"

"What have I done, that I should lose you!" she cried, with a still-increasing fierceness. "What crime have I committed, that I should be doomed to a hell upon earth? He was conceived in sin and born in iniquity, even as I was; yet the God you call upon permits him to live happy, rich, honored, and prosperous, while I—oh! it maddens me to think of it! But I will have revenge!"—she added, while her fierce eyes blazed, and her long, bony hand clenched—"yes, fearful revenge! If I am doomed to perdition, I shall drag him down along with me!"

"Mother! mother! Do not talk so! Be calm!"

"Calm! With these flames, like eternal fires, raging in my heart and brain? Oh, for the hour when his life-blood shall cool their blazing!"

"Mother, you are going mad!" said the young man, almost sternly. "Unless you are calm, we must part."

“Oh, yes! We will part to-morrow. You will go over the boundless sea with all the thieves, and murderers, and scum of London, and I—I will live for revenge. By-and-by you will kill yourself, and I will be hung for his murder.”

She laughed a dreary, cheerless laugh, while her eyes grew unnaturally bright with the fires of incipient insanity.

“Poor mother!” said the youth, sadly. “This is the hardest blow of all! Try and bear up, for my sake, mother. Did you see Lord De Courcy to-night?”

“I did. May Heaven’s heaviest curses light on him!” exclaimed the woman, passionately. “Oh! to think that he, that any man, should hold my son’s life in the hollow of his hand, while I am here, obliged to look on, powerless to avert the blow! May God’s worst vengeance light on him, here and hereafter!”

Her face was black with the terrific storm of inward passion; her eyes glaring, blazing, like those of a wild beast; her long, talon like fingers clenched until the nails sunk deep in the quivering flesh.

“Mother, did you stoop to sue for pardon for me tonight?” said the young man, while his brow contracted with a dark frown.

“Oh, I did! I did! I groveled at his feet. I cried, I shrieked, I adjured him to pardon you—I, who never knelt to God or man before—and he refused! I kissed the dust at his feet, and he replied by a cold refusal. But woe to thee, Earl De Courcy!” she cried, bounding to her feet, and dashing back her wild black hair. “Woe to thee, and all thy house! for it were safer to tamper with the lightning’s chain than with the aroused tigress Ketura.”

“Mother, nothing is gained by working yourself up to such a pitch of passion; you only beat the air with your breath. I am calm.”

“Yes, calm as a volcano on the verge of eruption,” she said, looking in his gleaming eyes and icy smile.

“And I am submissive, forbearing, and forgiving.”

“Yes, submissive as a crouching lion—forgiving as a tiger robbed of its young—forbearing as a serpent preparing to spring.”

He had awed her—even her, that raving maniac—into calm, by the cold, steely glitter of his dark eyes; by the quiet, chilling smile on his lip. In that fixed, iron, relentless look, she read a strong, determined purpose, relentless as death, or doom, or the grave; terrific in its very quiet, implacable in its very depth of calm, overtopping and surmounting her own.

“We understand each other, I think,” he said, quietly. “You perceive, mother, how utterly idle these mad threats and curses of yours are. They will effect nothing but to have you imprisoned as a dangerous lunatic; and it is necessary you should be free to fulfill my last bequest.”

Another mood had come over the dark, fierce woman while he spoke. The demoniac look of passion that had hitherto convulsed her face, gave way to one of despairing sorrow, and stretching out her arms, she passionately cried:

“Oh, my son! my only one! the darling of my old age! my sole earthly pride and hope! Oh, Reginald! would to God we had both died ere we had lived to see this day!”

It was the very agony of grief—the last passionate, despairing cry of a mother’s utmost woe, wrung fiercely from her tortured heart.

“My poor mother—my dear mother!” said the youth, with tears in his dark eyes, "do not give way to this wild grief. Who knows what the future may bring forth?”

She made no reply; but sat with both arms clasped round her knees—her dry, burning, tearless eyes glaring before her on vacancy.

“Do not despair, mother; we may yet meet again. Who knows?” he said, musingly, after a pause.

She turned her red, inflamed eyeballs on him in voiceless inquiry.

“There are such things as breaking chains and escaping, mother.”

Still that lurid, straining gaze, but no reply.

“And I, if it be in the power of man, I shall escape—I shall return, and then—”

He paused, but his eyes finished the sentence. Lucifer, taking his last look of heaven, might have worn just such a look—

so full of relentless hate, burning revenge, and undying defiance.

"You may come, but I will never live to see you," said the gipsy, in a voice so deep, hollow and unnatural, that it seemed issuing from a tomb.

"You will—you must, mother. I have a sacred trust to leave you, for which you must live," he said impetuously.

"A trust, my son?"

"Yes. One that will demand all your care for many years. You shall hear my story, mother. I would not trust any living being but you; but I can confide fearlessly in you."

"You have only to name your wishes, Reginald. Though I should have to wade through blood to fulfill them, fear not."

"Nothing so desperate will be required, mother. The less blood you have on your hands the better. My advice to you is, when I am gone, to return to Yetholm, and wait with patience for my return—for return I will, in spite of everything."

Her bloodshot eyes kindled fiercely with invincible determination as he spoke, but she said nothing.

"My story is a somewhat long one," he said, after a pause, during which a sad shadow had fallen on his handsome face; "but I suppose it is necessary I should tell you all. I thought never to reveal it to any human being; but I did not dream then of ever being a convicted felon, as I am now."

He had been sitting hitherto with his head resting on his hand; now he arose and began pacing to and fro his narrow cell, while the dark, stern woman, crouching in a distant corner like a dusky shadow, watched him with her eyes of fire, and prepared to listen.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHILD-WIFE.

"Oh, had we never, never met,
Or could this heart e'en now forget,
How linked, how blessed we might have been,
Had fate not frowned so dark between!"
—MOORE.

"Eight years ago, mother," began the prisoner, "I first entered Eton. Through your kindness, I was provided with money enough to enable me to mix on terms of equality in all things with the highest of its high-born students. No one dreamed I was a gipsy; they would as soon have thought of considering themselves one as me. I adopted the name of Reginald Germaine, and represented myself as the son of an exiled French count, and being by Nature gifted with a tolerable share of good looks, and any amount of cool assurance, I soon worked my way up above most of my titled compeers, and became ringleader and prime favorite with students and professors. They talk of good blood showing itself equally in men as in horses, mother. I don't know how that may be, but certain it is the gipsy's son equaled all, and was surpassed by none in college. In fencing, shooting, riding, boxing, rowing, I was as much at home as reading Virgil or translating Greek. If it is any consolation to you, mother, to know what an exceedingly talented son you have," he said, with a bitter smile, "all this will be very consoling to you—more especially as Latin, and Greek, and all the rest of my manifold accomplishments will be extremely necessary to me among my fellow-convicts in Van Dieman's Land. It is very probable I will establish an infant school for young thieves and pickpockets when the day's labor is over. I wonder if our kind, fatherly, far-seeing British government dreams what an incalculable treasure they possess in the person of Germaine, the convicted burglar!"

His bitter, jeering tone was terrible to hear; but the dark, burning glare of his fierce eyes was more terrible still. Oh, it *was* a dreadful fate to look forward to—a chained, manacled convict for life—and so unjustly condemned! With his fierce, gipsy blood, is it any wonder that every noble and generous feeling in his breast should turn to gall?

The dusky form crouching in the corner moved not, spoke not; but the inflamed eyes glared in the darkness like two red-hot coals.

"Well, mother, I was boasting of my cleverness when I interrupted myself—was I not?" he said, after a pause, during which he had been pacing, like a caged lion, up and down. "It is an exciting subject, you perceive; and if I get a little incoherent at times, you must only pass it over, and wait until I come to the point. That brief *exposé* of my standing in the school was necessary, after all, as it will help to show the sort of estimation I was held in. When the vacations came, numberless were the invitations I received to accompany my fellow-students home. Having no home of my own to go to, I need hardly say those invitations were invariably accepted. How the good people who so lavishly bestowed their hospitality upon me feel now, is a question not very hard to answer. I fancy I can see the looks of horror, amazement and outraged dignity that will fill some of those aristocratic mansions, when they learn that the dashing son and heir of the exiled Count Germaine, on whom they have condescended to smile so benignly, is no other than the convicted gipsy thief. It will be a regular farce to witness, mother."

He laughed, but the grim, shadowy face in the corner was as immovable as a figure in stone.

"Among the friends I made at Eton," he went on, "there was one—a fine, princely-hearted fellow about my own age—called Lord Everly. He was my 'fag' for a time, and, owing to a similarity of tastes and dispositions, we were soon inseparable friends, Wherever one was, there the other was sure to be, until we were nicknamed 'Damon and Pythias' by the rest. Of course, the first vacation after his coming, I received a pressing invitation to accompany him home; and, without requiring much coaxing, I went."

The young man paused, and a dark, earnest shadow passed over his fine face. When he again resumed, his voice was low and less bitter.

"I met my fate there, mother—the star of my destiny, that rose, for a few brief, fleeting moments, and then set forever for me. I was a hot-blooded, hot-headed, hotter-hearted boy of nineteen then, who followed the impulse of his own headstrong passions wherever they chose to lead, without ever stopping to *think.* At Everly Hall I met the cousin of my friend—one of the most perfectly beautiful creatures it has ever been my lot to see. Only fourteen years of age, she was so well-grown, and so superbly-proportioned, as to be, in looks, already a woman; and a woman's heart she already possessed. Her name, mother, it is not necessary to tell now. Suffice it to say, that name was one of the proudest of England's proud sons, and her family one of the highest and noblest in the land. She was at Everly Hall, spending her vacation, too, and daily we were thrown together. I had never loved before—never felt even those first moonlight-on-water affairs that most young men rave about. My nature is not one of those that love lightly; but it was as resistless, as impetuous, as fierce and consuming as a volcano's fire, when it came. Mother, I did not *love* that beautiful child-woman. Love! Pshaw! that is a cold word to express what I felt—every moonstruck youth prates about his *love*. No; I adored, I worshipped, I idolized her; the remembrance of who I was, of who *she* was—all were as walls of smoke before the impetuosity of that first consuming passion. The Everlys never dreamed—never, in the remotest degree, fancied—I, the son of an exiled count, could dare to lift my eyes to one whom a prince of the blood-royal might almost have wed without stooping. They had confidence in her, the proud daughter of a proud race, to think she would spurn me from her in contempt, did I dare to breathe my wild passion. But how little, in their cool, clear-headed calculations, did they dream that social position and worldly considerations were as a cobweb barrier before the impetuosity of first love!

"And so, secure in the difference between us in rank, the Everlys permitted their beautiful niece to ride, walk, dance and drive with the gay, agreeable son of the exiled Count Germaine. Oh! those long, breezy morning rides, over the sloping hills and wide lawns that environed the home of the Everlys! I can see her now, as side by side we rode homeward—I drinking in, until every sense was intoxicated, the bewildering draught of her beauty, as she sat on her coal-black pony, her dark riding-habit fluttering in the morning breeze; her cheek flushed with health and happiness; her brilliant eyes, more glorious to me than all the stars in heaven; her bright, black hair flashing back the radiant sunlight! Oh! those long, moonlight strolls, arm-in-arm, through the wilderness of roses, not half so beautiful as the queen-rose beside me, that bloomed in wild luxuriance in the gardens! Oh! those enchanting evenings, when, encircled by my arm, we kept time together to the delicious music of the voluptuous waltz. Then it was, there it was, that the gipsy youth wooed and won the high-born daughter of a princely race.

"For, mother, even as I loved her she loved me. No, not as I loved her—it was not in her nature to do that, but with all the passionate ardor of a first, strong passion. I had long known I was not indifferent to her; but when, one night, as I stood bending over her as she sat at the piano, and heard her stately lady-aunt whisper to a friend that, in a few more years, her 'lovely and accomplished niece' would become the bride of Lord Ernest Villiers, only son of Earl De Courcy,

all that had hitherto restrained me from telling that love was forgotten. I saw her start, and turn pale as she, too, heard and caught the quick, anxious glances she cast at me. All I felt at that moment must have been revealed in my face, for her eyes fell beneath mine, and the hot blood mounted to her very brow.

"'And you are engaged to another?' I said, in a tone of passionate reproach. 'Oh, why did I not know this?'

"'It is no engagement of my making,' she said, in a low, trembling voice. 'I never saw Lord Villiers, nor he me. Our fathers wish we should marry, that is all.'

"'And will you obey?' I said, in a thrilling whisper.

"'No,' she said, impulsively; 'never.'

"The look that accompanied the words made me forget all I had hitherto striven to remember. In an instant I was at her feet, pouring out my wild tale of passion; in another, she was in my arms, whispering the words that made me the happiest man on earth. It was well for us both the room was nearly deserted, and the corner where we were in deepest shadow, or the ecstasies into which, like all lovers, we went, would have led to somewhat unpleasant consequences. But our destinies had decreed we should, for the time, have things all our own way; and that night, wandering in the pale, solemn moonlight, I urged, with all the eloquence of a first, resistless passion, a secret marriage. I spoke of her father's compelling us to part; of his insisting on her marriage with one whom she could not love; I drew a touching description of myself, devoted to a life of solitude and misery, and probably ending by committing suicide—which melancholy picture so worked upon her fears, that I verily believe she would have fled with me to New South Wales, had I asked it. And so I pleaded, with all the ardor of a passion that was as strong and uncontrollable as it was selfish and exacting, until she promised, the following night, to steal secretly out and fly with me to where I was to have a clergyman in waiting, and then and there become my wife."

Once more he paused, and his fine eyes were full of bitter self-reproach now.

"Mother, that was the turning-point in my destiny. Looking back to that time now, I can wish I had been struck dead sooner than have hurried, as I did, that impulsive, warm-hearted girl into that fatal marriage. *Then,* in all the burning ardor of youth, I thought of nothing but the intoxicating happiness within my grasp; and had an angel from heaven pleaded for the postponement of my designs, I would have hurled a refusal back in his face. I thought only of the present—of the joy, too intense, almost, to be borne—and I steadily shut my eyes to the future. I knew she would loathe, hate, and despise me, if she ever discovered—as discover she must some day—how I had deceived her; for, with all her love for me, she inherited the pride and haughtiness of her noble house uncontaminated. Had she known who I really was, I know she would have considered me unworthy to touch even the hem of her garment.

"All that day she remained in her room; while I rode off to a neighboring town to engage a clergyman to unite us at the appointed hour. Midnight found me waiting, at the trysting-place; and true to the hour, my beautiful bride, brave in the strength of her love and woman's faith in my honor, met me there, alone; for I would have no attendants to share our confidence.

"Two horses stood waiting. I lifted her into the saddle, sprung upon my own horse; and away we dashed, at a break-neck pace, to consummate our own future misery. There was no time for words; but I strove to whisper of the happy days in store for us, as we rode along. She did not utter a word; but her face was whiter than that of the dead when I lifted her from the saddle and drew her with me into the church.

"The great aisles were dimly lighted by one solitary lamp, and by its light we beheld the clergyman, standing, in full canonicals, to sanction our mad marriage. Robed in a dark, flowing dress, with her white face looking out from her damp, flowing, midnight hair I can see her before me, as she stood there, shivering at intervals with a strange presaging of future evil.

"It was an ominous bridal, mother; for, as the last words died away, and we were pronounced man and wife, the harsh, dreadful croak of a raven resounded through the vast, dim church, and the ghostly bird of omen fluttered for a moment over our heads, and fell dead at our feet. Excited by the consciousness that she was doing wrong; the solemn, unlighted old church; the dread, mystic hour—all proved too much for my little child-wife, and with a piercing shriek, she fell fainting in my arms. Mother, the unutterable reproach of that wild agonizing cry will haunt me to my dying day."

No words can describe the bitterness of his tone, the undying self-reproach that filled his dark eyes, as he spoke.

"We bore her to the vestry; but it was long before she revived, and longer still before, with all the seductive eloquence

of passionate love, I could soothe her into quiet.

"'Oh, Reginald, I have done wrong!' was her sorrowful, remorseful cry to all I could say.

"We paid the clergyman, and rode home—the gipsy youth and the high born lady, united for life now by the mysterious tie of marriage. Now that the last, desperate step was taken, even I grew for a moment appalled at what I had done. But I did not repent. No; had it been again to do, I would have done it over a thousand times. I would have lost heaven sooner than her!

"Three weeks longer we continued inmates of Everly Hall; and no one ever suspected that we met other than as casual acquaintances. Looking back now on my past life, those are the only days of unalloyed sunshine I can remember in the whole course of my life; and she—she, too, closed her eyes to the future, and was for the time being perfectly happy.

"But the time came when we were forced to part. She went back to school, while I returned to London, I met her frequently, at first; but her father, after a time, began to think, perhaps, that, for the son of an exiled count, I was making too rapid progress in his daughter's affections, and peremptorily ordered her to discontinue the acquaintance. But she loved me well enough to disobey him; and though I saw she looked forward with undisguised terror to the time when the revelation of our marriage would be made we still continued to meet at long intervals.

"So a year passed. One day, wishing to consult her about something—I forget what—we met at an appointed trysting place. She entered the light chaise I had brought with me, and we drove off. The horses were half tamed things at best, and in the outskirts of a little village, several miles from the academy, they took fright at something, and started off like the wind. I strove in vain to check them. On they flew, like lightning, until suddenly coming in contact with a garden-fence, the chaise was overthrown, and we were both flung violently out.

"I heard a faint cry from my companion, and, unheeding: a broken arm, which was my share of the accident I managed to raise her from the ground, where she lay senseless, and bear her into the cottage. Fortunately, the cottage was owned by an old widow, to whom I had once rendered some slight service which secured her everlasting gratitude; and more fortunately still, my companion had received no injury from her fall, beyond a slight wound in the head.

"Leaving her in the care of the old woman, I went to the nearest surgeon, had my wounds dressed, and my horses disposed of until such times as we could resume our journey. Then I returned to the cottage; but found to my great alarm, that my wife, during my absence, had become seriously ill, and was raving in the wild delirium of a burning fever.

"There was no doctor in the village whose skill I could trust where her life was concerned; and, half-mad with terror and alarm, I sprung on horseback, and rode off to London for medical aid. But with all my haste, nearly twelve hours elapsed before I could return accompanied by a skillful though obscure physician, chosen by me because he was obscure, and never likely to meet her again.

"As I entered, the feeble wail of an infant struck on my ear; and the first object on which my eyes rested as I went in, was the old woman sitting with a babe in her arms, while the child-mother lay still unconscious, as I had left her.

"Mother, what I felt at that moment words can never disclose. Discovery now seemed inevitable. She must wake to the knowledge that he for whom she had given up everything was a gipsy; that her child bore in its veins the tainted gipsy blood. Disowned and despised by all her high-born friends, she would hate me for the irretrievable wrong I had done her; and to lose her was worse than death to me.

"The intense anguish and remorse I endured at that moment, might have atoned for a darker crime than mine. I had never felt so fully, before, the wrong I had done her; and with the knowledge of its full enormity, came the resolution of making all the atonement in my power.

"The doctor had pronounced her illness severe, but not dangerous; and said that with careful nursing she would soon be restored to health. When he was gone, I turned to the old woman, and inquired if she was willing to undertake the care of the child. The promise of being well paid made her readily answer in the affirmative; and then we concluded a bargain that she was to take care of the infant, and keep its existence a secret from every one, and, above all, from its mother. For I knew that she would never consent to give it up, and I was resolved that it should not be the means of dragging her down to poverty and disgrace. The woman was to keep it out of her sight while she remained, and tell her it had died, should she make any inquiries.

"During the next week, I scarcely ever left the cottage; and when she was sufficiently recovered to use a pen, she wrote a few lines to the principal of the academy, saying she had gone to visit a friend, and would not return for a fortnight, at

least. As she had ever been a petted child, accustomed to go and come unquestioned, her absence excited no surprise or suspicion; and secreted in the cottage, she remained for the next two weeks. How the old woman managed to conceal the child I know not; but certain it is, she did it.

"The time I had dreaded came at last. My better nature had awoke since the birth of my child; and I resolved to tell her all, cost what it might, and set her free. Mother, you can conceive the bitter humiliation such a confession must have been to me—yet I made it. I told her all; how basely I had deceived her; how deeply I had wronged her. In that moment, every spark of love she had ever felt for me was quenched forever in her majestic indignation, her scorn, and utter contempt. Silently she arose and confronted me, white as the dead, superb in her withering scorn, as far above me as the heavens from the earth. All the pride of her proud race swelled in her breast, in a loathing too deep and intense for words. But those steady, darkening eyes, that seemed scintillating sparks of fire, I will never forget.

"'Here we must part, then, Reginald Germaine; and on this earth we must never meet again!' she said, in a voice steady from its very depth of scorn. 'Of the matchless wrong you have done me, I will not speak; it is too late for that now. If one spark of the honor you once professed still lingers in your breast, be silent as regards the past. I ask no more. You have forever blighted my life; but the world need never know what we once were to each other. If money is any object'—and her beautiful lip curled with a contempt too intense for words—'you shall have half my wealth—the whole of it, if you will—if it only buys your silence. I will return to school, and try to forget the unutterable degradation into which I have sunk. You go your own way, and we are strangers from henceforth!'

"Mother! mother! such was our parting; in scorn and hatred on one side; in utter despair and undying remorse on the other. That day she returned to school; I fled, to drown thought in the maddening whirl and tumult of London; and we have never met since. She is unmarried still, and the reigning belle of every gilded salon in London; but I know she never will, never can, forget the abyss of humiliation into which I dragged her down. For her sake, to injure her happiness, I would willingly end this wretched existence, but that I must live for what is so dear to the gipsy heart—revenge! With all her lofty pride, what she will feel in knowing she is the wife of a convicted felon, God and her own heart alone will ever know."

He threw himself into a seat, and shading his face with his hands, sat silent; but the convulsive heaving of his strong chest, his short, hard breathing, told, more than words could ever do, what he felt at that moment. And still the dusky shadow in the duskier corner sat silently glaring upon him with those red, lurid eyes of flame.

"To tell you this story, to commit my child to your charge, I wished to see you to-night, mother," he said, at last, without looking up. "She does not dream of its existence; she was told it died the hour of its birth, and was buried while she was still unconscious. In this pocketbook you will find the address of the woman who keeps it; tell her the count—for as such she knows me—sent you for it. Take it with you to Yetholm, mother; try to think it is your son, Reginald, and forget the miserable convict whom you may never see more."

Still no reply, but oh, the fixed, burning gaze of those spectral eyes of fire!

"Mother, you must leave me now," he said, lifting his head, and looking sorrowfully in her rigid, haggard face; "for the few hours that are left me, I would like to be alone. It is better for us both that we part now."

"I will not go!" said a voice so hollow, so unnatural, that it seemed to issue from the jaws of death. "I will not go. I defy heaven and earth, and God himself, to tear me from you now."

"Mother, it is my wish," he said, calmly.

"Yours, Reginald?" she cried, in a voice of unutterable reproach. "You wish that I should leave you? For fifteen years I have given you up, and in one short hour you tire of me now. Oh, Reginald, my son! my son!"

No words can describe the piercing anguish, the utter woe, that rived that wild cry up from her tortured heart.

He came over, and laid his small, delicate hand on hers, hard, coarse, and black with sun, wind and toil.

"Listen to me, my mother!" And his low, calm, soothing tones were in strong contrast to her impassioned voice. "I am not tired of you—you wrong me by thinking so; but I have letters to write, and many matters to arrange before to-morrow's sun rises. I am tired, too, and want to rest; for it is a long time since sleep has visited my eyes, mother."

"Sleep," she bitterly echoed; "and when do you think I have slept. Look at these sunken eyes, this ghastly face, this haggard form, and ask when I have slept. Think of the mighty wrong I have suffered, and ask when I shall sleep again."

"My poor, unhappy mother!"

"*He* can sleep," she broke out, with a low, wild laugh. "Oh, yes! in his bed of down, with his princely son under the same roof, with menials to come at his beck, he can sleep. Yes, he sleeps now! but the hour comes when that sleep shall last forever! Then my eyes may close, but never before!"

"You are delirious, mother; this blow has turned your brain."

She rose to her feet, her tall, gaunt form looming up in the shadowy darkness; her wild black hair streaming disheveled down her back; her fierce eyes blazing with demoniacal light, one long, bony arm raised and pointing to heaven. Dark, fierce and stern, she looked like some dread priestess of doom, invoking the wrath of Heaven on the world.

"Delirious, am I?" she said, in her deep, bell-like tones, that echoed strangely in the silent cell. "If undying hate, if unresting vengeance, if revenge that will never be satiated but by his misery, be delirium, then I am mad. I leave you now, Reginald, such is your command; and remember, when far away, you leave one behind you who will wreak fearful vengeance for all we have both suffered."

"Mother, Lord De Courcy is not so much to blame after all, since he believes me guilty. I am not alarmed by your wild threats; for I know, in the course of time, this mad hate will grow less."

"Never—never!" she fiercely hissed through her clenched teeth. "May God forget me if I ever forget my vow! Reginald, if I thought that man could go to heaven, and I by some impossibility could be saved, too, I would take a dagger and send my soul to perdition, sooner than go there with him."

Upturned in the red light of the lamp, her face, as she spoke, was the face of a demon.

"Strong hate, stronger than death!" he said, half to himself, as he gazed on that fiendish face. "Farewell, then, mother. Will you fulfill my last request?"

"About your child?—yes."

"Thank you, dearest mother. If so lost a wretch as I am dare invoke Heaven, I would ask its blessings on you."

"Ask no blessing for me!" she fiercely broke in. "I would hurl it back in the face of the angels, did they offer it."

Folding her mantle around her, she knotted the handkerchief, that had fallen off, under her chin, and stood ready to depart. The young man went to the door, and knocked loudly. A moment after, the tramp of heavy feet was heard in the corridor approaching the door.

"It is the jailer to let you out. Once more, good-by, mother."

She was hard, and stern, and rigid now; and there were no tears in her dry, stony, burning eyes, as she turned to take a last farewell of the son she idolized—the son she might never see again. His eyes were dim, but her tears were turned to sparks of fire.

Without a word she pressed one hot, burning kiss on his handsome brow; and then the door opened, and she flitted out in the darkness like an evil shadow. The heavy door again swung to; the key turned in the lock; the son was alone in his condemned cell; and the maniac mother, out once more in the beating rain and chill night wind, was lost in the great wilderness of mighty London.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MOTHER'S DESPAIR.

"Go, when the hunter's hand hath wrung
From forest-cave her shrieking young,
And calm the lonely lioness—
But soothe not, mock not, my distress."

—Byron.

Away through the driving storm—through the deepening darkness of coming morn—through the long, bleak, gusty streets—through alleys, and courts, and lanes; whirled on like a leaf in the blast that knows not, cares not, whither it goes, sped the gipsy queen Ketura. There were not many abroad at that hour; but those she passed paused in terror, and gazed after the towering form, with the wild face and wilder eyes, that flew past like a lost soul returning to Hades. She stood on London bridge, and, leaning over, looked down on the black, sluggish waters beneath. Many lights were twinkling here and there upon the numerous barges rising and falling heavily on the long, lazy swell, but the river elsewhere lay wrapped in the blackness of Tartarus. One plunge, she thought, as she looked over, and all this gnawing misery that seems eating her very vitals might be ended forever. One hand was laid on the rail—the next moment she might have been in eternity; but with the rebound of a roused tigress she sprung back. Was it the thought of standing before the judgment-seat of God with all her crime on her soul—of the long eternity of misery that must follow—that appalled her? No, she would have laughed in scorn at these, but the remembrance of her vow, of her oath of vengeance, restrained her.

"No; I will live till I have wrung from his heart a tithe of the misery mine has felt," she thought; and then a dark, lowering glance on the black, troubled waters below filled up the hiatus.

Dusky forms, like shadows from the grave, were flitting to and fro, brushing past her as they went. Restlessly they flew on, as if under the friendly mantle of darkness alone they dared leave their dens. She knew who they were—the scum, the offcasts, the street-walkers of London; and she wondered vaguely, as she caught fitful glimpses of wild, pale faces, that gleamed for an instant in the light of the lamp, and then were gone, if any of them had ever felt anguish like to hers. While she stood clutching the parapet, a female form, in light, flowing garments, was borne on, as if by the night wind, and stood gazing down into the gloomy waters beside her. One fleeting glimpse she caught of a pale young face, beautiful still, despite its look of unutterable woe; and then, with a light rustle, something went down, far down, into the waves beneath. There was a sullen plunge, and the gipsy queen leaned over to see. By the light of one of the barge lamps she saw a darker shadow rise through the darkness to the surface. For an instant that white, wild face glared above the black bosom of the Thames, and then disappeared forever; and with a hard, bitter smile, terrible to see, the dark, dread woman turned away.

Away, again, through the labyrinth of the city, leaving that "Bridge of Sighs" far behind—away from the dark dens and filthy purlieus to the wider and more fashionable part of the town, sped the gipsy queen. There could be no rest for her this last sorrowful night; as if pursued by a haunting demon she fled on, as if she would escape from the insufferable misery that was gnawing at her heart; seeking for rest, and finding it not. Clutching her breast fiercely at intervals with her dark, horny fingers, as if she would tear thence the anguish that was driving her mad, she still flew on, until once again she found herself before the brilliantly lighted mansion of Earl De Courcy. Swelling on the night air, came borne to her ear strains of softest music, as if to mock her misery. Gay forms went flitting past the windows, and, at intervals, soft musical peals of laughter mingled with the louder sounds of gayety. Folding her arms over her breast, the gipsy leaned against a lamp-post, and looked, with a steady smile, up at the illuminated "marble hall" before her. Her commanding form, made more commanding by her free, fiery costume, stood out in bold relief, in the light of the street-lamp. Her dark face was set with a look fairly terrific in its intensity of hate. And that smile curling her thin, colorless lips—Satan himself might have envied her that demoniacal smile of unquenchable malignity!

Moving through his gorgeous rooms, Earl De Courcy dreamed not of the dark, vengeful glance that would, if it could, have pierced those solid walls of stone to seek him. And yet ever before him, to mar his festivity, would arise the haunting memory of that convulsed face, those distended eye-balls, those blanched lips, those upraised hands, pleading vainly for the mercy he could not grant. Amid all the glitter and gayety of the brilliant scene around him, he could not forget the pleadings of that strong heart in its strong agony. He thought little of her threats—of her maledictions; yet, when some hours later he missed his son from the gay scene, dark thoughts of assassination—of the unfailing subtle poisons gipsies were so skilful in, arose before him; and he shuddered with a vague presentiment of dread. But his son had returned safe; and now the stately old nobleman stood gayly chatting with a bevy of fair ladies, who clustered round him like so many gay, glittering, tropical butterflies.

"Oh! she was positively the most delightful old thing I ever saw!" exclaimed the gay voice of gay little Miss Clara Jernyngham. "Just like 'Hecate' in 'Macbeth,' for all the world—the very *beau ideal* of a delightful Satanic old sorceress! I would have given anything—my diamond ring, my French poodle, every single one of my lovers, or even a 'perfect love of a bonnet'—to have had her tell my fortune. I fairly dote on all those delightfully-mysterious, enchanting, ugly old gipsies who come poking round, stealing and telling fortunes. What in the world did she want of you, my lord?"

A shadow fell darkly over the brow of the earl for a moment, as he recollected that dark, impassioned woman pleading

for her only son; but it passed away as quickly as it came, and he answered, with a smile:

"To tell my fortune, of course, little bright-eyes. Am I not an enviable man?"

"And did she really tell it? Oh, how delightful! What did she say, my lord?"

"That I was to propose to Miss Clara Jernyngham, who was to say, 'With pleasure, my lord!'—that I was to indulge her with 'loves of bonnets' and French poodles to an unlimited extent—that—"

"Now, I don't believe a word of it," said Miss Clara, pouting, while a peal of silvery laughter arose from the rest. "I wouldn't be a mere countess at any price. I'll have a ducal coronet, if I die for it! You know the old Duke of B——, my lord!" she added, in a mysterious whisper. "Well, he is not quite right in his mind, poor man! and I am going to propose to him the very first chance! The family diamonds are superb, and I will become them beautifully, you know! This is strictly *entre nous*, though; and if you don't tell, my lord, you shall have an invitation to the wedding, and drink my health in his grace's old wine!"

And, with her pretty little face all dimpled with smiles, Miss Clara danced away to a window near, and, lifting the heavy curtains, peeped out.

The earl had bowed, and, with his hand on his heart, had promised, with befitting gravity, to preserve the young lady's secret inviolate, and was now turning away, when a sudden ejaculation from Miss Clara's rosy lips brought him again to her side.

"Oh, my lord! only look!" she cried, in a breathless whisper, pointing out. "There is that dark, dreadful gipsy we were talking of, herself. Only look at that awful face; it is positively enough to make one's blood run cold. Could she have heard us, do you think, my lord?"

At any other time, the gay little lady's undisguised terror would have amused the earl; but now, with that dark, stern, terrible face gleaming like a vision from the dead, in the fitful light of the street-lamp, he felt his very blood curdle. It rose before him so unexpectedly, as if she had risen from the earth to confront him, that even his strong heart grew for a moment appalled. Her tall form looming up unnaturally large in the uncertain light; her unsheltered head, on which the rain mercilessly beat; her steady, burning, unswerving gaze fixed on the very window where they stood—all combined, sent a thrill of terror, such as in all his life he had never felt before, to the very heart of the earl.

She saw them as they stood there; for by the brilliant jets of light, his imposing form was plainly revealed in the large window. Slowly, like an inspired sibyl of darkest doom, she raised one skinny hand, and, while her long, flickering finger pointed upward, her ominous gaze never for a single instant wandered from his face. So wild, so threatening was her look, that the shriek she had opened her mouth to utter, froze on little Miss Jernyngham's lips; and the earl, with a shudder, shaded his eyes with his hands to shut out the weird sight. One moment later, when he looked again, the dark, portentous vision was gone, and nothing met his eye but the slanting rain falling on the wet, glittering pavement.

Slowly and reluctantly, as though unwilling to go, the clouds of night rolled sullenly back, and morning, with dark, shrouded face and dismal fog, broke over London.

The crash, the din, the surging roar of busy life had commenced. The vast heart of the mighty Babel was throbbing with the unceasing stream of life. Men, looking like specters, in the thick, yellow fog, buttoned up in overcoats, and scowling at the weather, passed up and down the thronged thoroughfares. On the river, barges, yachts and boats ran against each other in the gloom, and curses, loud and deep, from hoarse throats, mingled with peals of gruff laughter, from crowds of rowdy urchins on the wharves, who, secure in their own safety, seemed hugely to enjoy the discomfiture of their fellow-heathens. The dark bosom of the sluggish Thames rose and fell calmly enough, telling no tales of all the misery, woe and shame hidden forever under its gloomy waves.

A large, black, dismal-looking ship lay moored to one of the docks, and a vast concourse of people were assembled to witness the crowd of convicts who were to be borne far away from "Merrie England" in her, that morning. Two-by-two they came, chained together hand and foot, like oxen; and the long, gloomy procession wound its tortuous way to the vessel's side, amid the laughter, scoffs and jeers of the crowd. Yet there were sad faces in that crowd, too—faces hard, rough and guilt-stained—that grew sorrowful as better men's might have grown, as some friend, son, husband or brother went by, straining their eyes to take a last look at the land they were leaving forever. Now and then, some fair young face scarcely past boyhood would pass in the felon gang—faces hard to associate with the idea of guilt; but most were dark, savage, morose men, with scowling eyes and guilt-hardened looks—men inured to crime from their very infancy, and paying crime's just penalty now.

At last came one who was greeted with an insulting cheer that rung to the very heavens. And "Hurrah! for the gentleman gipsy!" "Hurrah! hurrah! for the thief from Eton!" rung out again and again, until the welkin rung.

Proudly erect, with his fine head thrown back; his full, falcon eyes flashing with a scorn that made more than one scoffing gaze fall, walked the son of the gipsy queen.

Shout after shout of derision greeted him as he went on; for the rabble ever hate those who, belonging to their own class, raise themselves above them. But when a woman—a wild, haggard, despairing woman—rushed through the crowd, and greeted him with the passionate cry: "My son! oh, my son!—my son!" a silence like that of death fell over the vast throng. Unheeding all around her, the gipsy Ketura would have forced her way to his side; but she was held back by those who had charge of the convicts. And the dreary procession passed on its way.

All were on board at last; and the vessel, with a fair wind, was moving away from the wharf. The crowd was dispersing; and the officer, at last, who was guarding Ketura, moved away with the rest, casting a compassionate glance on the face white with woman's utmost woe.

Standing there, with straining eyeballs and clenched hands, the wretched woman watched the ship that bore away the son she so madly loved. A sort of desperate hope was in her heart; still, while it remained in sight, something might intervene to restore him yet. With parted lips and heaving breast, she stood there, as any other mother might stand, and watched the sods piled over her child's grave; and still she would not believe he had gone forever. At last the vessel disappeared; the last trace of her white sails were gone; and then, with a terrific shriek that those who heard might never forget, she threw up both arms, and fell, in strong convulsions, to the ground.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. TOOSYPEGS "TURNS UP" AGAIN.

"His looks do argue him replete with modesty."
—SHAKSPEARE.

"Why, Mr. Harkins, it ain't possible, now!" exclaimed a struggling, incredulous voice. "Just to think we should meet again after such a long time! I'm sure it's real surprising."

The speaker, a pale young man, with a profusion of light hair and freckles, and a gaudy hand carpet-bag, was taking a stroll on the classic banks of the Serpentine, when suddenly espying a short, plethoric, gruff-looking, masculine individual coming toward him, he made a sudden plunge at him, and grasped his hand with an energy that was quite startling.

The short individual addressed, with a wholesome distrust of London pickpockets before his eyes, raised a stout stick he carried, with the evident intention of trying the thickness of the pale young man's skull; but before it could come down, the proprietor of the freckles began, in a tone of mild expostulation:

"Why, Mr. Harkins, you haven't forgotten me—have you? Don't you recollect the young man you brought to London in your wagon one rainy night? Why, Mr. Harkins, I'm O. C. Toosypegs!" said the pale young man, in a slightly aggrieved tone.

"Why, so hit be!" exclaimed Mr. Harkins, brightening up, and lowering his formidable weapon. "Blessed! if you 'adn't gone clean hout my 'ead! Why, Mr. Toosypegs, this is the most surprisingest thing as ever was! I hain't seen you I don't care when!"

"I'm very much obliged to you, Mr. Harkins," said Mr. Toosypegs, gratefully. "I knew you'd be very glad to see me, and it's real kind of you to say so. I hope Mrs. Harkins and your infant family are all quite well, I thank you."

"Yes, they're hall among the middlin's" said Mr. Harkins, indifferently. "Mrs. Harkins 'as been and gone and 'ad the—what's this now?" said Mr. Harkins, pausing, with knit brows, and scratching his head in perplexity. "Blessed! if I hain't clean forgot the name, it was 'tongs,' No—yes—it was 'tongs,' hand something else."

"And poker," suggested Mr. Toosypegs, thoughtfully.

"Mr. Toosypegs," said Mr. Harkins, facing round fiercely, "I 'ope you don't mean for to hinsult a cove, do you?"

"Why, Mr. Harkins!" remonstrated the astonished and aggrieved Mr. Toosypegs. "I'm sure I never meant any such thing; I wouldn't insult you for all the world for—for—" Mr. Toosypegs paused for a figure of speech strong enough. "For any amount of money, Mr. Harkins," added Mr. Toosypegs, warmly.

"Well, it don't make no matter hif you did," said Mr. Harkins, cooling suddenly down. "But what has this Mrs. 'Arkins 'ad—tongs—tongs? Oh, yes! *tongs-will-eat-us!* that's the name, Mr. Toosypegs. Mrs. 'Arkins 'ad that," said Mr. Harkins, triumphantly.

"Tonsilitus, perhaps," insinuated Mr. Toosypegs, meekly.

"Well, hain't that wot I said?" exclaimed Mr. Harkins, rousing up again. "Hand my John Halbert, he's been and 'ad a Sarah Bell affection—"

"Cerebral," again ventured Mr. Toosypegs, humbly.

"Well, hain't that wot I said?" shouted Mr. Harkins, glaring savagely at the republican, who wilted suddenly down. "Blessed! if I hain't a good mind to bring you a clip 'long side the 'ead, for your imperence in conterdicting me like this 'ere hev'ry time? Why, you'd perwoke a saint, so you would!" exclaimed the outraged Mr. Harkins.

"Mr. Harkins, I'm sure I never meant to offend you, and I'm real sorry for your trouble," apologized Mr. Toosypegs, in a remorse-stricken tone.

"Well, it wasn't no trouble," said Mr. Harkins, testily. "'Cos he got took to the 'orsepittle for fear hany the rest hof the family would take it. Mary-Hann, she got her feet wet, and took the inn-flue-end-ways; whot yer got to say ag'in' that?" fiercely demanded Mr. Harkins.

Mr. Toosypegs, who had been muttering "influenza" to himself, and chuckling inwardly, as he thought how he could correct Mr. Harkins, in his own mind, in spite of him, was so completely overpowered by this bristling question, that the blood of conscious guilt rushed to his face, and Mr. O. C. Toosypegs stood blushing like a red cabbage.

"Because if you've got hanything to say ag'in hit," went on Mr. Harkins, pointing one stubby forefinger at society in general, "you 'ad better let hit hout for a little hexercise, that's all. Come now!"

"Mr. Harkins, it's very kind of you to give me permission, and I am very much obliged to you," said Mr. Toosypegs, looking severely at a small boy who had a hold of his coat-tails behind. "But I hadn't the remotest idea of saying anything, whatever, against it. I'm sure it's perfectly right and proper Mary Ann should have the influenza, if she wants to."

"Ah! I didn't know but what you might think she 'adn't," said Mr. Harkins blandly. "There wasn't hany tellin', you know, but what you might say a Hinglishman's 'ouse wasn't his castle, and he couldn't 'ave whatever he likes there. Well, the baby, he got the crook, which 'ad the meloncholic heffec' hof turning 'im perfectly black in the face."

Mr. Toosypegs, though inwardly surmising Mr. Harkins meant the croup, thought it a very likely effect to be brought about by either.

"Then Sary Jane took the brown skeeters, hand I 'ad the lum-beggar hin my hown back, but on the whole we were all pretty well, thanky!"

"I am real glad to hear it," said Mr. Toosypegs, with friendly warmth. "I've been pretty well myself since, too. I'm very much obliged to you."

"Let's see, it's near a month, hain't it, since the night I took you to London?" said Mr. Harkins.

"Three weeks and five days exactly," said Mr. Toosypegs, briskly.

"I suppose you don't disremember the hold gipsy has we took him that night—do you? 'I was a stranger hand you took me him.' That's in the Bible, Mr. Toosypegs," said Mr. Harkins, drawing down the corners of his mouth, and looking pious, and giving Mr. Toosypegs a dig in the ribs, to mark the beauty of the quotation.

"Yes, Mr. Harkins, but not so hard, if you please—it hurts," said Mr. Toosypegs, with tears in his eyes, as he rubbed the place.

“What does? that there piece hout the Bible?” said Mr. Harkins, with one of his sudden bursts of fierceness.

“Oh, Lor’, no!” said the deeply-scandalized Mr. Toosypegs, surprised into profanity by the enormity of the charge. “It’s your elbow, Mr. Harkins, it hurts,” said Mr. Toosypegs, with a subdued sniffle.

“Humph!” grunted Mr. Harkins; “well hit’s hof no squenceyance, but you don’t disremember the hold gipsy-woman we took in, do you?”

“The one with the black eyes and short frock? Oh, I remember her!” said Mr. Toosypegs. “I’ve never seen her since.”

“No, I shouldn’t s’pose you ’ad,” said Mr. Harkins, gruffly, “seein’ she’s as mad as a March ’are, down there with her tribe. Mysterious are the ways of Providence. You blamed little rascal! hif you do that again, I’ll chuck you inter the Serpentine! blessed hif I don’t.”

His last sentence, which began with a pious upturning of the whites, or rather the yellows, of Mr. Harkins’ eyes, was abruptly cut short by a depraved youth, who, turning a course of summersaults for the benefit of his constitution, rolled suddenly against Mr. Harkins’ shins, and the next instant found himself whimpering and rubbing a portion of his person, where Mr. Harkins had planted a well-applied kick.

“The way the principuls of perliteness is neglected to be hinstilled hinto the minds of youths now-a-days, is distressin’ to behold,” said Mr. Harkins, with a grimace of pain; “but has I was sayin’ habout the hold gipsy queen, she’s gone crazy, hand”—(here Mr. Harkins lowered his voice to a hoarse whisper)—“she’s went hand got a baby.”

“Do tell!” ejaculated Mr. Toosypegs, who saw it was expected of him to be surprised, and who consequently was, though he could not see any earthly reason for it.

“A baby,” went on Mr. Harkins, who would have emphasized his words by another dig in the ribs, but that Mr. Toosypegs dodged back in alarm; “a real baby, alive and kickin’!”

“Pshaw! it ain’t possible!” said Mr Toosypegs, in a voice betraying not the slightest particle of emotion.

“It is—hincredulous as it may sound, it’s true,” said Mr. Harkins, solemnly. “The way I found hit hout was this: I was comin’ halong ’ome, one night hafter bringing hoff a cove w’at got waylaid to Lunnon, a-singin’ to myself that there song, the ‘Roast Beef hof Hold Hingland,’ hand a-thinkin’ no more ’arm, Mr. Toosypegs, nor a lot hof young pigses goin’ to market,” said Mr. Harkins, giving his stick a grand flourish to mark this bold figure of speech. “It wasn’t a dark night, Mr. Toosypegs, nor yet a light one; the starses was a-shinin’ like heverything, when, hall hof a suddint, a ’and was laid hon the reins, hand a voice, so deep and orful-like hit made me fairly jump, said:

“‘Will you let me ride hin your vagging has far has you’re going?’

“I looked round, Mr. Toosypegs,” continued Mr. Harkins, in a husky whisper, “and there I see’d that there gipsy queen, lookin’ so dark, hand fierce, and wild-like, I nearly jumped clean hout the wagging. Blessed! if I wasn’t skeert! Just then I heerd a cry from a bundle she’d got in her arms, hand what do you think I saw, Mr. Toosypegs?”

The startling energy with which Mr. Harkins, carried away by the excitement of his story, asked this question, so discomposed the mild young man with the freckles, that he gave a sudden jump back, and glanced in terror at the narrator’s elbow.

“Really, Mr. Harkins, I don’t know, I’m sure,” said Mr. Toosypegs, grasping his carpet-bag, nervously.

“A baby!” said Mr. Harkins, in the same mysterious, husky whisper; “a baby, Mr. Toosypegs! Now, the question his, where did that there baby come from?”

Mr. Harkins gave his hat a slap on the crown, for emphasis, and, resting both hands on the top of his stick, came to a sudden halt, and looked Mr. Toosypegs severely in the face.

“A—really, Mr. Harkins—I—a—I hadn’t the remotest idea,” said Mr. Toosypegs, blushing to the very roots of his hair, “I hope you don’t suspect me—”

“Bah!” interrupted Mr. Harkins, with a look of disgust; “nobody never said nothin’ about you! Well, Mr. Toosypegs, I took her hin, has she hasked, and brought her along has far has my ’ouse, where Missus ’Arkins gave her something to eat for the little ’un, which was has fine a little fellow has you’d wish to see. Then she went hoff, and the next week we heard she’d gone and went crazy.”

“Poor thing. Why, I’m real sorry, Mr. Harkins. I dare say she was a real nice old lady, if she’d been let alone,” said Mr.

Toosypegs, in a tone of commiseration.

“Why, who tetched her?” said Mr. Harkins, testily.

“Well, they went and transported her son, and I’m sure it wasn’t right at all, when he did not want to go. She looked real put out about it that night, herself, too.”

“S’pose you heerd her son was drown-ded?”

“Yes; I saw it in the papers, and I was real sorry—I really was. Mr. Harkins, I dare say you was, too?”

Mr. Harkins grunted.

“All hands was lost, wasn’t they?” said Mr. Harkins, after a short pause.

“Yes; all hands and feet,” said Mr. Toosypegs, venturing on a weak joke; but, catching the stern look of Mr. Harkins, at this improper levity, he instantly grew serious again; “the ship struck against something—”

“A mermaid,” suggested Mr. Harkins.

“Mr. Harkins, I’m very much obliged to you, but it wasn’t a mermaid, it was a coral reef—that’s the name—and went to the bottom with all hands and the cook.”

“Which is a melancholic picture hof the treacherousness hof the hocean,” said Mr. Harkins, in a moralizing tone, “hand should be a severe warning to hall, when they steal, not to let themselves get tooken hup, lest they be tooken down a peg or two, hafter.”

“But you know, Mr. Harkins, it’s been found out since he wasn’t the one who stole the plate, at all. That man they arrested for murder, and are going to hang, confessed he did it. I’m sure you might have seen it in the papers, Mr. Harkins.”

“I don’t put no faith hin the papers myself,” said Mr. Harkins, in a severe tone; “they hain’t to be believed, none of ’em. Hif they says one thing, you may be sure hit’s just hexactly the tother. That there’s my opinion.”

“But, Mr. Harkins, look here,” said Mr. Toosypegs, deeply impressed with this profound view of the newspaper press, in general, “I dare say that’s true enough, and it’s real sensible of you to say so; but in this case it must be true. Why, they’re going to hang the man, Mr. Harkins, and he confessed he did that, along with ever so many other unlawful things. I wonder if hanging hurts much, Mr. Harkins?” said Mr. Toosypegs, involuntarily loosening his neck-cloth, as he thought of it.

“Well, I don’t know,” returned Mr. Harkins, thoughtfully, “I never was ’anged myself, but I had a cousin who married a vidder.” Here, Mr. Harkins, taking advantage of a moment’s unguarded proximity, gave Mr. Toosypegs a facetious dig in the ribs, which caused that ill-used young gentleman to spring back with something like a howl.

“You don’t know how sharp your elbow is, Mr. Harkins; and my ribs are real thin. I ain’t used to such treatment, and it hurts,” said Mr. Toosypegs, with whom this seemed to be the climax of wrong, and beyond which there was no proceeding further.

“I have heerd it was honly their shins as was tender hin Hamerica,” said Mr. Harkins. “When are you goin’ back to Hamerica, Mr. Toosypegs?”

“Not before a year—perhaps two,” said Mr. Toosypegs, brightening suddenly up. “And I tell you what, Mr. Harkins, America is a real nice place, and I’ll be ever so glad to get back to it. There was the nicest people round where we lived that ever was,” went on Mr. Toosypegs, getting enthusiastic. “There was Judge Lawless, up at Heath Hill; and old Admiral Havenful, at the White Squall, and lots of other folks. Where I lived was called Dismal Hollow, owing to its being encircled by huge black rocks on all sides, and a dark pine forest on the other.”

“Pleasant place it must ’ave been,” said Mr. Harkins, with a strong sneer.

“Well, it wasn’t so pleasant as you might think,” seriously replied Mr. Toosypegs, on whom his companion’s sarcasm was completely thrown away; “the sun never shone there; and as Dismal Creek, that run right before the house, got swelled up every time it rained, the house always made a point of getting flooded, and so we lived most of the time in the attic in the spring. There were runaway niggers in the woods, too, who used to steal and do a good many other nasty things, so it wasn’t safe to go out at night, but, on the whole, it was pretty pleasant.”

"Wot ever made you leave sich a nice place?" said Mr. Harkins, with a little suppressed chuckle.

"Why, Mr. Harkins, I may tell you as a friend, for I know you won't mention it again," said Mr. Toosypegs, lowering his voice to a deeply-confidential and strictly private cadence. "My pa died when I was a little shaver about so-year-old, and ma and I were pretty poor, to be candid about it. Well, then, three years ago my ma died, too, which was a serious affliction to me, Mr. Harkins, and I was left plunged in deepest sorrow and poverty. The niggers worked the farm, and I was employing my time in cultivating a pair of whiskers to alleviate my grief when I received a letter from an uncle here in England, telling me to come right on, and, if he liked me, he'd make me his heir when he died, which was real kind of him. That's what brought me here, Mr. Harkins; and I'm stopping with my uncle and his sister, who is an unmarried woman of forty-five, or so."

"Hand the hold chap's 'live yet?" inquired Mr. Harkins.

"Mr. Harkins, my uncle, I am happy to say, still exists," answered Mr. Toosypegs, gravely.

"Humph! 'As he got much pewter, Mr. Toosypegs?"

"Much what?" said the mild owner of the freckles, completely at a loss. "You'll excuse me, I hope, Mr. Harkins, but I really don't understand."

"Green," muttered Mr. Harkins, contemptuously to himself. Then aloud: "'Ow much do you think he'll leave you?"

"Well, about two thousand pounds or so," said Mr. Toosypegs, complacently.

"Two—thousand—poun'!" slowly articulated the astounded Mr. Harkins. "Oh, my heye!—w'y you'll be rich, Mr. Toosypegs! What will you do with all that there money?"

"Why, my aunt, Miss Priscilla Dorothea Toosypegs, and I are going home to Maryland (that's where I used to live, Mr. Harkins), and we're going to fit up the old place and live there. Aunt Priscilla never was in America, and wants to see it real bad."

"Two—thousand—poun'," still more slowly repeated Mr. Harkins. "Well, things is 'stonishing. Jest think hof me now, the honest and 'ard-working father of ten children, hand you won't catch nobody going hand dying hand leaving me one single blessed brass farden, while here's a cove more'n 'alf a hass. I say, Mr. Toosypegs, you wouldn't lend me a guinea or two, would you?" insinuated Mr. Harkins in his most incredulous voice.

"Why, certainly, Mr. Harkins," said Mr. Toosypegs, briskly, drawing out his purse. "I'm real happy to be able to be of service to you. Here's two guineas, and don't put yourself out about paying it."

"Mr. Toosypegs, you're a brick!" said Mr. Harkins, grasping his hand with emotion. "I won't put myself hout in the least, since you're kind enough to request it; but hif you'll come and dine with me some day, I'll give you a dinner of b'iled pertaters and roast honions fit for a king. Will you come?" urged Mr. Harkins, giving him a friendly poke with his fore-finger.

"Certainly I will, Mr. Harkins; and it's real kind in you to ask me," said Mr. Toosypegs, politely. "I see you're in a hurry, so I'll bid you good-day, now. Most certainly I'll come, Mr. Harkins. I'm very much obliged to you."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECRET REVEALED.

"I was so young—I loved him so—I had
No mother—God forgive me!—and I fell!"
BROWNING.

And how fell the news of Reginald Germaine's innocence of the crime for which he was condemned, and his sad end, on the other personages connected with our tale?

To his mother came the news in her far-off greenwood home; and as she heard he had perished forever in the stormy sea, Reason, already tottering in her half-crazed brain, entirely gave way, and she fled, a shrieking maniac, through the dim, old woods.

To Earl De Courcy it came in his stately home, to fill his heart with deepest sorrow and remorse. Hauntingly before him arose the agonized, despairing face of the lonely woman, as on that last night she had groveled at his feet, shrieking for that mercy he had refused. Proud, stern man as he was, no words can express the deep pity, the heartfelt sorrow he felt, as he thought of that lonely, despairing, childless woman, a wanderer over the wide world.

To Lord Ernest Villiers it came, bringing deepest regret for the bold-eyed, high-hearted youth, so unjustly condemned, so wrongly accused. He thought of him as he knew him first—proud, princely, handsome, and generous. And now! that young life, under the unjust sentence of the law, had passed away; that haughty head, noble even in its degradation, lay far under the deep sea, among the bleaching bones of those guilt-hardened men.

To one, in her father's castle halls, it came, bringing a feeling of untold relief. He had cruelly wronged her; but he was dead now, and she freely forgave him for all she had suffered. While he lived, incurable sorrow must be hers; but he was gone, and happy days might dawn for her yet. She might love another now, without feeling it a crime to do so—one noble and generous, and worthy of her in every way. One deep breath of relief, one low sigh to the memory of his sad fate, and then a look of calm, deep happiness stole over the beautiful face, such as it had not worn for years, and the beautiful head, with its wealth of raven ringlets, dropped on her arm, in a voiceless thanksgiving, in a joy too intense for words.

And this was Lady Maude Percy.

In spite of her steady refusal of his suit, Lord Villiers had not despaired. He could not understand the cause of her strange melancholy and persistent refusal of her hand, knowing, as he did, that she loved him, but, believing the obstacle to be merely an imaginary one, he hoped on, and waited for the time to come when this singular fancy of hers would be gone. That time had come now. Calling, one morning, and finding her in the drawing-room, he was greeted with a brilliant smile, with a quick flush of pleasure, and a manner so different from her customary one, that his heart bounded with sudden hope.

"I am truly rejoiced to see Lady Maude recovering her spirits again," he said, his fine eyes lit up with pleasure. "She has been shadowed by the dark cloud of her nameless melancholy long enough."

"If Lord Villiers only knew how much cause I had for that 'nameless melancholy,' he would forgive me any pain it may ever have caused him," she said, while a shadow of the past fell darkly over her bright young face.

"And may I not know? Dearest Maude, when is this mystery to end? Am I never to be made happy by the possession of this dear hand?"

He took the little, white hand, small and snowy as a lily-leaf, and it was no longer withdrawn, but nestled lovingly in his, as if there it found its rightful home.

"Maude, Maude!" he cried, in a delirium of joy, "is your dark dream, then, in reality over? Oh, Maude, speak, and tell me! Am I to be made happy yet?"

"If you can take me as I am, if you can forgive and forget the past, I am yours, Ernest!" she said, in a thrilling whisper.

In a moment she was in his arms, held to the true heart whose every throb was for her—her head upon the breast that was to pillow hers through life.

"Maude, Maude! My bride, my life, my peerless darling! Oh, Maude, this is too much happiness!" he cried, in a sort of transport between the passionate kisses pressed on her warm, yielding lips.

Blushingly she rose from his embrace, and gently extricated herself from his arms.

"Oh, Maude, my beautiful darling! May Heaven forever bless you for this!" he fervently exclaimed, all aglow with passionate love.

She had sunk into a seat, and bent her head into her hand, not daring to meet the full, falcon gaze, flashing with deepest tenderness, that she knew was bent upon her.

"Speak again, Maude! Once more let me hear those precious words from your own sweet lips, Maude! Maude, sweetest and fairest, speak!"

He wreathed his arms around her, while he seemed breathing out his very soul as he aspirated her name.

“But you have not heard all, my lord. This secret—do you not wish to hear it?” she faintly said, without lifting her dark, beautiful eyes.

“Not unless it is your wish to tell it. I want to hear nothing but that you are my own.”

“Yet, when you hear it, my lord, you may reject the hand I have offered.”

“Never, never! Nothing under heaven could make me do that!”

“You speak rashly, Lord Ernest. Wait until you have heard all. I dare not accept the noble heart and hand you offer, without revealing the one great error of my youth.”

“You commit error, my beautiful saint? You, who are as perfect in soul as in body. Oh, Maude, I cannot believe it.”

“It is true, nevertheless, my lord. But oh, how shall I tell you? How can I confess what I have been—what I am?”

There was a sharp agony in her voice, and her head dropped on her hands, and her fair bosom rose and fell like a tempest-tossed sea.

Encircling her with his arm, he drew her down until her white face lay hidden in his breast, and then pressing his lips to the dark ripples of hair sweeping against his cheek, he murmured, in tenderest whisper:

“Tell me now, Maude, and fear not; for nothing you can say will convince me you are not as pure and unsullied as the angels themselves. What is this terrible secret, sweetest love?”

“Oh, my dear lord, every word you speak, every caress you give me, makes my revelation the harder!” she passionately cried. “And yet it must be made, even though you should spurn me from you in loathing after. Listen, my lord. You think me Lady Maude Percy?”

“Yes, dear love.”

“That is not my name!”

“What, Maude?”

“That is not my name. No; I am not mad, Lord Villiers, though you look as if you thought so. I have been mad once! You and all the world are deceived. I am not what I seem.”

“What, in Heaven’s name do you mean? What then are you?”

“I was a wife! I have been a mother! I am a widow!”

“Maude!”

“You recoil from me in horror! I knew it would be so. I deserve it—I deserve it! but oh, Lord Villiers, it will kill me!” she cried, passionately wringing her hands.

“Maude, are you mad?”

“I am not—oh, I am not! if a grief-crazed brain, a blighted life, a broken heart be not madness.”

“But, Maude! Good heavens! You are so young—not yet eighteen! Oh, it cannot be true!” he cried, incoherently.

“Would to God it were not! Yet four years ago I was a wedded wife!”

“Wife, mother, and widow at eighteen! Maude, Maude, how can I realize this?”

“Oh, I was crazed! I was mad! and I did love him so, then! Not as I love you, Lord Ernest, with a woman’s strong, undying affection, but with the wild, passionate fervor of youth. I must have inherited my dead mother’s Spanish blood; for no calm-pulsed English girl ever felt love like that.”

“Oh, Lady Maude!—Lady Maude! I could hardly have believed a messenger from heaven had he told me this.”

“God be merciful to human error! A long life of sorrow and remorse must atone for that first rash fault.”

He was pacing up and down the long room with rapid, excited strides; his fine face flushed, and his hands tightly shut, as if to keep down the bitterness that rebelliously rose at this unlooked-for avowal. He had expected to hear some light, trivial fault, magnified by a morbid imagination; but not a clandestine marriage. No man likes to hear that the woman he

loves has ever loved another; and Lady Maud Percy had already seemed so angelic that this sudden "falling off" of his high ideal, brought with it a pang like the bitterness of death.

And therefore, pacing up and down—up and down, with brain and heart in a tumult—Lord Ernest Villiers' pride for one moment overcame and mastered his love. For one brief moment only—for then his eyes fell on the drooping figure and despair-bowed young head; and the anguished attitude went to his heart, bringing back a full tide of pity, love, and forgiveness. All was forgotten, but that she was the only one he ever did or could love; and lifting the sorrowing head and grief-bowed form in his arms, once more he clasped her closer to the manly young heart she could feel throbbing under her own, and whispered:

"My own life's darling still! Oh, Maude! if you must grieve, it shall be on my breast. If you have erred, so, too, have I—so have we all often. I will forget all but that you have promised my arms shall be your home forever!"

"And you forgive and love me still? Oh, Lord Ernest!" He kissed away her tears as she wept aloud.

"One thing more, dearest. Who was my Maude's first love!"

He felt a convulsive shiver run through the delicate form he held. He felt her breast heave and throb as if the name was struggling to leave it, and could not.

"Tell me, Maude, for I must know."

"Oh, saints in heaven! how can I? Oh, Lord Ernest! this humiliation is more than I can endure."

"Speak, Lady Maude! for I must know."

She lifted her eyes to his, full of unspeakable anguish, and then dropped her head heavily again; for in that fixed, grave, noble face, full of love and pity as it was, there was no yielding now.

"Tell me, Maude, who was the husband of your childhood?"

From the pale, quivering lip, in a dying whisper, dropped the words: "Reginald Germaine, the gipsy!"

There was a moment's death-like silence. The handsome face of Lord Ernest Villiers seemed turned to marble, and still motionless as if expiring, she lay in the arms that clasped her still in a close embrace. At last:

"Heaven be merciful to the dead! Look up, my precious Maude; for nothing on earth shall ever come between us more!"

Calm and clear, on the troubled wave of her tempest-tossed soul, the low words fell; but only her deep, convulsive sobs were his answer.

"Maude!—my own dear Maude!" he cried, at last, alarmed by her passion of grief, "cease this wild weeping. Forget the troubled past, dear love; for there are many happy days in store for us yet."

But still she wept on—wildly, vehemently, at first—until her strong passion of grief had passed away. He let her sob on in quiet now, with no attempt to check her grief, except by his silent caresses.

She lifted her head and looked up, at last, thanking him by a radiant look, and the soft, thrilling clasp of her white arms.

"I will not ask you to explain now, sweet Maude," he softly whispered. "Some other time, when you are more composed, you shall tell me all."

"No—no; better now—far better now; and then, while life lasts, neither you nor I, Ernest, will ever breathe one word of the dark sorrowful story again. Oh, Ernest! can all the fondest love of a lifetime suffice to repay you for the forgiveness you have shown me to-day?"

"I am more than repaid now, dear love. Speak of that no more. But now that the worst is over, will my Maude tell me all?"

"I have not much to tell, Ernest; but you shall hear it. Nearly three years before you and I met, when a child of fourteen, I was on a visit to my uncle Everly's. My cousin Hubert, home from college, brought with him a fellow-student to spend the vacation, who was presented to me as Count Germaine. What Reginald Germaine was then, you, who have seen him, do not need to know. Handsome, dashing, fascinating, he took every heart by storm, winning love by his gay, careless generosity, and respect by his talents and well-known daring. I was a dreamy, romantic school-girl; and in this bold, reckless boy, handsome as an angel, I saw the living embodiment of my most glorious ideal. From morning till night we were together; and, Ernest, can you understand that wild dream? How I loved him then, words are weak to express, how

I loathed and despised him after no words can ever tell. Ernest, he persuaded me to elope with him one night; and we were married. I never stopped to think of the consequences then. I only knew I would have given up my hopes of heaven for him! Three weeks longer he remained at Everly Hall; and then papa sent me back to school, and he went to London.

"No one was in our secret, and we met frequently, unsuspected; though papa, thinking he was too presuming, had forbidden me to associate with him. One day we went out driving; the carriage was upset; I fainted; and for a long time I remembered nothing more.

"When reason returned, I was in a little cottage, nursed by an old woman; while he hovered by my bedside night and day. Then I learned that I had given birth to a child—dead now and buried. I could recollect myself as people recollect things in a confused dream—of hearing for a time the feeble cries of an infant, and seeing a baby face, with the large, black, beautiful eyes of Reginald Germaine. I turned my face to the wall and wept, at first, in childish grief; but he caressed and soothed me, and I soon grew calm. I thought, at the time, a strange, unaccountable change had come over him; though I could not tell what. When I was well again I learned. Standing before me, one morning, he calmly and quietly told me how he had deceived me—that, instead of being a French count, he was the son of a strolling gipsy; but that, having repented of what he had done, he was willing to give me up.

"The very life seemed stricken out of my heart as I listened. Then my pride—the aroused pride of my race—arose; and, oh! words are weak to tell how I loathed myself and him. That I, a Percy—the daughter of a race that had mated with royalty hitherto—had fallen so low as to wed a gipsy! I shrunk, in horror unspeakable, from the black, bottomless quagmire into which I had sunk. All my love in that instant turned to bitterest scorn, and I passionately bade him leave me, and never dare to come near me again, or breathe a word of the past. He obeyed; and from that day I never beheld him more.

"After that, I met you, Lord Ernest, and I loved you as I never loved him. For him, I cherished a blind, mad passion; for you, I felt the strong, earnest love of womanhood. You loved me; but I shrunk from the affection my very soul was crying out for, knowing I dared not love you without guilt. Now you know the secret of my coldness and mysterious melancholy.

"I heard often of Germaine; and his name was like a spear-thrust to my heart. When I was told of his arrest, trial and condemnation for grand larceny, you perhaps may imagine, but I can never tell, exactly what I felt. His name was the theme of every tongue; and day after day I was forced to listen to the agonizing details, knowing—low as he had fallen, guilty as he might be—he was my husband still. Thank God! through all his ignominy, he had honor enough never to reveal our dark secret. Then came the news of his death; and Heaven forgive me if my heart bounded as I heard it!

"Oh, Lord Ernest! you were my first thought. I felt I could dare to love you now as you deserved to be loved, without sinning. I determined to tell you all, and to love you still, even though you spurned me from you forever. Oh, Ernest! my noble-hearted! may God forever bless you for forgiving me as you have done, and loving me still!"

Her voice ceased, but the dark, eloquent eyes were full of untold love—of love that could never die for all time.

"My own!—my own! never so well beloved as now! My Maude!—my bride!—my wife! blot out from the leaves of your life that dark page—that year of passion, of error, of sorrow and shame. We will never speak or think of it more, sweet Maude. Germaine has gone to answer for what he has done; if he has sinned while living, so also he has deeply suffered and sorrow-atoned for all. Fiery, passionate and impulsive, if he has wronged others, so also has he been deeply wronged. May God forgive him!"

"Amen," was the solemn response.

"And now, Maude, what need of further delay? When shall this dear hand be mine?"

"Whenever you claim it, dear Ernest. I shall have no will but yours now," she answered, with all a woman's devotion in her deep eyes, "I am yours—yours through life, and beyond death, if I may."

CHAPTER X.

THE VOICE OF COMING DOOM.

"They spake not a word.
But like dumb statues or breathless stones,
Stared on each other and looked deadly pale."
SHAKSPEARE.

"Oh! positively, your ladyship is looking perfectly dazzling! I never, no, *never* saw anybody half so beautiful in my life! Oh, Lady Kate! isn't she charming?" And little Miss Clara Jernyngham, in an outburst of enthusiasm, earnestly clasped her little white hands, flashing with jewels, together, and went off into a look of ecstasy wonderful to behold.

Lady Kate McGregor, the proud, dark-eyed daughter of an impoverished Scottish nobleman, smiled quietly as she replied:

"Lady Maude is always lovely, and like all brides, looks doubly so now. How many of the gentlemen will envy Lord Villiers to-night!"

"Yes, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Clara, earnestly. "I am quite sure if I was a man (which, thank the gods! I am not), I would be tempted to shoot him, or do something else equally dreadful, for carrying off the reigning belle! I really don't see how any man in his proper senses could help falling in love with Maude. And yet there's brother George, now, he takes it as coolly as—as—I don't know what." The usual fate of Miss Clara's similes.

Had Miss Jernyngham's eyes not been so earnestly fixed on a certain superb set of diamonds that lay on a dressing-table near, she might have seen a sudden flush in the dark, handsome face of Lady Kate as she spoke, and that the lace on her bosom fluttered perceptibly, as if with the beating of the heart beneath.

"So Captain Jernyngham does not care?" said Lady Kate, in a voice not quite steady.

"No," answered Miss Clara, her eyes dancing from the blinding river of diamond-light on the table to a magnificent bridal veil lying near—"no; which is a horrid proof of his insensibility. The fact is, George never was in love in his life, and never will be, so far as I can see. He will, most likely, die an old bachelor, if some rich heiress does not take pity on him, marry him, and pay his debts, before long. Did you see the Duke of B——this evening, though, Lady Kate? What a dear old creature it is! Going about shaking so, like a lot of *blanc mange*. I'm going to marry him some day, for the family diamonds. Worth while, eh?"

"Miss Jernyngham is herself the best judge of that," coldly replied Lady Kate, her handsome face growing proud and pale, as she listened to Miss Clara's speech about her brother.

"Really, Lady Maude, it's my duty to tell you you are looking perfectly bewildering to-night, as all brides should look. If Lord Villiers had never been in love with you before, he must certainly have fallen into that melancholy predicament this evening," said little Miss Clara, dancing off on a new tack. "This orange wreath and bridal veil are vastly becoming. I am sure no one would think you had been ill this morning, to look at you now."

It was a pleasant scene on which the light of the rose-shaded chandelier fell. The superbly-furnished dressing-room of Lady Maude Percy was all ablaze with numberless little jets of flame, which the immense mirrors magnified four-fold. Priceless jewels lay carelessly strewn about on the inlaid dressing-table, mingling with rare bouquets, laces, gloves, and tiny satin slippers, that would scarcely have fitted Cinderella herself. Lady Kate McGregor, proud and stately, in white satin, and point-lace, and pale, delicate pearls, stood leaning against the marble mantel, her handsome eyes growing cold and scornful whenever they rested on Miss Clara Jernyngham. That frivolous little lady, quite bewildering in the same snowy robes, was all unconscious of those icy glances, as she fluttered, like a butterfly over a rose, around another lady standing before a full-length mirror, while her maid arranged the mist-like bridal veil on her head, and set the orange wreath on her dark, shining curls.

It was Lady Maude Percy; and this was her bridal eve. Peerlessly lovely she looked as she stood there, with the light of a happy heart flushing her rounded cheeks, swelling her white bosom, and flashing from her dark, Syrian eyes. The bridal dress she wore was worth a duke's ransom. It fell around her like a summer cloud, three glistening folds of richest lace, so light, so gauzy, so brilliant, that it looked like a flashing mist. Diamonds that blinded the eyes with their insufferable light rose and fell on her white bosom with every tumultuous throb of the heart beneath. Like a floating cloud fell over all the bridal veil, and glittering above it rose the orange wreath of rarest jewels. There was a streaming light in her magnificent eyes, a living, glowing flush on her cheek, all unusual there; and little Miss Clara stood up and clasped her hands as she gazed in speechless admiration.

It was one month after the interview recorded in the last chapter. Lord Villiers, with a lover's impatience, would consent to wait no longer; and as Lady Maude had not opposed him, this day had been fixed. The marriage was to have taken place at St. George's, in the morning; but early that eventful day the bride had been seized with so severe a headache that she was unable to leave her room. Therefore, the ceremony had been necessarily delayed until the evening, when the august bishop of C—— himself was to come and perform the nuptial rite at the Percy mansion. Some were inclined to look upon this interruption in the light of an evil omen; but Lady Maude only smiled, and inwardly thought that, as his bride, nothing on earth could ever darken her life more. How little did she dream of the bitter cup of sorrow she was destined yet to drain to the dregs! How little did she dream of the dark, scathing, unresting revenge that hovered around her like a vulture waiting for its prey!

The old earl, her father, who was somewhat old-fashioned in his notions, and liked ancient customs kept up, had determined his daughter's bridal should be celebrated by the grandest ball of the season.

"I don't like this new-fangled way young people nowadays have, of getting married in the morning, coming home for a hasty breakfast, and then tearing off, post-haste, for France, or Germany, or somewhere, as if they wanted change of scene to reconcile them to what they have done," said the old gentleman, in strict confidence, to Lord De Courcy. "It wasn't so in my time. Then we had all our friends assembled, and enjoyed ourselves together over a bottle or two of old wine until morning. Ah! those were the days." And the old earl heaved a deep sigh, and looked ruefully at his gouty foot.

Resolving, therefore, to keep up those halcyon days at all hazards, the great saloons of the stately hall were thrown open, and now they were filled with the *elite* of the city, all waiting impatiently for the coming of the bride.

Lord Hugh De Courcy, suave, stately, courteous, and bland, was there, conversing with the father of the bride, and two or three of the most distinguished politicians of the day—his eyes now and then wandering from the faces of his friends, to rest proudly on the handsome form of his son, who, in the absence of Lady Maude, was the cynosure of all eyes, the "observed of all observers."

The venerable and high-salaried bishop, attended by several other "journeyman soul-savers," as Captain George Jernyngham irreverently called them, was there, too, in full pontificals, all ready, and waiting to tie the Gordian knot.

The rooms were filled with the low hum of conversation. There were waving of fans, and flirting of bouquets, and dropping of handkerchiefs, and rustling silks and satins, and flashing of jewels, and turning of many bright, impatient eyes towards the door where the bride and her attendants were presently expected to make their appearance. Ladies coquetted, and flirted, and turned masculine heads with brilliant smiles and entrancing glances, and gentlemen bowed and complimented, and talked all sorts of nonsense, just like gentlemen in general, and all things went "merry as a marriage-bell."

Standing by themselves, as when we first saw them, were Lord Ernest Villiers and his friend, Captain Jernyngham, of the Guards.

Handsome, stately, and noble, Lord Villiers always looked; but more so now than ever. What man does not look well when happy, faultless in costume, and about to be married to the woman he loves?

Captain Jernyngham, first groomsman, etc., was also looking remarkably well—a fact of which the young gentleman himself was well aware; and lounging in his usual listless attitude against a marble column, he languidly admired his aristocratically small foot in its shining boot.

"There are some men born to good luck, just as others are born to be hanged"—he was saying, with the air of a man delivering an oration—"born with a silver spoon in their mouths, to use a common, but rather incredible figure of speech. You, *mi lor* Villiers, are one of them; you were born above the power of Fortune—consequently, the toadying jade shows you a face all smiles, and gives the cold shoulder to poor devils like me, who really stand in need of her good graces. This world's a humbug! Virtuous poverty, illustrated in the person of Captain George Jernyngham, is snubbed and sent to Coventry, while potent, rich, and depraved youths like you are borne along on beds of roses. Yes, I repeat it, the world's a humbug! society's a nuisance! friendship's a word of two syllables found in dictionaries, nowhere else! and cigars, kid gloves and pale ale are the only things worth living for. There's an 'opinion as is an opinion.'"

"Oh, come now, Jernyngham! things are by no means so desperate as you would have me believe," said Lord Villiers, laughing. "Young, good-looking, and adored by the ladies, what more would you have?"

"Well, there is a vulgar prejudice existing in favor of bread and butter, and neither of the three items mentioned will

exactly supply me with that useful article. I intend trying the matrimonial dodge, some day, if I can pick up anything under fifty, with three or four thousand a year, who wants a nice youth to spend it for her."

"Love, of course, being out of the question."

"Love!" said the guardsman, contemptuously. "I lost all faith in that article since I was fourteen years old, when I fell in love with our cook, a young lady of six-and-thirty. My father forbade the banns; she ran off with a hump-backed chimney-sweep, and I awoke to the unpleasant consciousness that 'Love's young dream' was all bosh."

"And you have been heart whole ever since?"

"Well, I rather think so. I have felt a peculiar sensation under my vest-pocket now and then, when Kate McGregor's black eyes met mine. But pshaw! where's the use of talking? She's as poor as a church-mouse, and so am I; and, unless we should set up a chandler-shop, there would be a paragraph in the *Times* headed: 'Melancholy death by starvation. The bodies of an unfortune couple were found yesterday in the attic of a rickety, six-story house, and the coroner's inquest returned a verdict of "Death for want of something to eat." The unfortunate man was dressed in a pair of spurs and a military shako—having pawned the rest of his clothing, and held in his hand the jugular bone of a red herring half-devoured.' Not any, thank you!"

Captain George stroked his mustache complacently, while Lord Villiers laughed.

"A pleasant picture that! Well, I shouldn't wonder if it's what 'love in a cottage' often comes to."

A servant approached at this moment, and whispered something to Lord Villiers.

"The ladies are waiting, Jernyngham," he said hastily. "Call Howard, and come along."

He hastened out to the lofty hall, and at the foot of the grand staircase he was joined by Jernyngham and Howard, the second groomsman, Lord De Courcy, Earl Percy and a few other intimate family friends.

The bride and her attendants had already left her "maiden bower," and Lady Maude was met at the foot of the stairs by Lord Villiers, who drew her arm within his, and whispered, in a thrilling voice:

"My bride! my wife! my queen! my beautiful Maude! never so beautiful as now! Mine, mine forever!"

"Yes, yours forever!" she softly and earnestly said, looking up in his face with a joy too intense for smiles.

There was no time for further speech. Captain Jernyngham had drawn the willing hand of the proud Kate within his arm, and felt his heart throb in a most unaccountable manner beneath her light touch. Young Howard took possession of our gay Miss Clara, whose whole heart and soul was bent on the conquest she was about to make of that "dear, old thing," the Duke of B——, and the bridal *cortege* passed into the grand, flower-strewn saloon.

The company parted on either side as they advanced, and under the battery of many hundred eyes they approached the bishop. Book in hand, that reverend personage stood, patiently awaiting their coming, and looked approvingly over his spectacles at the beautiful bride and handsome, stately bridegroom as they stood up before him.

And then, amid the profoundest silence, the marriage ceremony was begun.

You might have heard a pin drop, so deep was the stillness that reigned—as every one held their breath to catch each word of that most interesting of rites—doubly interesting to ladies. Of the three standing before him, one heart was beating with a joy too deep and intense for words to tell. Lady Kate's handsome eyes stole quick glances now and then at the gay, young guardsman, as she thought, with a thrilling heart, how much she could love him, but for the humiliation of loving unsought. Little Miss Clara, with her head poised on one side, and her finger on her lip, was building a castle in Spain, where she saw herself blazing with "family diamonds," and addressed as "Duchess of B——." As for the gentlemen, I don't intend describing their sensation—never having been a gentleman myself (more's the pity!) but will leave it to the imagination of my readers.

The last "I will" had been uttered; and amid that breathless silence Ernest Seyton, Viscount Villiers, and Maude Percy were pronounced man and wife.

There was an instant's pause, and the guests were about to press forward to offer their congratulations, when pealing through the silence came an unseen voice, in clear, bell-like tones that thrilled every heart, with the words:

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life! My curse, and the curse of Heaven rest on all of the house of De Courcy!"

Blanched with wonder, horror and consternation, every face was turned in the direction whence the voice came; but nothing was to be seen. So sudden, so unlooked for was this awful interruption; so terrific was that deep, hollow voice, that the shrieks they would have uttered were frozen to the lips of the terrified women. And while they still stood speechless, horror-struck, gazing in silence, the deep, direful voice pealed again through the silent apartment like the knell of doom.

"As the rich man who stole the one ewe-lamb was accursed, so also be all who bear the name of De Courcy! May their bridal robes turn to funeral-palls! may their hours of rejoicing end in blackest misery! Blighted be their lives! doomed be all they love—hated by earth, and accursed by Heaven!"

The voice ceased. A wild shriek resounded through the room and the bride fell fainting on the ground.

In an instant all was confusion. Ladies shrieked and screamed; servants came rushing in; gentlemen, pale and horror-struck, hurried hither and thither in wildest confusion. All was uproar and dismay. Lord Villiers, with his senseless bride in his arms, was struggling to force his way from the room; and then high above the din resounded the clear, commanding voice of Earl De Courcy:

"Let all be quiet! There is no danger! Secure the doors, and look for the intruder. This is the trick of some evil-minded person to create a sensation."

His words broke the spell of superstitious terror that bound them. Every one flew to obey—guests, servants and all. Each room was searched—every corner and crevice was examined. If a pin had been lost, it must have been found; but they searched in vain. The owner of the mysterious voice could not be discovered.

Looking in each other's faces, white with wonder, they gave up the fruitless search, and returned to the saloon.

Like a flock of frightened birds, the ladies, pale with mortal apprehension, were huddled together—not daring even to speak. In brief, awe-struck whispers the result was told; and then, chill with apprehension, the guests began rapidly to disperse. And in less than an hour the stately house of Maude Percy was wrapt in silence, solitude and gloom. The bride, surrounded by her attendants, lay still unconscious, while all over London the news was spreading of the appalling termination of the wedding.

CHAPTER XI.

LITTLE ERMINIE.

"Sleep, little baby, sleep,
  Not in thy cradle bed,
Not on thy mother's breast,
  But with the quiet dead."
—Mrs. Southey.

Into the great dark gulf of the Past, nearly two years, like two waves from an ever-flowing sea, had vanished, freighted with their usual modicum of sorrow, joy, happiness, and despair.

And what changes had those two years brought to the various personages connected with our tale?

First, Mr. O. C. Toosypegs, in whom I hope my fair readers feel an interest, had closed the eyes of his rich uncle, pocketed two thousand pounds, attired himself in the very deepest weeds, and began to turn his thoughts toward Dismal Hollow, and all "the real nice people around there."

Miss Clara Jernyngham had obtained the desire of her heart at last, was "Her Grace of B.," and, blazing in "family diamonds," was toasted as one of the reigning beauties and belles of the London *haut ton*. As to that "dear old thing," the duke, the pretty little duchess troubled her head very little about him; and he was left at home, to amuse himself with alternate fits of the palsy and gout, and the other diseases old gentlemen are heir to.

Captain George Jernyngham had risen to the rank of colonel, now, having been promoted for his bravery in a certain action; and an old uncle, whom he had hardly heard of before, coming at the same time from the East Indies with an uncountable lot of money, and the liver disease, was accommodating enough to die in the nick of time, leaving all his wealth to our gay guardsman. These two strokes of good fortune enabled Master George to offer his hand, with a safe conscience, to handsome Lady Kate, which he did, without even hinting at such a thing as a chandler's shop. Lady Kate showed her good taste in the selection of a husband, by accepting him on the spot; and two weeks after, the *Times,* under the heading of "Marriage in High Life," announced the melancholy fact that Colonel Jernyngham was a bachelor no longer.

Of the gipsy Ketura, nothing was known. Now and then, at intervals, Earl De Courcy would catch a glimpse of a dark, wild face, with streaming hair, and hollow, sunken eyes, flitting after him like a haunting shadow from the grave. Wherever he went, night or day, that dusky, ominous shadow followed, dogging his steps like a sleuth-hound, until the dread of it grew to be a horror unspeakable—the vague, mysterious terror of his life. No precautions could rid him of it, until it became the very bane of his existence. If he walked, looking over his shoulder he would see that tall, spectral figure coming after; if he sat in his carriage, and it chanced to stop for a moment, a white, wild face, with great burning eyes, would gleam in upon him for an instant with deadly hate and menace in every feature, and then vanish like a face from the dead. Neither night or day was he safe from his terrible pursuer, until the dread of this ghostly ghoul wore the very flesh off his bones, reduced him to a mere living skeleton, poisoned every joy of his existence, made death and life a blank and a horror, until the birth of his little granddaughter. And the only tender feeling in his stony heart centered in her; she became the only thing that rendered life desirable. His love for the child amounted to idolatry; in its infant innocence and beauty, it seemed like a protecting angel between him and his terrible pursuer, lighting the gloom of that awful haunting shadow with the brightness of unseen wings.

The last cold gleam of yellow sunshine faded from the dull March sky. Night, with black, starless, moonless face, with cold, piercing wind and sleet, was falling over London.

The gorgeous rooms, the glittering salons, the spacious halls of the De Courcy mansion were one blaze of light and magnificence, just as they were that very night two years before—that awful night of darkest doom. By all but one that night was forgotten now; for a gay family-party were to meet to celebrate the first birthnight of Lord De Courcy's grandchild. Strange, that on the very anniversary of that dreadful night, another scion should be born to the house of De Courcy.

The guests had not yet begun to assemble; and standing by himself, wrapt in gloomy thought, the earl gazed darkly out into the deepening night. You would scarcely have known him, so changed had he grown by the blighting influence of that horrible incubus. Thin and haggard, with sunken eyes, projecting brows, snow-white hair and care-worn look, he stood the very shadow of his former self—a stricken, bowed, gloomy old man.

Through the inky darkness the rays from the street-lamp sent long lines of light and shade across the pavement. That very night, two years before, a face, white with woman's utmost woe, had gleamed upon him in that very light, as he stood in that self-same spot. He thought of it now with a convulsive shudder; and the flickering light seemed like a finger of blood-red flame pointing up to heaven, and invoking its wrath upon him. With an inward presentiment he looked through the darkness as if expecting that same dark, unearthly face to appear; and, lo! while he gazed, as if she had sprung up through the earth, a tall, shadowy figure emerged from the darkness, and that awful spectral face, he dreaded more than that of the arch fiend himself, gleamed white and awful through the gloom. She beheld him there in the light, and again that long, bony arm was raised, and that flickering finger pointed up to the lowering sky above, in darkest, voiceless menace. Then, flitting away in the darkness, to which she seemed to belong, the ghastly vision was gone, and Earl De Courcy stood frozen with horror to the spot, unable to speak or move.

At that same hour, a far pleasanter scene was going on in one of the rooms above.

It was the dressing-room of Lady Maude, into which we once before introduced the reader. Once again she stood before the mirror while her maid assisted at her toilet, and chatted with the little Duchess of B., who, magnificent in white velvet and emeralds, sat (or rather lay) half-buried in the downy depths of a lounge—having taken advantage of her girlhood's intimacy with Lady Maude to come early, and indulge in what she phrased the "sweetest of talks," before she should descend to the drawing-room, and begin her nightly occupation of breaking masculine hearts.

Very fair, very sweet, very lovely looked Lady Maude, as she stood there with a soft smile on her gentle lips, and a calm, deep joy welling from the brooding depths of her soft dark eyes.

Her dress was white, even as it had been that night—white blonde over white satin—with her favorite jewels (pale oriental pearls) wreathing her shining ringlets of jet, and fluttering and shimmering in sparks of subdued fire on her white arms and bosom. The lovely young face looking out from those silky curls was sweeter and fairer now in her gentle maturity than it had ever been in the brilliant beauty of her girlhood. Scarcely twenty, her form had not attained the roundness of perfect womanhood, but was slight and slender as a girl of fourteen, yet perfect in its elegant contour.

"And the baby is well?" the duchess was languidly saying, as she played with a beautiful little water-spaniel.

"Quite well, thank you," replied the low, sweet voice of Lady Maude, with her soft, musing smile.

"I need not ask for his lordship, for I saw him last night at the *bal masque* of Madame la Comtesse De St. Rimy!" said the duchess, with some animation. "He was looking quite kingly as 'Leicester.' By the way, Lady Maude, why were you not there?"

"Erminie seemed slightly indisposed, I fancied, and I would not leave her," answered the young mother.

"Is it possible? Well, I am very fond of children; but I do not think I could give up so brilliant an affair as last night's masquerade even for such a sweet little angel as Erminie. What do you think, I made a complete conquest of that handsome melancholy Turkish ambassador, who is all the rage now! I had him all to myself the whole evening!"

"Was his grace present?" said Lady Maude, a little gravely.

The question took the little duchess so much by surprise, that she raised herself on her elbow, opened her blue eyes to their widest extent, and stared in silence at her questioner. Then, seeing Lady Maude was quite serious, she lay back among the velvet pillows, and burst into a silvery peal of laughter.

"His grace! Oh, that is too good! Why, Lady Maude, the last time I saw the poor, dear, old man, which is a week or two ago, he could not stir either hand or foot, and had to be carried about by that odious Italian valet of his, in a chair, whenever he wanted to move. The dear, helpless old thing! he did look so old and so absurd, shaking all over with that disagreeable palsy of his, that I could not bear to go into his room since. My maid, Fanchette, always finds out how he is, and tells me. But the idea of his going to the masquerade! Oh, dear me!"

And the affectionate wife went off into another low, musical peal that made the pretty, soft-eyed water-spaniel shake his necklace of tiny silver bells from sympathy, till they tingled again.

Lady Maude looked as she felt—a little shocked—at this heartless levity; and madame la duchesse perceiving it, began:

"Now, Maude, there is no use in your looking so profoundly scandalized about it, because I have done nothing so very naughty. You don't expect me to go and shut myself up, and nurse him—do you? Though I dare say you, having the elements of a martyr in you, would do it just as soon as not!"

"I would not flirt with that Turkish ambassador, at all events!" said Lady Maude, in a tone of slight rebuke. "Have you not heard he has four wives already?"

"Perhaps he thinks I'll make a fifth some day!" said the duchess, laughing. "Well, I wouldn't mind much; he is handsome enough for anything. There! I knew I would shock you again. How saintly you have grown of late, Maude!"

"Oh, Clara!—Clara! what a mad little flirt you are!" said Lady Maude, half-smiling—half sorrowful.

"Well, you see it's my nature. What a love of a little dog this is! I made a *mariage de convenance*; and what other result could you anticipate? I married the Duke of B. for his coronet; he married me because he wanted some one to nurse him, and poultice up his constitution, and sit at the head of his table, and make herself generally useful. I got what I aimed at; and if he has not, it shows I am the better politician of the two. Stand upon your hind-legs, Prince! And, therefore, oh, wise and discreet Lady Villiers! model wife and happy mother, you must not expect one who is neither to do otherwise than as she does. If my sole earthly happiness consists in a 'coach-and-four,' superb diamonds, an unlimited number of lovers, and a box at the opera, why, I rather think I should be permitted to enjoy them, since I am really not a bad girl after all, and never mean to be. And now, as your toilet is completed, and I have made quite a long speech, will your ladyship be good enough to lead the way to the nursery? I want to see this little stray angel of yours before I descend among the sinners below."

Smiling, and passing her arm around the slender waist of the thoughtless little duchess, Lady Maude passed with her from the room, and the two young girls entered the nursery.

It was a beautiful room, all draped in white and pale-green, pure and peaceful as a glimpse of heaven. And in the center

of the room stood a little rosewood crib, with snowy hangings, wherein lay a young infant, so surpassingly lovely that the duchess might well call it a "stray angel."

Little Erminie—sweet Erminie—the child of noble, princely Lord Villiers and beautiful Maude Percy—how shall I describe her? It is not often young babies are really pretty—doting grandmammas and aunties to the contrary notwithstanding; but this one really was. A snow-white complexion, with the softest pink tinge on the rounded cheeks and lips, as faint and delicate as the heart of a sea-shell; a profusion of palest golden hair falling in slight, rippling waves, like raveled silk, on the white, rounded forehead. Two tiny blue-veined hands grasped, even in sleep, a pretty French doll, holding it close to the soft, white bosom, and the long, golden lashes lay brightly on the rosy, sleep-flushed cheeks.

The lovely face of Lady Maude flushed with pride, love and happiness; and bending down, softly as the west wind kisses the sleeping flowers, her lips touched the babe's.

Light as the caress was, it awoke little Erminie. The golden lashes slowly lifted, and a pair of sweet blue eyes looked fearlessly up.

"Mamma," she cried, joyfully, holding up her rosy little arms, "mamma, tate Minnie."

"Oh, the little darling!" exclaimed the duchess, catching her impulsively up, and half-smothering her with kisses. "Oh, did you ever see such a sweet little cherub? Oh, there never was such a lovely little angel! It's just the sweetest, dearest, b'essed, tidsy ickle sing that ever was, so it is!"

Baby, who evidently was an adept in broken English, and fully understood that profoundly-mysterious language known as "baby-talk," immediately, as if in reward for these exclamatory sentences, emphasized by the strongest italics, held up her rosy little mouth to be kissed again, being evidently (like all of her sex) fond of that operation.

"Oh, I never never, saw such a perfectly lovely little duck!" exclaimed the Duchess Clara, in a sudden burst of enthusiasm. "Such sweet hair, and such splendid eyes! Who does she look like, Maude? Not like you, I'm sure."

"She has her father's blue eyes and fair hair," said the happy young mother, smiling at Clara's emphasis, which rendered every other word not only into italics, but, in some cases, even into capitals.

"Oh, she is the most charming little ducks o' diamonds I ever beheld in my life! Such a beautiful skin, just like white satin!" reiterated the duchess, punctuating her remarks by a series of short, sharp little kisses, that made sweet Erminie open her large blue eyes in subdued wonder. "Oh, Maude! I don't wonder you are so saintly, with this little beautiful seraph ever with you! Sweet little angel Erminie! thou almost persuadest me to be a Christian!"

There was a soft tap at the door, and the nurse, who had hitherto remained in the back-ground, and listened with professional stoicism to these raptures, went and opened it; and Lord Villiers entered.

He started in some surprise, as he beheld how the room was tenanted, and then advanced with a smile. Lady Maude, with more than the adoring love of two years before, went over, and, laying her hand on his shoulder, said:

"Clara wanted to see Erminie before we descended to the drawing-room, dearest Ernest, and has fallen even more deeply in love with her than she has with the Turkish ambassador, the fortunate possessor of the interestingly melancholy dark eyes."

Lord Villiers smiled, and looked, with eyes full of love, on sweet Erminie, who sprung up, crowing gleefully, and crying, "Papa!"

"Wait one moment, till I see. Why, she's the very picture of your lordship! Keep still, little girl, till I compare you with your papa. There's the same large, blue, Saxon eyes; the same fair, curling hair; the same high, princely forehead; the same handsome mouth (no harm to compliment a married man—eh, Maude); the same long, aristocratic, white fingers—your very image, my lord!"

"I had rather she looked like Maude," said the young husband, encircling his wife's small waist fondly with his arm.

"Well, so she does when she smiles. Don't you perceive the resemblance now? Miss Erminie, will you be still? What a restless little creature it is."

"Papa, papa, tate Minnie," crowed that small individual, holding out her little arms, and looking pathetic and imploring.

"Here, papa, take the young lady," said the duchess, depositing her in the young man's arms, and shaking out her

glittering plumage, slightly discomposed by the frantic exertions of the "young lady" in question. "She is fonder of gentlemen than ladies, I perceive. She wouldn't be a true female, though, if she wasn't."

Miss Erminie, in a paroxysm of delight, immediately buried her "long, aristocratic, white fingers" in papa's thick burnished locks, with variations of pulling his whiskers and mustache and then tenderly kissing the above hirsute appendages to make them well again. And papa, like all other young papas, looked, as if he thought her the most wonderful baby that ever lived, and danced her up and down until she forgot all sense of etiquette and propriety, and fairly screamed with delight.

"Now, nurse, take Miss Minnie," he said, rising at last, and laughingly shaking back his thick, fair hair. "Come, Minnie, be good now; papa must go."

Still crowing as if she considered she had done something rather extraordinary than otherwise, Miss Minnie allowed herself to be taken by the nurse, and saw papa and mamma, and the little lady in velvet and diamonds, smile a good-bye, and turn to leave the room.

"Foolish little wife," said Lord Villiers, laughing, as he saw Lady Maude cast a "longing, lingering look behind" at her heart's treasure, "can you not even tear yourself away from your darling for a few hours, without straining your eyes to catch a last glimpse?"

"I know it is foolish," said Lady Maude, half-apologetically, yet still keeping her yearning eyes fixed on little Erminie; "but I feel so strangely about leaving her tonight. You will be sure to take good care of her, Martha?"

"Sartin, my lady," responded Martha, rather offended at their want of trust in her care.

"Now, Maude," said Lord Villiers, amused at her still-apparent anxiety.

Half-laughing, half-reluctant, she allowed herself to be drawn from the room, and saw the door close between her and her child.

Down in the spacious drawing-room, Lady Maude soon found herself fully occupied in receiving the guests, who began to arrive thick and fast. But this did not remove her strange anxiety concerning Erminie; and about an hour after, she stole away for a moment to pay a hurried visit to the nursery.

All was calm and peaceful there. Little Erminie lay asleep once more in her crib, and Martha sat dozing in her rocking-chair. Half ashamed of her groundless fears, Lady Maude lightly kissed her sleeping infant and hurried away. Little did she dream how many suns would rise and set—how many years would come and go—before they two should meet again.

The night in mirth and music was passing on, and the hour of midnight approached.

The Duchess of B., Earl De Courcy, and Lady Maude were standing conversing together, when, as if struck by a sudden thought, the duchess exclaimed:

"Oh! by the way, Lady Maude, do you recollect the strange voice that interrupted the ceremony the night you were married? Have you ever discovered who that was?"

Both Lady Maude and the earl grew pale.

"Never! The whole affair has been wrapped in mystery ever since," said Lady Maude, with a slight shudder.

"Dear me, how frightened I was that night!" said the duchess, arranging her bracelets. "It was quite dreadful; the most mysterious thing—just like a ghost, or something in a play."

The duchess broke off suddenly and listened, as the great hall-clock tolled the hour of twelve.

And just as the last stroke died away, that same terrific voice they had heard years before pealed through the spacious room like the deep tolling of a death-bell.

"Two years ago this night a legal murder was committed, and now the hour of retribution is at hand. The sins of the father shall be visited upon the children, and the children's children, even to the third and fourth generations. Woe to all the house of De Courcy."

As if the angel of death had suddenly descended in their midst, every face blanched, and every heart stood still with nameless horror. For one moment the silence of the grave reigned, then a wild, piercing shriek was heard through the

house, and the nurse Martha, with terror-blanched face, and uplifted arms, rushed into the midst of the assembled guests, screaming:

“Oh, Miss Minnie! Miss Minnie! Miss Minnie!”

“Oh, God! my child!” came from the white lips of Lady Maude, in a voice that those who heard never forgot, as she fled from the room, up the long staircase, and into the nursery.

But the crib was empty; the babe was gone.

The wild, wild shriek of a mother’s woe resounded through the house, and Lady Maude fell in a deadly swoon on the floor.

And when Lord Villiers—his own noble face white and set with unutterable anguish—burst into the room, he found her lying cold and lifeless on the floor.

Meantime, some of the most self-possessed of the guests had assembled round Martha, in order to extract from her, if possible, what had happened.

But half insane with terror already, the continuous screaming of the frightened ladies completely drove every remaining gleam of sense out of her head, and her words were so wild and incoherent, that but little could be made out of them. It appeared from what she said, that she had been sitting half asleep in her chair, with her little charge wholly asleep in the cradle beside her, when suddenly a tall, dark shadow seemed to obscure the light in the room; and looking up with a start of terror, she beheld the most awful monster—whether man, or woman, or demon, she could not tell—in the act of snatching little Erminie from the cradle, and flying from the room. Frozen with horror, she had remained in her seat unable to move, until at last, fully conscious of what had taken place, she had fled screaming down-stairs. And that was all she could tell. In vain they questioned and cross-questioned; they could obtain nothing further from the terrified Martha, and only succeeded in driving the few remaining wits she had, out of her head.

Lord Villiers, leaving his still-senseless wife in the care of her maid, with a face that seemed turned to marble, gave orders to have the house, the grounds, the whole of London, if necessary, ransacked in search of the abductor.

But there was one who sat bowed, collapsed, shuddering in his seat, who recognized that voice, and knew what those awful words meant; and that one was Earl De Courcy.

“She has murdered her! she has murdered her!” was the cry that seemed rending his very heart with horror and despair.

CHAPTER XII.

WOMAN’S HATE.

“Oh! woman wronged can cherish hate
  More deep and dark than manhood may;
And when the mockery of fate
  Hath left revenge her chosen way,
Then all the wrongs which time hath nursed
Upon her spoiler’s head shall burst,
And all her grief, and woe, and pain,
Burn fiercely on his heart and brain.”

—Whittier.

Maddened, despairing, blaspheming, cursing earth and heaven, God and man, hating life, and sunshine, and the world, the wretched gipsy queen had fled from those who gathered around her on that morning full of woe, and fled far away,

she neither knew nor cared whither.

She sped along through lanes, streets, and crowded thoroughfares, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, conscious of nothing but her own maddening wrongs, glaring before her like a maniac, and dashing fiercely to the ground with her clenched fist all those who, moved by pity, would have stopped her. On, like a bolt from a bow, until the city seemed to fade away, and she saw green fields, and pretty cottages, and waving trees, and knew that she had left London behind her.

Night came on before she thought of stopping for a single instant to rest. She had walked far that day; her feet were bleeding and blistered; for nearly three days she had touched nothing but cold water, yet her iron frame was unsubdued —she felt no weariness, no faintness, no hunger. The indomitable spirit within, sustained her. She thought of nothing, cared for nothing, but revenge; and for that her very soul was crying out with a longing—a hunger that nothing could appease. She dared not stop for one moment to think; she felt she would go mad if she did; so she hurried on and on, as if driven on by some fierce, inward power, against which it was useless to contend.

How the night passed, how the morning came, how she found herself in the peaceful depths of the forest, she never could tell. How, ere that sun set, she found herself with her tribe, lying prostrate on the cold ground, conscious, like one in the most frightful nightmare, of what was passing around her, yet unable to comprehend what it meant—all was vague and unreal still. Past, and present, and future, all were mingled together in one dark, dreadful chaos, of which nothing was real but the dull, muffled pain at her heart, and the word revenge, that kept ever dancing in letters of blood-red flame before her hot, scorching eyes.

She was conscious, in a lost, dreamy sort of way, that suns rose and set, and the insufferable light departed, and the dark, cool night came again and again; of seeing anxious eyes bent on her, and hearing hushed voices and subdued footfalls, and dusky, troubled faces stooping over her; but, like all the rest, it was a mocking unreality. The first shock of the blow had crushed and stunned her, numbing the sense of pain, and leaving nothing but the heavy throbbing aching at her strong, fierce heart. The woman of mighty frame, and fierce, stormy passions, lay there, motionless—stricken to the dust.

And then this departed, and another mood came.

One by one the broken links of memory returned, and then all other feelings were submerged and lost in a strong, deadly, burning desire of revenge—a revenge as fierce and undying as that of a tigress robbed of her cubs—a revenge as strong and unconquerable as the heart that bore it. With it came the recollection of his child; and drawing from her bosom the packet he had given her, she read (for gipsy as she was she could read) the woman's address. There were two motives to preserve life; and, like a lioness rousing herself from a lethargy, the gypsy queen arose, and resolutely set her face to the task. One determination she made, never to lose sight of him whom she hated, until her revenge was satiated. For she could wait—there would be no sudden stabbing or killing; she did not believe in such vengeance as that—vengeance that tortures its victim but for a moment. Revenge might be slow, but it would be sure—she would hunt him, pursue him, torture him, until life was worse than death, until he would look upon death as a mercy; then he would have felt a tithe of the misery he had made her endure.

Another determination was, to leave her son's child with the tribe until such time as she should again claim it. She knew it would be well cared for with them, for they all loved their queen. And taking with her a lad whom she could trust, she left them one morning, and started for the child.

Leaving the gypsy youth some miles from the place, she approached the cottage, which was opened by the widow herself, who looked considerably startled by her dark, stern visitor. In the briefest possible terms, Ketura made known her errand, and imperiously demanded the child.

The woman, a mild, gentle-looking person, seemed grieved and troubled, and began something about her affection for the little one, and her hope that it would not be taken away.

"I want the child!—bring it here!" broke in the gipsy, with a fiercely-impatient gesture.

The woman, terrified into silence by her dark, imperious visitor went to the door and called:

"Ray, Ray!"

"Here, Susan," answered a spirited young voice; and, with a gleeful laugh, a bright little fellow of three years bounded into the room, dragging after him, by the collar, a huge, savage-looking bulldog, who snapped fiercely at his captor.

The woman Susan uttered a scream, and fled from the dog to the other side of the room.

"I caught him, Susan, and pulled him in! He can't bite me!" said the little fellow, triumphantly, his black eyes flashing

with the consciousness of victory. Then, catching sight of the stranger, he stopped, and stared at her in silent wonder.

"He does beat all I ever seen—he bean't afeerd o' nothin'," said the woman, half-apologetically. "It be no fault o' mine, mistress; he will ha'e his own way, spite o' all I can say."

The gypsy fixed her piercing eyes keenly upon him, and started to behold the living counterpart of her own son when at the same age. There was the same clear olive complexion, with a warm, healthy flush on the cheeks and lips; the same bold, bright-black eyes, fringed by long silken lashes; the same high, noble brow; the same daring, undaunted, fearless spirit, flashing already in his young eyes. Her hard face softened for an instant; but when she saw the thick, curling black hair clustering round his head; noted the small, aristocratically fastidious mouth, the long, delicate hand, she knew he must have inherited them from his mother—and she grew dark and stern again. His smile, too, that lit up his beautiful face, and softened its dazzling splendor, was not his father's; but still he was sufficiently like him to bring a last ray of human feeling back to her iron heart.

"Little boy, come here," she said, holding out her hand.

Any other child would have been frightened by her odd dress, her harsh voice, and darkly-gleaming face; but he was not. It might be that, child as he was, he had an inherent liking for strength and power; or it might have been his kindred blood that drew him to her—for he fearlessly went over, put his hand in hers, and looked up in her face.

"What is your name?" she said, in a softer voice, as she parted his thick, silky curls, and looked down into the dark splendor of his eyes.

"Raymond Germaine," was his answer.

The gypsy looked at Susan.

"His father's name was Germaine," the woman hastened to explain, "and I called him Raymond because I saw R. G. on his father's handkerchief; and I thought maybe it might have been that."

"Very good. Will you come with me, Raymond?"

"If Susan lets me," answered the boy, looking at his foster-mother.

"She will let you," said the gipsy, calmly. "Get him ready instantly. I have no time to lose."

The woman, though looking deeply grieved and sorry, did not hesitate to obey, for there was something in the age of Ketura that might have made a bolder woman yield. So she dressed little Raymond in silence, made up the rest of his clothing in a bundle, kissed him, and said good-by amid many tears and sobs, and saw him depart with Ketura.

"Let me carry you—we have a long way to go," said the gipsy, stooping to lift him in her strong arms.

"I don't want to be carried. I'll walk," said Master Ray, kicking manfully.

The gipsy smiled a hard, grim smile.

"His father's spirit," she muttered. "I like it. We'll see how long he will hold out."

For nearly an hour the little hero trudged sturdily along, but at the end of that time his steps began to grow slow and weary.

"Ain't we most there?" he said, looking ruefully down the long muddy road.

"No; we're a long way off. You had better let me carry you."

With a somewhat sleepy look of mortification, Master Ray, permitted his grandmother to lift him up; and scarcely had she taken him in her arms, before his curly head dropped heavily on her shoulder, and he was fast asleep.

With the approach of night, feeling somewhat fatigued and footsore herself, she overtook our friend Mr. Harkins, who, as he related to Mr. Toosypegs, "took 'er hin," and brought her to his own house, where "Missis 'Arkins" regaled young Mr. Germaine with a supper of bread and milk, to which that small youth did ample justice.

Another hour brought her to the place where the gipsy boy was waiting, and to his care she consigned her still-sleeping grandson, with many injunctions that he was to be taken the best care of. These commands were, however, unnecessary; for, looking upon the sleeping child as the future king of his tribe, the lad bore him along as reverentially as though he were a prince of the blood-royal.

Then the gipsy queen, Ketura, giving up all other thoughts but that of vengeance, turned her steps in the direction of London, where, by fortune-telling, and the other arts of her people, she could live and never lose sight of her deadly foe.

Everything concerning the De Courcys she learned. She heard of the marriage of Lord Villiers to Lady Maude Percy; and on the night of the wedding she had entered, unobserved by all, in the bustle, and, screened from view behind a side-door, she had uttered the words that had thrown the whole assembly into such dismay. Then, knowing what must be the consequence, she had fled instantly, and was far from danger ere the terrified guests had recovered sufficient presence of mind to begin the search.

How after that she haunted, harassed, and followed the earl, is well-known to the reader, and the success of this course was sufficient even to satisfy her, implacable as she was. She saw that life was beginning to be slow torture to him—that his dread of her was amounting to a monomania with him; and still she pursued him, like some awful nightmare, wherever he went, keeping him still in view.

With the birth of little Erminie, she saw a still more exquisite torture in store for him. Her very soul bounded with the thought of the life-long misery she might heap upon him through the means of this child, whom she had heard he idolized. From the first moment she had heard of its birth, her determination was to steal it—to make 'way with it—murder it—anything—she did not care what, only something to make him feel what she had felt. She had been, for a time, delirious, when she first heard of her son's death: but that grief lasted but for a short time; and then she rejoiced—yes, actually rejoiced—that he was dead and free from all future earthly misery. Death would have been to her a relief, had she not been determined to live for revenge. She had lost a child—so should they; and then, perhaps, they would be able to comprehend the wrong they had made her suffer.

But in spite of all her attempts, a year passed and she had found no means of carrying this threat into execution. The baby was so seldom taken out, and then always in a carriage with its mother and the nurse, that it was impossible to think of obtaining it. To enter the house, except on the occasion of a ball, or party, when servants and all would be busily occupied, was not to be thought of, either. But on the night of the abduction, hearing of the party to be given at the mansion, and remembering that it was the anniversary of her son's death, she had been wrought up to a perfect frenzy of madness, and, resolved to obtain the child, even at the cost of her life.

Toward midnight, she had cautiously entered, thinking all were most likely to be in the drawing-rooms at that hour, and having previously heard from the servants, by apparently careless questions, where the nursery was situated, bent her steps in that direction. Pausing at the door, which was ajar, she had glanced through, and beheld child and nurse both asleep.

To steal cautiously in, snatch up the child, muffle it so tightly in her cloak that if it cried it could not be heard, and fly down the staircase, was but the work of an instant. Pausing, for an instant, before the door of the grand salon, in her fleet descent, she had boldly uttered her denunciation, and then, with the speed of the wind, had flown through the long hall, out of the door, and away through the wind and sleet, as if pursued by the arch-demon himself.

When she paused, at last, from exhaustion, she was on London Bridge. Darkly came back the memory of the night, just two years before, when, with deadly despair in her heart, she had stood in that self-same spot, on the point of committing self-murder. With a fierce impulse, she opened her cloak and lifted the half-smothered infant high above her head, to dash it into the dark waters below. For one moment she held it poised in the air, and then she drew it back.

"No," she said, with a fiendish smile; "it will be a greater revenge to let it live—to let it grow up a tainted, corrupted, miserable outcast; and then, when spurned alike by God and man, present it to them as their child. Ha! ha! ha! that *will* be revenge indeed! Live, pretty one—live! You are far too precious to die yet."

Awakened from her sound sleep by the unusual and unpleasant sensation of the bitter March storm beating in her face, little Erminie began to cry. Wrapping it once more in her thick mantle, the gipsy, knowing there was no time to lose, fled away in the direction of a low house in St. Giles, where, with others of her tribe, she had often been, and the proprietor of which was a gipsy himself, and a member of her own tribe. Here, safe from all pursuit, she could stay with the child until the first heat of the search was past, and then—then to begin her tortures once more.

Little Erminie grieved without ceasing for "mamma," at first, and seemed almost to know the difference between the miserable den wherein she was now located and the princely home she had left. It was not in any heart, however hard, to dislike the lovely infant; and much as Ketura hated the race from which she sprung, she really pitied the little, gentle, helpless babe. So, from two motives—one a feeling of commiseration for the child, and the other a fierce, demoniacal desire that she should live to be the instrument of her vengeance—she procured a nurse for little Erminie, a woman a

shade better than the rest of her class, who had lately lost a child of her own; and owing to her care, little Erminie lived. Lived—but for what fate?

CHAPTER XIII.

RETRIBUTION.

"Ay, think upon the cause—
Forget it not. When you lie down to rest,
Let it be black among your dreams; and when
The morn returns, so let it stand between
The sun and you, as an ill-omened cloud
Upon a summer-day of festival."
—BYRON.

A month passed. Night and day the search had been carried on; enormous rewards were offered; detectives were sent in every direction; but all in vain. No trace of the lost child was to be found.

Lady Maude had awoke from that deadly swoon, only to fall into another, and another, until her friends grew seriously alarmed for her life. From this, she sunk into a sort of low stupor; and for weeks, she lay still and motionless, unconscious of everything passing around her. White, frail, and shadowy, she lay, a breathing corpse, dead to the world and all it contained. She scarcely realized her loss, she felt like one who has received a heavy blow, stunning her for a time, and rendering her unable to comprehend the full extent of her loss. She received what they gave her in a passive sort of way, heard without understanding what they said, and watched them moving about from under her heavy eyelids without recognizing them. She did not even know her husband, who, the very shadow of his former self, gave up everything to remain by her bedside, night and day. They began to be alarmed for her reason, at last; but her physician said there was no danger—she would arouse from this dull, death-like lethargy, at last: they must only let nature have her way.

Earl De Courcy never left his room now. Feeling as if in some sort he was the cause of this awful calamity, he remained, day and night, in his chamber, a miserable, heart-broken, wretched old man.

Late one evening, early in May, as he sat bowed and collapsed in his chair, a servant entered to announce a stranger below, who earnestly desired to see his lordship.

"Is it a woman?" asked the earl, turning ghastly.

"No, my lord, a man, I think, wrapped in a long cloak, and with a hat slouched down over his face. He said he had something of the utmost importance to reveal to your lordship."

"Show him up," said the earl eagerly: while his heart gave a sudden bound, as he thought it might be some one with news of Erminie.

The next moment the door was thrown open, and a tall, dark figure, muffled in a cloak reaching to the ground, and with a hat pulled far over the face, entered, and stood silently confronting the earl.

"Well? Do you bring news of my son's child? Speak quickly, for God's sake, if you do!" said the earl, half rising in his eagerness.

Two fierce, black eyes, like living coals, glared at him from under the hat; but the tall stranger spoke not a word.

A deadly fear, like an iron hand, clutched the heart of the earl. That tall, motionless form; those glaring eyes; that ominous silence, made his very blood curdle. White and trembling, he fell back in his seat, for all his undaunted strength was gone now.

"Leave the room," said the stranger, in a deep, stern voice, turning to the servant, who stood gazing from one to the other.

The man vanished—the door closed. And Earl De Courcy was alone with his mysterious visitor, who still stood erect, towering and silent, before him.

"Man or devil, speak! With what evil purpose have you sought me to-night?" said the earl, at last finding voice.

Silently the stranger lifted his hat, and cast it on the floor. A mass of thick, streaming, black hair, on which, one wild March night, the pitiless rain had beat, fell over her shoulders. The long cloak was dropped off, and, stern, dark and menacing, he saw the lofty, commanding form, the fierce, black eyes, and dark, lowering brow of the wronged gipsy queen, Ketura, his relentless, implacable foe.

The last hue of life faded from the white face of the earl at the terrible sight; a horror unspeakable thrilled through his very soul. Twice he essayed to speak; his lips moved, but no sound came forth.

Silent, still, she stood before him, as rigid as a figure in bronze, her arms folded over her breast, her lips tightly compressed, every feature in perfect repose. You might have thought her some dark statue, but that life—burning life—was concentrated in those wild, dark eyes, that never for a single instant removed their uncompromising glare from his face.

So they stood for nearly five minutes, and then words came, at last, to the trembling lips of the earl.

"Dark, dreadful woman! what new crime have you come to perpetrate this night?"

"No crime, lord earl. I come to answer the questions you asked as I entered."

"Of the child? You have stolen it?" he wildly demanded.

Her malignant eyes were on him still; her arms were still folded over her breast; no feature had moved; but now a strange, inexplicable smile flickered round her thin lips, as she quickly answered:

"I have!"

"And, woman!—demon in woman's form! what wrong had that helpless babe done you?" he cried out, in passionate grief.

No change came over the set, dark face, as from the lips, still wreathed with that dreadful, ominous smile, slowly dropped the words:

"'The sins of the father shall be visited upon the children's children, even to the third and fourth generation. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life, saith the Lord of Hosts!'"

"Devil incarnate! blaspheme not! Oh, Heaven of heavens! how had you the heart to murder that child?"

"You had the heart, lord earl, to murder mine."

"I believed him guilty. You know I did! And she was an innocent babe, as pure from all guile as an angel from heaven."

"So was he, my lord. He was as free from that crime as that babe; and yet for it you took his life."

It was awful to hear her speak in that low, even voice, so unnaturally deep and calm. No pitch of passion could be half so terrific as that unearthly quiet.

"Devil!—fiend! you shall die for this!" he cried, madly springing up. "What ho! without there! Secure this hag of perdition before—"

A low, strangled gurgle finished the sentence; for, with the bound of a pythoness, she had sprung forward and grasped him by the throat. She had the strength of a giant. He was a weak, broken-down old man, as powerless in her strong, horny fingers as an infant.

He grew black in the face, his eyeballs projected, and he struggled, blindly and helplessly, to extricate himself. She laughed a low, jeering laugh at his ineffectual efforts, and said, insultingly, as she released him:

"Softly, softly, lord earl! such violent straining of your lungs is not good for your constitution. You are quite helpless in my hands, you perceive; and if you attempt to raise your voice in that unpleasant manner again, I shall be forced to give you a still more loving clutch next time. Your best policy is, to keep as quiet as possible just now."

He ground his teeth in impotent fury, as he gasped for breath.

"Besides, you take things for granted too easily, my lord. What proof have you that I am a murderess? You are, and in the

sight of God; but that is not saying I am!"

"Oh, woman! guilty, blood-stained fiendess! your own words confirm it!" he passionately cried out.

"Gently, my lord, gently! Have you heard me say I murdered her?"

"You did not deny it."

"That is negative proof, very unsubstantial, as you evidently know, although you found it sufficient to condemn my son!"

"You are too much of a demon to spare her innocent life one moment when in your power. Oh, I know—I know she is dead! Dear little angel! Sweet, helpless little Erminie!"

He almost lost his dread of her in his passion of grief. His chest heaved as he buried his face in his hands, and something like a convulsive sob shook his frame. "Talk not of grief till thou hast seen the tears of stern-browed men."

But the woman felt no remorse. No; an exultant sense of triumph—a fiendish joy filled her heart, at the proof of what she had made him suffer. She had still a fiercer pang in store for him; and waiting till he had lifted his pale face again, she began, in a low, mocking voice:

"And thinkest thou, oh, Lord De Courcy, there is no darker doom than death? Do you think vengeance such as mine is to be sated by such paltry revenge as that? Pshaw, man! You are only a novice in the art of torture, I see; though you commenced a dangerous game when you practiced first on me. Why, if I had slain her, that would have been momentary revenge, and fifty thousand lives such as hers could not sate mine. Other children might be born, years would pass, and she, in course of time, would be almost forgotten. No, my lord; such vengeance as that would never satisfy the gipsy Ketura!"

"Saints in heaven! Am I sane or mad? Oh, woman, woman! speak, and tell me truly. Does the child yet live?"

"It does!"

"Thank God! Oh, bless God for that!" he cried, passionately, while tears of joy fell fast from his eyes.

The same evil, sinister smile curled the lips of the gipsy.

"What a fool the man is!" she said, bitterly, "thanking God that her life is spared, when she will yet live to curse the hour she was born. Oh, man! can you comprehend the depths of a gipsy's hate—you, with your cold, sluggish Northern blood? Yes; she shall live; but it will be for a doom so dark that even the fiends themselves will shudder to hear it; she will live to invoke death as a blessing, and yet will not dare to die! And then I will return your Erminie to her doting grandsire, a thing so foul and polluted that the very earth will refuse her a grave. Then, Lord De Courcy, my revenge will be complete!"

His hands dropped from his face as if he had been stricken with sudden death; the sight seemed leaving his eyes; the very life seemed palsied in his heart. He was conscious, for one dizzy moment, of nothing but of the blasting sight of that terrific woman, who, with her flaming eyes piercing him like two drawn stilettoes, towered there above him, like a vision from the infernal regions.

She was calm still; that terrible, exultant smile had not left her lips; but he would sooner have seen her foaming with passion than as she looked at that moment, standing there.

"This is our second interview, lord earl," she said, while he sat speechless. "The first time I pleaded on my knees to you, and you spurned me from you as if I had been a dog. This time it should be your turn to plead; for you have almost as much at stake as I had then. If you do not choose to do so, that is your affair, not mine. The third time—when it comes—you will have realized what a gipsy's revenge is like."

"Oh, woman! if there be one spark of human nature in your savage breast, for God's sake, spare that child!" cried the earl, wrought up to a perfect agony by her words.

She stepped back a pace, and looked at him for an instant in silence. At last:

"I pleaded to you on my knees," she said, with an icy smile.

Her words gave him hope. The proud man fell on his knees before her, and held up his clasped hands in supplication. The high born Earl De Courcy knelt in wildest agony at the feet of the outcast gipsy!

Her hour of triumph had come. Folding her arms over her breast, she looked down upon him as he knelt there, with a

look no words can ever describe.

“Spare her—spare her! For God’s sake, spare that child!”

There was no reply. Erect, rigid and moveless as a figure in stone, she stood, looking down upon him with her blazing eyes.

“Slay her, if you will; let her go to heaven guileless and unstained—anything rather than the doom you have destined for her!”

Still no reply. With that triumphant smile—a smile such as Satan himself might have worn—she looked steadily and quietly down at the man at her feet.

“Besides, you dare not keep her!” he said, gathering courage from her silence; fancying, perhaps, it was a sign of relenting. “The officers of the law would find you out; and a worse fate than your son’s would be yours.”

It was an unfortunate allusion. Her brow grew black as a thunder-cloud; but she only laughed scornfully.

“Find me?” she repeated. “Yes, if they can find last year’s snow, last year’s partridges, or last summer’s rain. Let them find me. Why, if it came to that, I could dash its brains out in one instant, before its very mother’s eyes.”

“Oh, worst of fiends! does there linger a human heart in your body?”

“No; it turned to stone the night I groveled in vain at your feet.”

“Take any other revenge you like; haunt me, pursue me, as you will, but restore that child! She never injured you; if there is guilt anywhere, it rests on my head. Let me, therefore, suffer, and give back the child.”

She smiled in silence.

“You will relent; you are a woman, and not a devil. Consent to what I ask, and if wealth be any object, you shall have the half—the whole of my fortune. Tell me you consent, and all I have in the world, together with my everlasting gratitude, will be yours.”

“You should have thought of this the night you refused to grant my prayer, my lord. Will your wealth and ‘every-lasting gratitude’ restore my son from the dead?”

“God knows, were it in my power, I would willingly give my life to restore him and cancel the past. All that remains for me to do I will do, if you restore the child.”

“Lord earl, when I knelt to you, you commanded me to get up. It is my turn now. You have been sufficiently humiliated, even to satisfy me. Rise!”

He rose, and stood before her, so faint with many emotions that he was obliged to grasp the chair for support.

“You will restore her?” he breathlessly asked.

“Never, so help me God; till my vow is fulfilled! Palsied be my heart, if it ever relents! Withered be my hand, if it ever confers a boon on you or one of your house! Blighted be my tongue, if it ever heap but curses on you! Doomed be my soul, if it ever forgives you for what you have done! Once again, lord earl, we are to meet, and then, beware!”

The last words were uttered with a maniac shriek, as she turned and fled from the room. There was a heavy fall; and the servants, rushing in in terror, found Earl De Courcy lying on the floor, with a dark stream of blood flowing from his mouth. They raised him up, but they were too late. He had ruptured an artery of the heart; and with the clotted gore still foaming around his lips, he lay there before them, stark and dead!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW HOME.

“Yellow sheaves from rich Ceres the cottage had crowned,
Green rushes were strewed on the floor;

The casements sweet woodbine crept wantonly round,
And decked the sod-seats at the door."
—CUNNINGHAM.

With that last terrible denunciation on her lips, Ketura had fled from the room, from the house, out into the night.

Half delirious with mingled triumph, fiendish joy, and the pitch of passion into which she had wrought herself, she walked with rapid, excited strides along, heedless of whither she went, until she suddenly ran with stunning force against another pedestrian who was coming toward her.

The force of the concussion sent the unfortunate individual sprawling, with rather unpleasant suddenness, on his back; while the gipsy herself, somewhat cooled by the shock, paused for a moment and grasped a lamp-post to steady herself.

"Good gracious!" gasped a deeply aggrieved voice from the pavement, "if this ain't too bad! To be run into this way and pitched heels over head on the broad of one's back without a minute's warning! Why, it's a shame!" reiterated the voice, in a still more aggrieved cadence, as its owner, a pale young man with a carpet-bag, slowly began to pick himself up.

The gipsy, having recovered from the sudden collision, was about to hurry on without paying the slightest attention to the injured owner of the carpet-bag, when that individual, catching a full view of her face, burst out in amazement:

"Why, if it ain't Mrs. Ketura! Well, if this isn't real surprising! How *do* you do? I *am* glad to see you, I'm sure; and I dare say it was all an accident. I hope you have been quite well since I saw you last, ma'am," said the pale young man, politely; "I've been *very* well myself, I'm obliged to you."

"Who are you?" said the gipsy, impatiently, scanning his mild, freckled frontispiece with her stiletto-like eyes.

"Why, you haven't forgotten me, have you?" said the young man, straightening out his beaver, which had got stove in during the late catastrophe; "why, I'm O. C. Toosypegs! I dare say you didn't expect to see me here, but we haven't left England yet, you know. We're going the day after to-morrow, aunt Prisciller and me; and I'm glad of it, too, for this here London ain't what it's cracked up to be. I had my pocket picked at least twenty times since I came here. They took my watch, my pocketbook, and my jack-knife, and didn't even leave me so much as a pocket-handkerchief to wipe my nose." And Mr. Toosypegs, who evidently considered this the climax of human depravity, gave his hat a fierce thump, that sent that astonished head-piece away down over his eyes with rather alarming suddenness.

"I don't know you—let me pass," said the gipsy, harshly, trying to walk away from him; but Mr. Toosypegs quickened his pace likewise, and kept up with her.

"Why, you *do* know me, Mrs. Ketura, and I hope you haven't went and forgotten me so soon," said Mr. Toosypegs, in a deeply-injured tone. "Don't you recollect that nasty wet night, a little over two years ago, when you was walking along the north road, and I made Mr. Harkins, who is a real nice man, only a little hasty at times, take you in and drive you to town? You didn't seem in very good spirits that night, and I was real sorry for your trouble—I really was, Mrs. Ketura."

The gipsy made no reply. Bitterly her thoughts went back to that night—that long, desolate, sorrowful night—when she had bidden her son a last farewell. She had had her revenge; she had wrenched cries of anguish from those who had tortured her; but oh! what revenge could remove the gnawing at her heart? what vengeance could restore her her son? With one of those hollow groans that seem rending the heart they burst from, her head dropped on her bosom. There was a world of anguish and despair in the sound, and it went right to the simple heart of the really kind Mr. Toosypegs.

"There, now, *don't* take on so about it," he began, piteously; "it's real distressing to listen to such groans as that. Everything happens for the best, you know; and though, as I remarked at the time to my friend Mr. Harkins, it was real disagreeable of them to take and send your son away, when he didn't want to go, still it can't be helped now, and there's no use whatever in making a fuss about it. As my uncle, who hadn't the pleasure of your acquaintance, has left me two thousand pounds, I should be real glad to aid you as far as money will go, and you needn't mind about giving me your note for it either. I ain't particular about getting it back again, I'm very much obliged to you."

During this well-meant attempt at consolation, not one word of which the gipsy had heard, Mr. Toosypegs had been fumbling uneasily in his pockets, and shifting his carpet-bag in a fidgety manner from one hand to the other. Having managed at last to extract a plump pocketbook from some mysterious recess inside of his coat, he held it out to his companion; but she, with her eyes gloomily fixed on the ground, seemed so totally oblivious of both himself and it, that, with a comical expression of distress, he was forced to replace it again where it came from.

"Now I *wouldn't* mind it so much if I was you, you know," he resumed, in a confidential tone. "Where's the good of making a time when things can't be helped? I'm going to to sail for America the day after to-morrow, in a great, nasty, tarry ship, and I *would* like to see you in good spirits before I go. It would make it a great deal nicer if I thought you weren't taking on."

The last words caught her ear. She lifted her haggard face and fixed her piercing eyes so suddenly full upon him, that, with an alarmed "Lord bless me," he sprung back and gazed upon her in evident terror.

"Going to America, are you?—to-morrow?" she asked, rapidly.

"Why—a—no, sir—that is, yes, ma'am," stammered Mr. Toosypegs, his self-possession considerably shaken by those needle-like glances.

With lightning-like rapidity there flashed through the gipsy's mind a scheme. London was no longer a safe place for her; she was liable to be arrested, now, at any moment, and with her half-completed revenge this was not to be thought of. She felt her best course would be, to leave England altogether for some years; and she determined to avail herself of the present opportunity.

"If I go with you to America, will you pay my passage?" she abruptly asked, transfixing Mr. Toosypegs with her lightning eyes.

"Why, of course, with a great deal of pleasure," responded the young man, with alacrity; "it will make it real pleasant to have you with us during the passage, I'm sure," said Mr. Toosypegs, who felt politeness required of him to say as much, though his conscience gave him a severe twinge for telling such a fib. "Perhaps, as we start the day after to-morrow, you wouldn't mind coming and stopping with us until then, so's to have things handy. Aunt Prisciller will be delighted to make your acquaintance, I know," concluded Mr. Toosypegs, whose conscience, at this announcement, gave him another rebuking pinch.

"There will be two children to bring," said the gipsy, hurriedly: "I must go for them."

"Half price," muttered Mr. Toosypegs, *sotto voce*; "what *will* aunt Prisciller say?"

"I will meet you here by daybreak the day after to-morrow," said the gipsy, stopping suddenly. "Will you come?"

"Why, certainly," responded Mr. Toosypegs, who was too much in awe of her to refuse her anything she might ask; "I'll be in this precise spot by daybreak the day after to-morrow, though I don't approve of early rising as a general thing; it ain't nice at all."

"Very well, I will be here—you need come with me no further," said Ketura, dismissing him with a wave of her hand; and ere he could expostulate at this summary dismissal, she turned a corner and disappeared.

That night a trusty messenger was dispatched by Ketura to the gipsy camp for little Raymond, who arrived the following night. His free, gipsy life seemed to agree wonderfully well with that young gentleman, who appeared in the highest possible health and spirits; his rosy cheeks and sparkling black eyes all aglow from the woodland breezes. Five years old now, he was tall and well-grown for his age, could climb the highest trees like a squirrel, set bird-traps and rabbit-snares, and was as lithe, supple, and active as a young deer. The eyes of Ketura lit up with pride as she gazed upon him; and for the first time the idea occurred to her that he might live to avenge his father's wrongs when she was dead. She would bring him up to hate all of the house of De Courcy; that hate should grow with his growth until it should become the one ruling passion and aim of his life, swamping, by its very intensity, every other feeling.

Master Raymond, who seemed quite as chary of caresses as his grandmother herself, met her with a good deal of indifference; but no sooner did he see little Erminie, than a rash and violent attachment was the result. Accustomed to the dirty, dusky gipsy babies, who rolled all day unheeded in the grass, this little snowy-skinned, golden-haired, blue-eyed infant seemed so wondrously lovely that he had to give her sundry pokes with his finger to convince himself she was real, and not an illusion. Miss Erminie did not seem at all displeased by these attentions, but favored him with a coquettish smile, and with her finger in her rosy mouth, gave him every encouragement he could reasonably expect on so short an acquaintance. Being left alone together, Master Raymond, who did not altogether approve of her wasting her time, lying blinking at him in her cradle, began to think it was only a common act of politeness she owed him to get up, and seeing no symptoms of any such intention on the young lady's part, he resolved to give her a hint to that effect. Catching her, therefore, by one little plump leg and arm, he gave her a jerk that swung her completely out, and then grasping her by the waist, he dumped her down on the floor beside him, upon which she immediately clapped another

finger in her mouth; and there they sat, silently staring at each other, until both were dispatched to bed.

Early in the morning Master Raymond and Miss Erminie found themselves awakened from an exceedingly sound slumber, and undergoing the unpleasant operation of dressing. The young gentleman kicked and plunged manfully for a while, but finding it all of no use, he gave up the struggle and yielded to fate in a second nap. Erminie, after crying a little, followed his example; and the gipsy, taking her in her arms, and followed by one of the tribe bearing the sleeping Raymond, hurried to the trysting-place.

There they found Mr. Toosypegs, looking green and sea-sick already, from anticipation. In a few words the gipsy gave him to understand that she wished to go on board immediately—a proposition which rather pleased Mr. Toosypegs, who was inwardly afraid she might desire to be brought to his house, where she would be confronted by Miss Toosypegs, of whom he stood in wholesome awe.

Half an hour brought them to the pier where the vessel lay, and consigning little Raymond to the care of one of the female passengers, she sought her berth with Erminie. Until England was out of sight she still dreaded detection; and, therefore, she sat with feverish impatience, longing to catch the last glimpse of the land wherein she was born. She watched every passing face with suspicion, and in every out-stretched hand she saw some one about to snatch her prize from her; and involuntarily her teeth set, and she held the sleeping child in a fiercer clasp.

Once she caught a passing glimpse of Mr. Toosypegs, a victim to "green and yellow melancholy" in its most aggravated form, as he walked toward his berth in an exceedingly limp state of mind and shirt-collar. Mr. Toosypegs knew what sea-sickness was from experience; he had a distinct and sad recollection of what he endured the last time he crossed the Atlantic; and with many an ominous foreboding, he ensconced himself in an arm-chair in the cabin, while the vessel rose and fell as she danced over the waves. Silently he sat, as men sit who await the heaviest blow Fate has in store for them. Suddenly a stentorian voice from the deck rose high above the creaking and straining of ropes and trampling of feet, with the words, "Heave ahead." Mr. Toosypegs gave a convulsive start, an expression of intensest anguish passed over his face, and suddenly clapping his handkerchief to his mouth, he fled into the silent depths of the state-room, where, hidden from human view, what passed was never known.

"Well, I never!" ejaculated a tall, thin, sharp female, with a sour face, and a cantankerous expression of countenance generally, who sat with her hands folded over a shiny-brown Holland gown, as upright as a church-steeple and about as grim. "Well, I never! going hand being sea-sick hafore he's ten minutes hon board, which his something none of the family hever 'ad before, hand I've been hover to Hireland without hever thinking of such a thing; lying there on the broad hof his back, leaving me a poor, lone woman, and groanin' hevery time this dratted hold ship gives a plunge, which is something that's not pleasant for a hun-protected female to be, having a lot hof disagreeable sailors, smefling of oakum and tar and sich, has hif he couldn't wait to be sea-sick hafter we'd land. Ugh!" And Miss Priscilla Dorothea Toosypegs—for she it was—knit up her face in a bristle of the sourest kinks, and punctuated her rather rambling speech by sundry frowns of the most intensely acid character.

To describe that voyage is not my intention; suffice it to say, that it was an unusually speedy one. On the following morning, the gipsy had appeared on deck with little Erminie, whose gentle beauty attracted universal attention, as her nurse's dark, stern, moody face did fear and dread. Many hands were held out for her, and Ketura willingly gave her up, and consented to the request of a pleasant-faced young girl who offered to take charge of her until they should land. Master Raymond had already become prime favorite with all on board, more particularly with the sailors; and could soon run like a monkey up the shrouds into the rigging. At first he condescended to patronize Erminie occasionally; but on discovering she could not climb—in fact, could not even stand on her feet properly—he began to look down on her with a sort of lofty contempt. On the fifth day, Mr. Toosypegs made his appearance on deck, a walking skeleton. Everybody laughed at his wobegone looks; and so deeply disgusted was Miss Priscilla by his sea-green visage, that it seemed doubtful whether she would ever acknowledge the relationship again.

As every one but Miss Priscilla laughed at him, and she scolded him unmercifully, the unhappy young man was forced to fly for relief to Ketura, whose silent grimness was quite delightful compared with either of the others. Feeling that she owed him something for his kindness, she listened in silence to all his doleful complaints; and this so won upon the susceptible heart of that unfortunate youth, that he contracted quite an affection for her—just as a lap-dog has been known to make friends with a tiger before now.

"What do you intend to do when you get to America, Mrs. Ketura?" he asked one day as they sat together on the deck.

"I have not thought about it," she answered indifferently.

“You’ll have to do something, you know,” insinuated Mr. Toosypegs. “People always do something in America. They’re real smart people there. *I’m* an American, Mrs. Ketura,” added Mr. Toosypegs, complacently.

A grim sort of smile, haft contempt, half pity, passed over the face of the gipsy.

“Telling fortunes pays pretty well, I guess, but then it isn’t a nice way to make a living; and besides that little baby would be real inconvenient to lug round with you, not to speak of that dreadful little boy who climbs up that main-topgallant bowsprit—or whatever the nasty steep thing’s name is. No; I don’t think telling fortunes would be exactly the thing.”

“I shall manage some way; don’t bother me about it,” said gipsy, impatiently.

“What do you say to coming with us to Dismal Hollow? There’s plenty of room around there for you; and I should be real glad to have you near, so that I could drop in to see you now and then.”

Mr. Toosypegs was sincere in saying he would like it this time; for her stern, fierce character had a strange sort of fascination for him, and he really was beginning to feel a strong attachment to her.

The real kindliness of his tone, his simple generosity, touched even the granite heart of the hard gipsy queen. Lifting her eyes, that all this time had been moodily gazing into the dashing, foam-crested waves, she said, in a softer voice than he ever expected to hear from her lips:

“I thank you and accept your offer, and more for *their* sake, however, than my own”—pointing to the children. “I could make my way through the world easily enough, but they are young and tender, and need care. I will go with you.”

She turned away as she ceased, as if there was no more to be said on the subject, and again looked fixedly down into the wide waste of waters.

“It’s real good of you to say so, Mrs. Ketura, and I’m very much obliged to you,” said Mr. Toosypegs with a brightening up of his pallid features. “We will land at New York, and after that, go to Dismal Hollow *via* Baltimore, which means, Mrs. Ketura,” said Mr. Toosypegs, interrupting himself, to throw in a word of explanation, “‘by way of’ It’s Latin, or Greek, I guess, though I never learned either. Ugh! ain’t Latin nice, though!” added the owner of the sickly complexion, with a grimace of intensest disgust. “I tried it for six weeks one time, with an apothecary; and then, as it began to throw me into a decline, I gave it up. Not any more. I’m very much obliged to you.”

Three days after that the vessel touched the wharf at New York. And after two days’ delay, which Mr. Toosypegs required to get his “land legs” on, they set off for Baltimore.

In due course of time that goodly city was reached, and one week after, the whole party arrived at Judestown—a thriving country town on the sea-coast, called then after the first settler, but known by another name, now.

Driving through the town, they reached the suburbs, and entered a more thinly-settled part of the country. Gleaming here and there through the trees, they could catch occasional glimpses of the bright waters of the Chesapeake, and hear the booming of the waves on the low shore.

Turning an abrupt angle in the road, they drove down a long, steep, craggy path, toward a gloomy mountain gorge, at sight of which Mr. Toosypegs so far forgot himself as to take off his hat and wave it over his head, with a feeble “Hooray for Dismal Hollow!” which so scandalized that strict Christian, his aunt, that she gave him a look beneath which he wilted down, and was heard no more.

“What an ugly old place! I won’t go there!” exclaimed little Raymond, with a strong expression of contempt.

And truly it did not look very inviting. The mountain, which, by some convulsion of nature, seemed to have been violently rent in twain, was only passable by a narrow, dangerous bridle-path. Down in the very bottom of this deep, gloomy gorge, stood an old, time-worn building of what had once been red brick, with dismal, black, broken window shutters, that at some far-distant time might have been green. A range of dilapidated barns and outhouses spread away behind, and in front, some hundred yards distant, ran a slender rivulet, which every spring became swollen into a foaming torrent.

Here the sun never penetrated; no living creature was to be seen, and a more gloomy and dismal spot could hardly have been found in the wide world. Even the gipsy queen looked round with a sort of still amaze that any one could be found to live here, while Miss Priscilla elevated both hands in horror, and in the dismay of the moment was surprised into the profanity of exclaiming: “Great Jemimi!”

“It’s the ugliest old place ever was, and I won’t go there!” reiterated Master Raymond, kicking viciously at Mr. Toosypegs, to whom, with an inward presentiment, he felt he owed his coming.

“It *is* rather dull-looking, now,” said Mr. Toosypegs, apologetically; “but wait till we get it fixed up a little, after a spell. The niggers have let things go to waste since I went away.”

“Humph! Should think they had!” said Miss Priscilla, with a disdainful sniff. “Nothing but treeses, and rockses, and mountainses split him two; hand what your blessed father, which lies now a hangel in some nasty, swampy graveyard, could have been thinking habout, with that ’orrid little river hafore the door, to build a ’ouse in sich a spot, which must hoverflow hevery time hit rains, his more than I can tell—drowning us hin hour beds, as it will be sure to do some fine morning or hother. Wah! wah!” And with this final expression of disgust, given in a tone of scorn no words can express, the ancient virgin suffered herself to be handed from the wagon by her dutiful nephew and deposited in a mud-puddle before the door to the great benefit of her stockings and temper.

The noise of wheels, a very unusual noise there—brought some half-score of lean, hungry-looking curs from some unseen region, who instantly began a furious yelping and barking. Miss Priscilla set up a series of short, sharp little screams, and jumped up on a rock in mortal terror; little Erminie, terrified by the noise, began to cry; Master Raymond yelled to the dogs at the top of his lungs, and plunged headforemost in among them; Mr. Toosypegs went through all the phases of the potential mood—“exorting, entreating, commanding,”—and a general uproar ensued that would have shamed Babel.

The hubbub and din roused the inmates, at last, as it might very easily have done the Seven Sleepers themselves.

A shuffling tread of feet was heard within, and then a trembling voice demanded:

“Who dar?”

“It’s me. Open the door, for goodness’ sake!” exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, in an agony of supplication.

“We’s got yarms, and dar ain’t notting in de house for you to rob, so you’d better go ’way,” said a quavering voice, that evidently strove in vain to be courageous.

“*Will* you open the door? I tell you it’s only *me*!” shouted the deeply-exasperated Mr. Toosypegs, seizing the handle of the door and giving it a furious shake.

Cautiously the door was partly opened, a terrified voice was heard to whisper: “You hit dem wid de poker arter I fire,” and then the frowning muzzles of two huge horse-pistols met their dismayed eyes.

“Don’t shoot—it’s ME!” yelled the terror-stricken Mr. Toosypegs; but his words were lost in the bang! bang! of the pistols as they went off.

“Oh, Lord, have mercy on me! I’m shot!” shrieked the unhappy Mr. Toosypegs, as he dropped like a stone in the mud, and lay motionless.

“Hand me de brunderingbuss—quick, Pomp! Dar’s more o’ dem,” again whispered the chattering voice; and once more the warlike individual within blazed away, while Miss Priscilla lay kicking in the strongest hysterics, and Mr. Toosypegs, flat on his face in the mud, lay as rigid and still as a melancholy corpse.

So completely amazed was the gipsy queen by all this, that she stood motionless, with Erminie in her arms. Now the door was slowly opened, and a negro’s face, gray with terror, was protruded. His round, goggle eyes, starting from his head with fear, fell on the prostrate forms of Miss Priscilla and her unfortunate nephew.

“Two ob dem gone, bress de Lord!” piously ejaculated Cuffee. “It takes me for to do de bisiness. Well, bress Mars’r! if I ain’t had a fight for’t.” Then catching sight of the gipsy, he paused suddenly, and jumped back, and raised the discharged blunderbuss, but no effort could make it go off a second time.

“Are you mad, fellow?” exclaimed the deep, commanding voice of Ketura. “Would you murder your master?”

“Young mars’r hab gone; an’ef you don’t cl’ar right out dar’ll be more blood shed!” exclaimed the negro, still keeping his formidable weapon cocked.

“I tell you this is your master!” impatiently exclaimed Ketura. “He arrived to-day; and now you have shot him.”

Slowly the blunderbuss was lowered, as if the conviction that she might be speaking the truth was slowly coming home to the mind of her hearer. Cautiously he left his post of danger and approached his prostrate foe. Gathering courage from

his apparent lifelessness, he at last ventured to turn him over, and all smeared and clotted with mud, the pallid features of Mr. Toosypegs were upturned to the light. His arms were stretched stiffly out by his side, as much like a corpse as possible; his eyes were tightly closed; ditto his lips, all covered with soft mud.

There was no mistaking that face. With a loud howl of distress, the negro threw himself upon the lifeless form of poor Mr. Toosypegs.

"Ah! You've got your elbow in the pit of my stomach!" exclaimed the corpse, with a sharp yell of pain. "Can't you get out of that, and let me die in peace?"

For the first time in two years the gipsy, Ketura, laughed. In fact, they would have been more than mortal who could have beheld that unspeakably-ludicrous scene without doing so.

Miss Priscilla stopped her hysterical kicking and plunging, and raised herself on her elbow to look.

The negro, with a whoop of joy that might have startled a Shawnee Indian, seized Mr. Toosypegs, who had shut his eyes and composed himself for death again, save an occasional splutter as the mud went down his throat, and swinging him over his shoulder as if he had been a limp towel, rushed with him in triumph into the house.

"He warn't dead, then, hafter hall?" said Miss Priscilla, sharply, in a voice that seemed made of steel-springs. "Well, I never! Going hand fright'ning respectable parties hout their wits with 'orrid black niggers, firing hoff of pistols hand cannons; lying there in the mud making believe dead; hand shooting me somewhere—for I can feel the balls hinside hof me; spoiling a good new suit hof clothes, rolling there like a pig, and not dead, hafter hall; hand that there nigger shooting away like mad hall the time, which his a mercy to be thankful for! Wah! wah!"

And, with her usual look of sour disgust immeasurably heightened, Miss Priscilla gathered up her own muddy skirts and marched, like a loaded rifle all ready to go off, into a long, black, chill, littered hall.

Half a dozen frightened darkies were crouching in the further corner, and on these Miss Priscilla turned the muzzle of the rifle, and a sharp volley of oddly-jumbled up sentences went off in tones of keenest irony.

"Yes; you may stand there, you hugly black leeches, hafter shooting us hevery one—though looks ain't hof no consequence in this horrid place; hand hif you don't get 'ung for it some day, my name hain't Priscilla Dorothea Toosypegs! Perhaps you'll show me where my nevvy his, which you've shot so nicely, hand make a fire, hafter keeping hus rolling hin the mud, getting our death hof cold in this 'orrid cold 'ouse, which, being a respectable female, hand not a pig, I hain't used to; hand Hamerica mud hain't the nicest thing I ever saw for to eat; so maybe you'll get hus some dinner, hand show me to where my nevvy his, hif you please," concluded Miss Priscilla, in tones of most cutting irony.

The terrified servants understood enough of this singular address to know Miss Toosypegs wished for a fire, her dinner, and her nephew. An old woman, therefore, in a gaudy Madras turban, advanced, and led the way up a rickety flight of stairs into a comfortless-looking room, with a damp, unaired odor, where, on a bed, lay the mortal remains of O. C. Toosypegs, with the darkey—whose name I may as well say at once was Cupid—giving him a most vigorous rubbing, which extorted from the dead man sundry groans and grimaces and encouraged Cupid to still further exertions.

The loaded rifle advanced to the bedside, and a second volley went off.

"Come, Horlander Toosypegs, get hup hout o' that, lying there in this musty hold room, face and hall plastered hover with mud, which his enough to give you the rheumatism the longest day you live, without the first spark hof a fire—so it is!"

"I'm dying, Aunt Priscilla; stay with me to the last!" in the faintest whisper, responded Mr. Toosypegs, languidly opening his eyes, and then shutting them again.

"Dying? Wah, wah!" grunted Miss Priscilla, catching him by the shoulder and shaking him with no gentle hand. "Pretty corpse you'll make, hall hover with mud, hand looks has much like dying has I do."

"De brunderingbuss an' de pissels war only loaded wid powder—no shot in 'em at all. 'Deed, old missus, he ain't hurted the fustest mite, only he t'inks so."

"Hold!" shrieked Miss Priscilla, turning fiercely upon Cupid. "You impident black nigger, you! to call me hold! Leave the room this very minute, hand never let me see your hugly, black face hagain!"

"Come—you are not hurt—get up!" said Ketura, going over to the bedside, as poor Cupid, crestfallen, slunk away. "There is not a hair of your head injured. Up with you!"

“Am I not shot?” demanded Mr. Toosypegs, bewildered. “Did the bullet not enter my brain?”

“You never had any for it to enter,” said the gipsy, encouragingly. “Look yourself; there is neither wound nor blood.”

“No; but it’s bleeding inwardly,” said Mr. Toosypegs, with a hollow groan. “Oh, I know I’m a dead man!”

“Chut! I have no patience with you! Get up, man! you are as well as ever!” impatiently exclaimed Ketura.

Slowly Mr. Toosypegs, who had immense faith in Ketura, lifted first one arm and then another to see if either were powerless. Satisfied on this point, he next lifted each leg; and finding, to his great astonishment, that his limbs were all sound, he carefully began to raise himself up in bed. No torrent of blood followed this desperate attempt, as he expected there would be; and the next minute, Mr. Orlando Toosypegs stood, safe and sound, on the floor, looking about as sheepish a young gentleman as you would find from Maine to Florida.

“You thought you was gone—didn’t you?” said the little witch, Raymond, with a malicious chuckle of delight, as he watched the chopfallen hero of the pallid features.

Miss Toosypegs merely contented herself with a look of lofty contempt more withering than words, and then rustled out to rouse up the “hugly black leeches” on the subject of dinners and fires.

Having succeeded in both objects especially in the dinner department, which Aunt Bob, the presiding deity of the kitchen, had got up in sublime style, Miss Priscilla was in somewhat better humor; and having announced her intention of beginning a thorough reformation both out doors and in, turned briskly to her nephew, who sat in a very dejected state of mind, without so much as a word to say for himself, and exclaimed:

“Now, Horlander, the best thing you can do is, to go immediately hand see habout getting a ’ouse for Mrs. Ketura hand the children, which would never survive a day in this damp hold barn; besides, being to do some time or hother, it mayhas well be did first has last, hand save the ’spense hof a doctor’s bill, which his the hunpleasantest thing hever was stuck hin hanybody’s face.”

Mr. Toosypegs, who felt he would never more dare to call his soul his own, meekly put on his hat, and said he would go and see about a cottage he knew of which would suit Mrs. Ketura to a T. The fact was, he was glad to escape from his aunt; and that good lady, who had classed Mrs. Ketura and the children under the somewhat indefinite title of “riff-raff” from the first, was equally anxious to be rid of them.

Late that evening, Mr. Toosypegs returned, with the satisfactory news that he had obtained the cottage, which belonged, he informed them, to a certain Admiral Havenful, who, not having any particular use for it himself, said they might have it rent free. The cottage was furnished; just as it had been let by its last tenant; and Mrs. Ketura might pitch her tent there, with a safe conscience, as fast as she liked.

“You had better take one of the servants with you, too,” said Mr. Toosypegs, good-naturedly; “we have more than we want, and you will require one to mind the baby, and fetch water, and do chores. I think Lucy will do as well as any.”

Miss Toosypegs frowned at first; but remembering, upon second thoughts, that there was already a tribe of useless negroes and dogs, eating them out of house and home, she gave a sharp assent, at last, to her nephew’s arrangement.

Early the next morning, Mr. Toosypegs, Ketura, Raymond, Erminie, and the negress, Lucy, entered the wagon, and turned their backs upon Dismal Hollow.

Half an hour’s drive through a forest-road, all aglow with the leafy splendor of early July, brought them to the seashore. Far removed from any other habitation, stood a pretty little whitewashed cottage, a little fairy-bandbox of a place, on a bank above the sea, nestling like a pearl set in emeralds as it gleamed through a wilderness of vines and shrubs. A wide, dry, arid expanse, overrun with blueberry and cranberry vines, spread before the door toward the north, as far as the eye could reach. Far in the distance, they could see a huge house, of a dazzling whiteness, unshaded by tree or vine, as it stood in the full glare of the hot sun, dazzling the eye of the gazer. This, Mr. Toosypegs gave them to understand, was the “White Squall,” the residence of Admiral Havenful; and the dry plains spreading into the distance were very appropriately known as the “Barrens.” South and east, a dense forest shut in the view, and to the west spread out the boundless sea.

“Now, Mrs. Ketura,” said Mr. Toosypegs, in a mysterious whisper, “you can’t live upon green vines and blueberries, nor yet you can’t stay in this cottage from morning till night, you know, though I dare say Aunt Priscilla thinks you can. Therefore you must take this purse—half of which the admiral gave me for you last night, and the other half—well, no matter. Then, as you’ll want to go to Judestown to market, and to church, sometimes, I’ll send over the pony and the old

buggy; but don't you say a word about it to Aunt Priscilla—women don't need to know anything, you know, as they don't always view things in their proper light; and Aunt Priscilla's queer any way. If there's anything else you want, just you send Lucy for it to Dismal Hollow, and you shall have it, Mrs. Ketura, for I like you real well."

"You are very kind," said the gipsy, again touched by his good-nature; "and I hope you will always regard yourself as one of the family."

"Hark you, Mrs. Ketura," said Mr. Toosypegs, in a tone of delight. "I certainly will, since you wish it. I'll drop in very often. I'm very much obliged to you."

And, waving his hand briskly, Mr. Toosypegs resumed his seat in the wagon, and drove off again to Dismal Hollow.

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

"I will paint her as I see her.
Ten times have the lilies blown
Since she looked upon the sun."
—BROWNING.

And ten years passed away.

It was a jocund morning in early spring. From the pine woods came the soft twittering of innumerable birds, filling the air with melody; while the soft, fragrant odor of the tall swinging pines came floating on every passing breeze. The sun rose in unclouded splendor above the dark tree-tops, and the bright waves of the Chesapeake danced and flashed in the golden rays. No sound broke the deep, profound stillness of the wide, dry moor; no living thing, save now and then some solitary bird that skimmed along over the fern, was to be seen. Far away in every direction nothing met the eye but the blue, unclouded sky above, and the bleak, arid barrens below, that lay hot and dry in the glare of the morning sunshine.

Suddenly the sylvan silence of the spot was broken by the clear, sweet notes of a hunting-horn, that startled the echoes far and near, and the next moment the forms of a horse and rider came dashing over the moor.

The horse was a splendid animal, a small, jet-black Arabian, with graceful, tapering limbs, arching neck, flowing mane, and small, erect head, and bright, fiery eyes. His rider was a young girl of some twelve years, who sat her horse like an Arab hunter, and whose dark, unique style of beauty merits a wider description.

She was very slight and rather tall for her age; but with a finely proportioned figure, displayed now to the best advantage by her well-fitting riding-habit—which consisted of a skirt of dark-green cloth, a tight basque of black velvet. Her face was thin and dark and somewhat elfish, but the olive skin was smooth as satin, and deepening with deepest crimson in the thin cheeks and lips. Her forehead was low broad, and polished; her saucy little nose decidedly *retrousse*; her teeth like pearls, and her hands and feet perfect. And then her eyes—such great, black, lustrous, glorious eyes, through which at times a red light shone—such splendid eyes, vailed by long, jetty, silken lashes, and arched by glossy black eyebrows, smooth and shining as water-leeches—eyes full of fun, frolic, freedom, and dauntless daring—eyes that would haunt the memory of the beholder for many a day. Her hair, "woman's crowning glory," was of intensest blackness, and clustered in short, dancing curls round her dark, bright, sparkling face. In the shade those curls were of midnight darkness, but in sunshine, red rings of fire shone through like tiny circlets of flame. She wore a small, black velvet hat, whose long sable plume just touched her warm, crimson cheek.

Such was the huntress, who with a pistol stuck in her belt, a little rifle swung across her shoulder, dashed along over the moor, holding the bridle lightly in one hand, and swinging jauntily, a silver-mounted riding-whip in the other.

As she reached the center of the moor, she reined in her horse so suddenly that he nearly reared upright, and then, lifting her little silver bugle again to her lips, she blew a blast that echoed in notes of clearest melody far over the heath.

This time her signal was answered—a loud shout from a spirited voice met her ear, and in another instant another actor

appeared upon the scene.

He, too, was mounted, and rode his horse well. He was a tall, slender stripling of about fifteen, and in some ways not unlike the girl. He had the same dark complexion, the same fiery black eyes and hair; but there all resemblance ceased. The look of saucy drollery on her face was replaced on his by a certain fierce pride—an expression at once haughty and daring. He was handsome, exceedingly, with regular, classical features, a perfect form, and had that mark of high birth, the small and exquisitely-shaped ear, and thin curving nostril. Erect he sat in his saddle, like a young prince of the blood.

"*Bon matin*, Monsieur Raymond!" shouted the girl, as he gallantly raised his cap and let the morning breeze lift his dark locks. "I thought the sun would not find you in bed the first morning after your return home. How does your serene highness find yourself?"

"In excellent health and spirits. I'm very much obliged to you—as our friend Mr. Toosypegs would say," answered Master Raymond, for he it is, as he laughingly rode up beside her. "Where's Ranty?"

"In bed. That fellow's as lazy as sin, and would rather lie there, sleeping like some old grampus, than enjoy a ride over the hills the finest morning that ever was."

"How do you know grampuses are fond of sleeping?" said Raymond.

"How do I know?" said the girl, in a high key, getting somewhat indignant. "I know very well they are? Doesn't Miss Toosypegs, when she's talking about Orlando sleeping in the morning, always say he's 'snoring like a grampus'? and if Miss Priscilla doesn't know, that's been to England, and every place else, I would like to know who does!"

"Well, I've been to England, too," said Raymond.

"Yes, and a great deal of good it's done you!" said the young lady, contemptuously. "But that's the way always. Ever since Ranty and you went to college, you've got so stuck up, and full of Latin and Greek, and stuff, there's no standing either of you. Last night, Ranty had to go and ask aunt Deb for the bootjack in Latin, and when she couldn't understand him, he went round kicking the cat and my nine beautiful kittens, in the most awful manner that ever was; and swearing at her in Greek—the hateful wretch!"

And Miss Petronilla Lawless scowled at Raymond, who laughed outright.

"Oh! come now, Pet, don't be angry!" he said. "Where's the use of quarreling the very first morning we meet."

"Quarreling!" repeated Miss Pet, shortly: "I'm sure I don't want to quarrel; but you're so aggravating. Boys always are just the hatefulest things—"

"*Most* hateful, Miss Lawless," amended Raymond, gravely. "There's a great deal of good sense but bad grammar in that sentence. I don't like boys myself half so well as I do girls—for instance, you're worth a dozen of Ranty."

"Yes; you say so now, when Ranty ain't listening; but if you wanted to go off on some mischief or other, I guess you wouldn't think of me. But that's the way I'm always treated, pitched round like an old shoe, without even daring to say a word for myself."

This melancholy view of things, more particularly the idea of Miss Pet's not having a "word to say for herself," struck Raymond as so inexpressibly ludicrous, that he gave vent to a shout of laughter.

"Yes, you may laugh!" said Pet, indignantly; "but it's true, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself, making fun of people in this way. I am not going to stand being imposed upon much longer, either! If Miss Priscilla keeps snubbing and putting down Mr. Toosypegs all the time, that ain't no reason why I'm to be snubbed and put down too—is it?"

"Why, Pet, what's the matter with you this morning?" exclaimed Raymond. "I never knew you so cross; has the judge scolded you, or have you bagged no game, or has your pony cast a shoe, or—"

"No, none of them things has happened!" broke in Pet, crossly. "I suppose you'd keep on or, or, or-ing till doomsday, if I let you! It's worse still, and I wouldn't mind much if you shot me on the spot!" said Pet, in a tone of such deep desperation that Raymond looked at her in real alarm.

"Why, Pet, what has happened?" he inquired, anxiously, "Nothing really serious, I hope."

"Yes, it is really serious. I'm going to be sent to school—there now!" said Pet, as near crying as an elf could be.

"Oh! is that all?" said Raymond, immeasurably relieved. "Well, I don't see anything so very dreadful in that."

“Don’t you, indeed?” exclaimed Pet, with flashing eyes. “Well, if there’s anything more dreadful, I’d like to know what it is! To be cooped up in a great dismal dungeon of a schoolhouse from one year’s end to t’other, and never get a chance to sneeze without asking leave first. I won’t go, either, if I die for it!”

“And so you’ll grow up and not know B from a cow’s horn,” said Raymond. “I am sure you need to go bad enough.”

“I don’t need it, either!” angrily retorted Pet. “I can read first-rate now, without spelling more than half the words; and write—I wish you could see how beautifully I can make some of the letters!”

“Oh! I saw a specimen yesterday—Minnie showed it to me—looked as if a hen had dipped her foot in an ink-bottle and clawed it over the paper.”

“Why, you horrid, hateful, sassy——”

“Abandoned, impertinent young man!” interrupted Raymond. “There! I’ve helped you out with it. And now look here, Pet, how do you expect to be raised to the dignity of my wife, some day, if you don’t learn something? Why, when we are married, you’ll have to make your mark!”

“I’ve a good mind to do that now with my whip!” exclaimed Pet, flourishing it in dangerous proximity to his head. “Your wife, indeed! I guess not! I’m to be a President’s lady some day, Aunt Deb says. Catch me marrying you!”

“Well, that will be your loss. Where is the judge going to send you?”

“Why, he says to the Sacred Heart; but I ain’t gone yet! I’d a heap sooner go to Judestown, with Minnie, to that school where all the boys and girls go together. Oh, Ray! there are just the nicest boys ever was there—’specially one with the beautifulest red cheeks, and the loveliest bright buttons on his coat ever you seen!”

And Pet’s eyes sparkled at the recollection.

“Who is he?” said Raymond, who did not look by any means so delighted as Pet fancied he should.

“His name’s Bobby Brown; and only he’s all as yellow as the yolk of an egg ever since he had the ja’nders, he’d be real pretty. But I’m getting hungry, Ray. I’ll race you to the cottage, and bet you anything I’ll beat you!”

“Done!” cried Ray, catching the excitement now sparkling in the dark, brilliant face of the little fay beside him; and crushing his cap down over his thick curls, he bounded after her as she dashed away.

But Pet was better mounted, and the best rider of the two; and a ringing, triumphant laugh came borne tantalizingly to his ears as she distanced him by full twenty yards, and galloped up to the little white cottage on the Barrens.

“Fairly beaten!” he said, laughing, as he sprung off. “I am forced to own myself conquered, though I hate to do it.”

Though he laughed, his look of intense mortification showed how galling was defeat.

“Ahem! and how do you expect to be raised to the dignity of my husband some day, if you don’t learn to ride better? Why, when we’re married, I’ll have to give you lessons!” said Pet, demurely; though her wicked eyes were twinkling with irrepressible fun under their long lashes.

“Oh, I see!” said Ray, gayly. “Poetical justice, eh? Paying me in my own coin? Well, if you can beat me in riding, you can’t in anything else!”

“Can’t I, though?” said Pet, defiantly. “Just you try target-shooting, or pulling a stroke oar with me, and you’ll see! Schools where they teach you the Greek for bootjack ain’t the best places for learning them sort of things, I reckon!”

The thunder of horses’ hoofs had by this time brought another personage to the stage.

It was Erminie—“sweet Erminie,” the little beauty, and heiress of a princely fortune and estate.

The promise of Erminie’s childhood had been more than fulfilled. Wondrously lovely she was! How could the child of Lord Ernest Villiers and Lady Maude Percy be otherwise? She had still the same snowy skin of her infancy, softly and brightly tinged with the most delicate pink on the rounded cheeks; her face was perfectly oval, and almost transparent; her eyes were of the deepest, darkest violet hue; her long curls, that reached nearly to her waist, were like burnished gold, and the snow-white forehead and tapering limbs were perfect. In spite of the difference between them, though one was dark and impetuous, the other fair and gentle, yet there was a resemblance between Raymond and Erminie. You could see it most plainly when they smiled; it was the smile of Lady Maude that lit up both faces with that strange, nameless beauty.

“Oh, Pet! I’m so glad you’ve come!” she joyfully exclaimed. “Guess who’s here?”

“Who? Ranty?” said Pet.

“No, indeed. Mr. Toosypegs. He heard Ray was come, and rode over this morning to see him.”

“Oh, I must see Mr. Toosypegs!” exclaimed Ray, laughing, as he bounded past the two girls, and sprung into the house.

It was a neat, pleasant little sitting-room, with white-muslin blinds in the windows, that were already darkened with vines; clean, straw matting on the floor and chairs, table, and ceiling fairly glistening with cleanliness. There was a wide fireplace opposite the door, filled with fragrant pine-boughs, and sitting in a low rocking-chair of Erminie’s, in the corner, was our old friend, Mr. O. C. Toosypegs, perfectly unchanged in every respect since we saw him last.

“Why, Mr. Toosypegs, how do you do? I hope you have been quite well since I saw you last!” cried the spirited voice of Ray as he grasped Mr. Toosypegs’s hand and gave it a cordial shake.

“Thank you, Master Raymond, I’ve been quite well, I’m very much obliged to you,” said Mr. Toosypegs, wriggling faintly in his grasp. “So is Miss Toosypegs, so is Aunt Bob, and all the rest of the family—I’m very much obliged to you.”

“Dogs and all, I hope, Orlando?” said Pet, as she entered.

“Yes, Miss Pet, the dogs are quite well, I’m obliged to you. I hope you feel pretty well yourself?”

“No, I ain’t, then. I’m not well at all. I’ve been in a state of mind all the week, and there’s no telling how long it may last.”

“Good gracious! you don’t say so!” said the alarmed Mr. Toosypegs. “It’s not anything dangerous, I hope?”

“Well, people generally think the smallpox is dangerous!” began Pet, with a sort of gloomy sternness, when she was interrupted by Mr. Toosypegs, who, seizing his hat, rushed to the door, shrieking out:

“The smallpox! Oh, my gracious! Why, Miss Pet, how could you go to come here, and give it to us all like this? Good gracious! for to think of being all full of holes like a potato-steamer!” said Mr. Toosypegs, wiping the cold perspiration off his face.

“But the smallpox ain’t no circumstance to my trouble,” went on Pet, as if she hadn’t heard him. “I’m going to be sent to school!”

“Come back, Mr. Toosypegs; she hasn’t got the smallpox,” said Ray, laughing. “There is not the slightest danger, I assure you. Pet was only using an illustration that time.”

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, dropping into a chair and wiping his face with his handkerchief, “if you didn’t pretty near scare the life out of me!”

“Well, you wouldn’t be the first one I’ve scared the life out of!” said Pet, swinging her riding-whip. “I’m apt to astonish people now and then!”

“I should think so,” said Ray. “Do you remember the night she coaxed you out sailing with her, Mr. Toosypegs, and upset the boat; and then added insult to injury by pulling you on shore by the hair of your head? That was an awful trick, Pet.”

“I haven’t got it out of my bones yet,” said Mr. Toosypegs, mournfully. “I never expected such treatment from. Miss Pet, I’m sure, and I don’t know what I had ever done to deserve it.”

“Well, don’t be mad, Orlando. I’ll never do it again,” said Pet, in a deeply-penitent tone. “But, I say, Minnie, when we are going to have breakfast? I’ve an awful appetite this morning.”

“In a moment. Hurry, Lucy,” said Erminie, as she entered the room.

“I was just up-stairs, bringing grandmother her breakfast.”

“Hem! How is the old lady?” inquired Miss Pet.

“As well as usual. She hardly ever comes down-stairs now. Do hurry, Lucy. Miss Lawless will soon be starved, if you keep on so slowly!”

“Lor’ sakes! I is hurryin’, Miss Minnie,” said Lucy, as, she bustled in, drew out a small, round table, laid the cloth, and prepared to arrange the breakfast-service. “’Spect dat ar’ little limb t’inks folks ought to git up de night afore, to have

breakfast ready time 'nuff for her," muttered Lucy to herself, looking daggers at Pet Lawless, who, swinging her riding-hat in one hand and her whip in the other, watched Lucy's motions with a critical eye. Erminie, with her sunny face and ready hands, assisted in the arrangements; and soon the whole party were assembled round the table, doing ample justice to Lucy's morning meal.

And while they were thus engaged, I shall claim your patience for a moment, dear reader, while we cast a brief retrospective glance over the various changes that have occurred during those ten years.

By the kind care of good-natured Mr. Toosypegs, and his friend, Admiral Havenful, the gipsy Ketura had been amply provided for. As Raymond and Erminie grew up, they had been sent to Judestown to school, with the children of Judge Lawless, whose daughter, Miss Pet, has already been introduced to the reader. The dark, gloomy recluse, Ketura, was an object of dread and dislike to the neighborhood around. She shunned and avoided them, lived her own inward life independent of them all, and was therefore hated by them. And when, about a year previous to the present, time, she received a severe paralytic stroke, from the effects of which she never fully recovered, very little sorrow was felt or expressed. Sweet, gentle little Erminie was, however, a favorite with all, and so was the bold, bright, high-spirited Raymond, to whom the somewhat eccentric old Admiral Havenful took such a fancy that he insisted on sending him to college with his nephew, Ranty, or Randolph Lawless. To college, therefore, the boys went; and Erminie remained at the Barrens, and went every fine day to Judestown to the district school, sometimes, but very rarely, accompanied by Pet Lawless; for that wild young lady voted schools and school-teachers and "Committee men," unmitigated bores, all, and preferred her own "sweet will" and her pony Starlight to suffering through "reading, writin' and refmetic." In vain her father, the judge, stormed and threatened her with all sorts of calamities. Pet, metaphysically speaking, snapped her finger in the face of all authority; and the more they wanted her to go, the more she wouldn't, though she *did* offer to do her best to learn if they would let her go with Ray and Ranty. But gaiters were things forbidden inside the college gates; and besides Ranty very ungallantly protested that all girls in general, and "our Pet" in particular, were nothing but "pests," and that he wouldn't have her near him at any price. Master Ranty Lawless did not like the female persuasion, and once gruffly announced that *his* idea of heaven was, a place where boys could do as they liked, and where there were no girls. So as Pet had no mother to look after her, and queened it over the servants at home, she grew up pretty much as she liked, and was noted far and near as the wildest, maddest, skip-over-the-moon madcap that ever threw a peaceable community into convulsions.

This much being premised, it is only necessary to say that Ray and Ranty had returned from college for a few months' vacation, the day previous to the commencement of this chapter, and then go on with our story.

"When is Miss Priscilla coming over, Mr. Toosypegs?" asked Erminie, as she filled for the third time his cup with fragrant, golden coffee.

"'Morrer evening," replied Mr. Toosypegs, speaking with his mouth full; "she's going to bring you a parcel of muslin things to work for her."

"The collar and cape she was speaking of, I guess," said Erminie, with her pleasant smile.

"How in the world, Ermie," exclaimed Pet, "do you find time to work for everybody? I never saw you a moment idle yet."

"Well, it is pleasanter to be doing something," said Erminie; "and besides, Miss Priscilla can't do fine sewing, her eyes are so weak, you know. I can't bear to sit still and do nothing; I like to sew, or read, or something."

"Ugh! sewing is the most horrid thing," said Pet, with a shrug; "I don't mind reading a pretty story to pass time now and then; but to sit down and go stitch—stitch—stitching, for hours steady—well, I know I'd soon be in a strait-jacket if I tried it, that's all! I was reading a real nice book the other night."

"What was it?" asked Ray. "I *should* like to see the book you would like to read."

"Well, there ain't many I like, but, oh! this one was ever so nice. It was all about a hateful old Jew who lent money to a man that wanted to go somewhere a-courting; and then this Jew wanted to cut off a pound of his flesh, to eat, I expect—the nasty old cannibal! And then this lady, I forget her name, came and dressed herself up in man's clothes, and got him—the fellow who went courting, you know—off somewheres. Oh, it was splendid! I'll lend you the book, sometime, Minnie."

"Why, it must have been the 'Merchant of Venice' you read," said Ray, "though such a jumbled up account of it as that, I never heard. I'll go over for the book to-morrow and read it to Min, if she cares about hearing it."

Before Erminie could reply, a surprised ejaculation from Pet made her turn quickly round. Ray's eyes wandered in the same direction, while Mr. Toosypegs sprung from his seat in terror; thereby badly scalding himself with the hot coffee, at the sight which met his astonished eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

MASTER RANTY.

"A rare compound of oddity, frolic and fun."
GOLDSMITH.

A little, old, decrepit woman, bent double with age, leaning on a staff, and shaking with palsy, stood as suddenly before them as if she had sprung up through the earth. Her dress was the most astonishing complication of rags that ever hung together on a human back before. A long old-fashioned cloak that, a hundred years before, had probably been all the rage, swept behind her; and as it trailed along, seemed in imminent danger of throwing the unfortunate old lady over her own head, every minute. A brown, sunburned face, half hidden in masses of coarse, gray hairs, peered wildly out; and from under a pair of bushy, overhanging, gray eyebrows, gleamed two keen, needle-like eyes, as sharp as two-edged stilettos. This singular individual wore a man's old beaver hat on her head, which was forcibly retained on that palsy-shaking member by a scarlet bandanna handkerchief passed over the crown, and tied under the chin.

Altogether, the little, stooping, unearthly-looking crone was one of the most singular sights that mortal eyes ever beheld.

So completely amazed were the whole assembly that for some five minutes they stood staring in silent wonder at this unexpected and most startling apparition. The little old woman, steadying herself with some difficulty on her cane, shaded her eyes with one hand, and peered at them with her sharp eyes.

"Don't be afeard, pretty ladies and gentlemen," said the little old lady, in a shrill, sharp falsetto. "I won't hurt none o' you, ef you behave yourselves. I guess I may come in?"

And suiting the action to the word, the little owner of the extraordinary head-dress hobbled in, and composedly dumped herself down into the rocking-chair Mr. Toosypegs had lately vacated.

"Now, what in the name of Hecate and all the witches, does this mean?" exclaimed Pet, first recovering her presence of mind.

"It means that I'll take some breakfas', if you'll bring it down, Miss," said the little old woman, laying her formidable-looking stick across her lap; and favoring the company, one and all, with a prolonged stare from her keen bright eyes.

"Well, now, that's what I call cool," said Pet, completely taken aback by the old woman's *sang froid*. "Perhaps your ladyship will be condescending enough to sit over here and help yourself?"

"No thankee," squeaked her ladyship. "I'd rather have it here, if it's all the same to you. I ain't as smart as I used to was; and don't like to be getting up much. Perhaps t'other young gal wouldn't mind bringing it here," she added, looking at the astonished Erminie.

Roused out of her trance of astonishment, not unmingled with terror, by claims of hospitality, Erminie hastened to comply; and placing a cup of fragrant coffee and some buttered waffles on a light waiter, placed it on a chair within the old woman's reach.

That small individual immediately fell to, with an alacrity quite astonishing, considering her size and age; and coffee and waffles in a remarkably short space of time were "among the things that were, but are no longer."

"Thankee, young 'oman, that was very nice," said the old woman, drawing out a flaming yellow cotton pocket-handkerchief, and wiping her mouth, as a sign she had finished; "my appetite ain't so good as it used to be; I reckon that'll do for the present. What's your dinner hour, young gals?"

"Little after midnight," said Pet.

“Humph! I reckon you’re trying to poke fun at me, Miss Pet Lawless; but no good ever comes of telling lies. Have ye ever heard tell on Ananias and Sapphira?” asked the old woman, turning sharply on Pet.

“Whew! ghosts, and goblins, and warlocks! She knows my name!” whistled Pet, in unbounded astonishment.

“Yes; I know more about you than I want to know,” said the little old woman, with a scowl.

“Well, you ain’t the only one in that plight, if that’s any consolation,” said Pet, carelessly.

“Do you know who I am, too?” said Ray.

“Yes, I’ve heern tell on you,” said the old woman, shortly.

“And no good either, I’ll be bound!” said Pet.

“Well, no; sence you say it I never did hear any good of him,” said the old woman, taking out a huge snuff-box, and composedly helping herself to a pinch.

“What did you hear about me, mother?” said Ray, laughing, as he shook his curly black locks.

“Well, I heard you was a noisy, disagreeable, fightin’ character; allus a-kickin’ up a row with somebody, and forever a-tormentin’ of that nice young gentleman, Master Ranty Lawless, who is a brother of that little yeller gal over there, and worth a dozen like her!” said the little old woman, with asperity.

“Well, upon my word, if that ain’t polite, not to say complimentary,” said Pet, drawing a long breath. “‘Little yeller gal!’ Good gracious!”

“Well, you ain’t white, you know,” said the old woman—who, whatever her other infirmities might be, was certainly not deaf. “You’re raythe of the tawniest, as everybody what’s got eyes can see for themselves. It’s a pity you ain’t good-looking, like your brother Ranty; I don’t think I ever saw a prettier young man nor he is, in my life.”

“Why, you hateful old thing!” burst out Pet, indignantly; losing all her customary respect for old age in these unflattering remarks. “I *ain’t* tawny; and I *am* pretty—I just am! and I’m not going to believe anybody that says anything else. If you and everybody else think I’m ugly, it’s all your bad taste! Ranty prettier than me! Likely story!” said Pet, between contempt and indignation.

“Well, look what a nice white skin he has!” said the old woman, with whom Master Ranty appeared to be an immense favorite.

“White skin! bleached saffron, more like!” exclaimed Pet; “if our Ranty’s good-looking, I guess he keeps his beauty in his pocket; for nobody but you ever discovered it. Humph! ‘Little yeller gal!’ I vow, it’s enough to provoke a saint!” exclaimed Pet, in a higher key, at the remembrance of this insult.

“May we ask the name of the lady who has favored us with her company this morning?” said Ray, at this point, bowing to the old woman with most ceremonious politeness.

“Yes, you may, young man,” said the old lady, with a sharp asperity that seemed rather uncalled for; “it’s a name I ain’t never ashamed of, and that’s more’n some folks can say. I’m Goody Two-Shoes; and if you don’t like it you may lump it.” And the shrill falsetto rose an octave higher, as she gave the snuff-box a furious tap on the lid.

“A mighty pretty name,” remarked Pet.

“And we like it, exceedingly,” said Ray; “though, if we didn’t, what awful meaning lies hidden under the mysterious phrase of ‘lumping it’? I confess, it passes my comprehension. Perhaps, my dear madam, you would be good enough to translate it from the original Greek, to which language I should judge it belongs, and let us know its import in the vulgar tongue, commonly called plain English.”

“Young man!” exclaimed the beldame, facing sharply round, “I dare say you think it mighty amusing to keep poking fun at me—which shows all the broughten up ever you had, to go showing no respect to people what’s in their old ages of life. But if you think sich onchristian conduct”—here the sharp voice rose to the shrillest possible treble—“will go onpunished on this airth, or in the airth to come, you’re very much deceived, young man: let me tell you that! I have power, though you mayn’t think so, and could turn you into a cracked jug, or a mustard-pot, just as easy as not.”

“I wish to mercy you would, then, old Goody Two-Shoes! Lor’! what a showy appearance you’d make, Ray, as a mustard-pot!” said Pet, bursting into a fit of laughter.

“Why, my dear madam, I hadn’t the slightest idea of ‘poking fun’ at you, as you elegantly expressed it,” said Ray, looking deeply persecuted and patient; “and as to being turned into a cracked jug, or a mustard-pot, I think would rather retain my present shape if it’s all the same to you.”

“Take care, then, how you rouse my wrath,” said the old woman, with a scowl, which was unfortunately lost in a succession of short, sharp sneezes, as her pinch of snuff went the wrong way. “I’m a patient woman; but I can’t stand everything. I’m used to be treated with respect. Where I came from, no such conduct was ever heerd tell on.”

“It’s a warm climate there—ain’t it?” insinuated Pet, meekly.

“Humph! there’s some inference in that, if a body only could make it out,” grunted the old woman; “anyways, I was always treated with respect there, young ’oman; which I’d advise you to remember, for you need it.”

“Now, who would think the little demons would treat the old one with respect?” said Pet, musingly, but in an exceedingly audible tone. “I never knew they were so polite down there, before.”

“Young woman,” began Goody, with kindling eyes, when Pet interrupted her impatiently with:

“Look here, now! old Goody Two-Shoes, I ain’t a young woman, and I never intend to be; and I’d thank you not to keep calling me out of my name. I’m Miss Petronilla Lawless, and if it’s not too much trouble, I’d feel grateful to you if you’d call me so. There!”

“Good gracious! Miss Pet, take care!” whispered Mr. Toosypegs, who, gray with terror, had been all this time crouching out of sight, in a corner; “it’s real dangerous to rouse her; she might bring the roof down about our heads, and kill us all, if you angered her.”

“Who is that young man?” said the old woman, in an appalling voice, as she slowly raised her finger, and pointed it, like a pistol, at the trembling head of Mr. O. C. Toosypegs.

“I—I—I’m Orlando C. Toosypegs, I—I’m very much obliged to you,” stammered Mr. Toosypegs, dodging behind Pet, in evident alarm.

“Young man, come over here,” solemnly said the beldame, keeping her long finger pointed, as if about to take aim, and never removing her chain-lightning eyes from the pallid physiognomy of the unhappy Mr. Toosypegs.

“Go, Horlander,” said Pet, giving him an encouraging push. “Bear it like a man; which means, hold up your head, and take your finger out of your mouth, like a good boy. I’ll stick to you to the last.”

With chattering teeth, trembling limbs, bristling hair, and terror-stricken face, Mr Toosypegs found himself standing before the ancient sibyl, by dint of a series of pushes from the encouraging hand of Pet.

“Young man, wouldst thou know the future?” began the old woman, in a deep, stern, impressive voice.

“I—I—I—I’m very much obliged to you, Mrs. Two-Shoes,” replied poor Mr. Toosypegs. “It’s real kind of you, I’m sure, and—”

“Vain mortal, spare thy superfluous thanks,” interrupted the mysterious one, with a wave of her hand, “Dark and terrific is the doom Fate has in store for thee—a doom so dreadful that dogs will cease to bark, the stars in the firmament hold their breath, and even the poultry in the barnyard turn pale to hear it. Woe to thee, unhappy man! Better for thee somebody else had a millstone tied round his neck, and were plunged into the middle of a frog-pond, than that thou shouldst live to see that day.”

“Good gracious!” ejaculated the horror-stricken Mr. Toosypegs, wiping the cold drops of perspiration off his face, as the sibyl flourished her snuff-box in the air, as if invoking kindred spirits to come to her aid.

“Sublime peroration!” exclaimed Ray, laughing inwardly.

“Live to see what day?” inquired Pet, whose curiosity was aroused. “The day he gets married, maybe.”

“Awful will be the results that will follow that day,” went on the seeress, scowling darkly at the irreverent Pet. “Tremendous clouds will flash vividly through the sky, the blinding thunder will show itself in all the colors of a dying dolphin, and a severe rain-storm will probably be the result. On thyself, oh, unhappiest of mortals, terrific will be the effects it will produce! These beautiful snuff-colored freckles will shake to their very center; these magnificent whiskers, which, I perceive, in two or three places show symptoms of sprouting, will wither away in dread, like the grass which perisheth. This courageous form, brave as a lion, which has never yet quailed before man or ghost, will be

rent in twain like a mountain in a gale of wind; and an attack of influenza in your great toe will mercifully put an end to all your earthly agonies and troubles at once! Unhappy mortal, go! Thou hast heard thy doom."

A more wretched and woebegone face than Mr. Toosypegs displayed, as he turned round, no earthly eye ever fell on before. Ray had turned to the window in convulsions of laughter.

"I ain't well," said Mr. Toosypegs, mournfully, as he took up his hat. "I've got a pain somewhere, and I guess I'll go home. Good-morning, Mrs. Two-Shoes. I'm very much obliged to you, I'm sure."

And slowly and dejectedly Mr. Toosypegs crushed his hat over his eyes, and turned his steps in the direction of Dismal Hollow.

"Poor Horlander!" said Pet; "if he isn't scared out of his wits, if he ever had any. Say, Goody, won't you tell my fortune, too?"

"Come hither, scoffer," said the sibyl, with solemn sternness. "Appear, and learn the dark doom Destiny has in store for thee. Fate, that rules the fortunes of men as well as little yaller gals, will make you laugh on 'tother side of your mouth, one of these days."

"Oh, Hamlet! what a falling off was there!" quoted Ray, laughing. "What a short jump that was from the sublime! Don't pile on the agony too high, Mother Awful."

"Peace, irreverent mortal!" said Goody Two-Shoes giving her snuff-box a solemn wave; "peace, while I foretell the future fate of this tawny little mortal before me!"

"Well, if you ain't the politest old lady!" ejaculated Pet. "But go on; I don't mind being called ugly, now. I'm getting used to it, and rather like it."

"You'll never be drowned," began the sibyl, looking down prophetically in Pet's little dark palm.

"Well, that's pleasant, anyway," said Pet.

"Because you were born to be hanged," went on the old woman, unheeding the interruption.

"Whew!" whistled Pet.

"Your days are numbered—"

"Well, I never saw a number on one of 'em yet," interrupted the incorrigible Petronilla.

"Peace, scoffer!" exclaimed the beldame, fiercely. "The fates disclose a speedy change in thy destiny."

"I expect they do," said Pet; "for I'm going to be sent to school soon."

"Some dark torture is in store for you, an agony that nothing can alleviate, a nameless secret misery—"

"Perhaps it's the colic," suggested Pet "If it is, I ain't afraid; 'cause gin and water will cure it."

"Silence, girl! and mock not destiny thus. At some future day, you will be a wife."

"Well there ain't anything very wonderful in that, I'm sure; I didn't need to be told that. You didn't expect I'd be an old maid—did you?" said Pet.

"I behold here," continued the seeress, peering into the little palm quite heedless of the interruption, "a miserable little hut, where thirteen red-haired children are playing, and a tawny woman, with a dirty face, in the midst of them, is—"

"Spanking them all round!" interrupted Pet, eagerly. "If she isn't, it ain't me."

"Will you be silent?" vociferated the ancient prophetess, with increasing sharpness. "Terrible is the doom of those who scoff at fortune as thou dost! Don't withdraw your hand. It is here plainly revealed that if you travel much you'll see a good deal."

"Go 'way!" ejaculated Pet, incredulously.

"And if you have a great deal of money you'll be rich."

"It ain't possible!" once more broke in the unbelieving Miss Lawless.

"And if you don't die, you'll live to be pretty old."

“Now, who’d ’a’ thought it,” said Pet.

“Leave me, wretched unbeliever!” said the old woman, flinging away Pet’s hand, with angry disdain. “Leave me; but beware! I am not to be mocked with impunity.”

“Neither am I,” said Pet; “so I’m not going to believe a word about them thirteen red-headed children. A baker’s dozen, too; as if twelve wasn’t enough! Poh! I ain’t such a goose, Goody Two-Shoes.”

“Well, wait, you misdirected, sunburned, unfortunate, turned-up-nosed misbeliever!” exclaimed the old virago, shaking her fist at Pet, in a rage. “Wait! And when my words come true, remember they were foretold by Goody Two-shoes.”

“Well, I declare!” said Pet. “If I wasn’t the patientest, best-tempered little girl in Maryland, I wouldn’t put up with all this abuse. Not even my nose is allowed to escape; and it never injured you or anybody else in its life.”

And Pet, with a deeply-wounded look, ran her finger along the insulted proboscis, as if to soothe its injured feelings.

“Will you tell my fortune, Mother Two-Shoes?” said Ray, turning round. “I am particularly anxious to know the future.”

“Well, you needn’t be, then,” said Goody, snappishly; “for it has nothing good in store for a miserable scapegoat like you. I won’t tell it; but I will tell that little gal’s,” pointing to Erminie, who all the time had been quietly looking on, not knowing whether to laugh or be afraid, and wholly puzzled by it all. “She gave me some breakfast; and ‘one good turn deserves another,’ as the Bible says. Give me your hand.”

Afraid of offending the old lady, Erminie held it out.

“You’ll be rather a nice-looking young woman, if you don’t grow up ugly,” began the seeress, looking intently at the little white palm that lay in hers like a lily-leaf; “and will have some sense, if not more, unless you get beside yourself, as most young gals nowadays mostly do. It’s likely you’ll be married to somebody, some time; very likely the first letter of his name will be Ranty Lawless, who, by that time, will be one of the nicest young men you or anybody else will ever see. If he makes you his wife—which is a blessing you ought to pray for every day—don’t forget to learn to make slap-jacks and Johnny-cake, two things that good youth is very fond of, as I am given to understand. As he will probably be away up there among the big-wigs in Congress every day, don’t forget to give him your blessing, and a paper of sandwiches every morning before he starts; and meet him at night, when he returns, with a smile on your lip, and a cup of tea in your hand. By following these directions, an unclouded future will be yours, and you will probably be translated, at last, in a cloud of fire and brimstone, and your virtues inscribed on a pewter-plate, as an example for all future generations.”

“What an enviable fate, Erminie!” exclaimed Ray.

“Seems to me, old lady, our Ranty’s a great bother to you,” said Pet, suspiciously, as she fixed her bright, searching eyes keenly on her face.

“I always take an interest in nice youths,” said the old woman, rising and grasping her stick, preparatory to starting. “I guess I won’t mind staying for dinner. I’ll call some, other day, thankee.”

“Not so fast, Goody Two-Shoes,” exclaimed Ray, coolly, catching the old woman by the collar. “I’ve discovered you at last. ‘Off, ye lendings.’”

And to the horror of Erminie, he grasped the cloak and tore it off, in spite of the vigorous struggles of the beldame. Then followed the hat, and red handkerchief, and the venerable gray locks; and Erminie stifled a scream as she fancied head and all was coming. The bushy gray eyebrows came off, too, and the bright, handsome, mischievous face of Master Ranty Lawless stood revealed.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUR ERMINIE.

“A lovely being scarcely formed or molded—
A rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded.”

—Byron.

“Well, I never!” exclaimed Pet.

“Why, it’s Ranty!” said the surprised Erminie.

“Yes,” said Ranty, giving his hat so well-aimed a kick that it struck the cat, and hurled that unfortunate quadruped over on her back, “and this is a nice way to treat a ‘lone woman,’ as Miss Priscilla says—ain’t it? Going and tearing the clothes off her back, without any regard for decency, or the slightest veneration for gray hairs. By the way, I must take care of that wig. It belongs to Uncle Harry, and I stole it last night when he was in bed. What do you think of my‘get-up,’ Ray? I laid on the brown and black unsparingly.”

“Well, your complexion would be improved by having your face washed,” replied Ray. “However, it’s very creditable, and shows how usefully you can employ your time when you like. Where, in the name of all the witches that were ever ducked, did you get all this trumpery?”

“Trumpery! Just listen to that, now,” said Ranty, appealing to society in general. “Calling this hat, and cloak, and the rest of my drapery, trumpery. Well, most irreverent youth, I got it up in the garret among a lot of lumber and stuff, and I coaxed one of the housemaids to dress me. I flatter myself I made a showy appearance when I entered—eh? Poor Orlando Toosypegs! Unhook this confounded frock, Pet.”

“Well, now, to think I never knew you,” said Pet, as she obeyed. “I thought it might be a trick, but I never suspected such a stupid thing as you could have done it.”

“That’s the way! Merit never is appreciated in this world,” said Ranty, as he stepped out of his rather dilapidated garment. “I expect nobody will find out what a genius I am until it is too late. Darn the thing! I can’t get it off at all.”

“Patience, Ranty! patience, and smoke your pipe,” said Ray, as he assisted him off with his dress, and Ranty stepped out in his proper costume, and stood there, tall, human, handsome, and as different from the old witch of a few moments before as it was possible to be.

“Oh, Ranty! what a trick!” said Erminie, laughing. “It was a shame to frighten poor Mr. Toosypegs, though.”

“He won’t get much sympathy from Miss Priscilla, I guess,” said Ranty. “I do think he believed every word of it.”

“To be sure he did,” said Ray; “and such an expression of utter wretchedness as his face wore when he went out, I never want to see again. It will be as good as a play to see him when he goes home, and tells Miss Priscilla.”

“I’m going there to spend the day,” said Pet. “Miss Priscilla can’t bear me, so I go there as often as I can. I’ll be able to tell you all about it when I come back.”

“You had better not,” said Ray. “There are two or three runaway niggers in the woods, and it’s dangerous for you to go alone.”

“Now, you might have known that would just make that intensely-disagreeable girl go,” said Ranty, rocking himself backward and forward in Erminie’s chair. “Tell her there’s danger anywhere, and there she’ll be sure to fly. The other day, some one told her the typhus fever was down at the quarters, and nothing would serve her but she must instantly make her appearance there, to see what it was like. Luckily, it turned out to be something else; but if it had been the fever, Nilla would have been a case by this time—and serve her right, too. It’s very distressing to a quiet, peaceable individual like myself,” said Master Ranty, pensively, leaning his head on his hand with a deep sigh. “But there’s no use in me exhorting her, she don’t mind in the least. I’ve talked to her like a father; I’ve preached to her on the evil of her ways till all was blue, I’ve lectured her time and again, like a pocket-edition of Chrysostom, and look at the result! I don’t expect to live out half my days ’long of that ’ere little limb, as our Dell says.”

And Master Ranty sighed deeply over the degeneracy of the human race in general, and Nilla in particular.

“Spoken like an oracle,” cried Ray; “but though Nilla won’t take your advice, as a general thing, I hope she’ll take mine.”

“No, I won’t!” was Miss Petronilla’s short, sharp and decisive reply. “I won’t take you nor your advice, neither! I’m just going to Dismal Hollow, and I’d like to see who’ll stop me!”

“Why, the half-starved niggers will,” said Ranty; “and, what’s more, they’ll swallow you, body and bones, and without

salt, too, which will be adding insult to injury. They'll find you sharp and arid enough, though, if that's any consolation."

"Indeed, Pet, I wouldn't go if I were you," said Erminie, anxiously.

"Well, you ain't me; so you needn't," said Pet. "But I'm going; and you may all talk till you are black in the face, and then I won't stop."

And the wilful elf put on her hat, and took her whip and gloves, and looked defiantly at the assembled trio.

"Very well; when you've departed this life and gone to the place all disagreeable little girls go to, don't say I didn't warn you of your danger," said Ranty. "We'll put up a monument to your memory, with the inscription:

'Sacred to the Memory
Of that sunburned, self-willed female Nimrod,
Petronilla Lawless,
Who ought to lie here, but she doesn't.
For, having lied all the time she afflicted this earth,
Now that she has departed to a worser land,
She lies in the stomach of a great big nigger,
Who swallowed her at a mouthful one night.
Of such is the Kingdom of Maryland.'"

"You had better let me go with you," said Ray.

"No; you sha'n't," said Pet, whose wilful nature was now thoroughly aroused by opposition, and who fancied, if she accepted this offer, they might think it was cowardice; "I'll go myself. You ride with me, indeed! Why, I'd leave you out of sight in ten minutes."

Ray's dark cheek flushed, and he turned angrily away.

"Well, be sure to come home before dark—won't you, Pet?" said Erminie, following the capricious fairy to the door.

"No, I sha'n't leave Dismal Hollow till nine o'clock," said Pet, looking back defiantly at the boys. "I'm just going to show them that if two great boys, like they are, are afraid, little Pet Lawless ain't. I'll ride through the woods after dark, in spite of all the runaway niggers this side of Baltimore."

"All right," said Ranty, "I'd rather they'd eat you, though, than me; for you're like the Starved Apothecary—all skin and bones. They'll have hard crunching of it, I'll be bound! Luckily, though, darkeys have good teeth!"

"Oh, Pet! what will you do, if the niggers should see you?" said Erminie, clasping her hands.

Pet touched her pistols significantly.

"Two years ago, Ranty taught me to shoot, you little pinch of cotton-wool! and I haven't forgotten the way for want of practice since, I can tell you. I can see by the light of a nigger's eye, in the dark, how to take aim as well as any one."

"You shoot!" said Ranty, contemptuously. "You're nothing but a little boaster and a coward at that; all boasters are. You'd fall into fits at the first glimpse of a woolly head."

"I wouldn't! and I ain't a coward!" cried Pet, stamping her foot passionately, while her fierce black eyes seemed fairly to scintillate sparks of fire. "I hate you, Ranty Lawless, and I'll just do as I like, in spite of you all!" And flushed with passion, Pet fled out, sprung on her fleet Arabian, as wild and fiery as herself, and striking him fiercely with her whip, he bounded away as if mad. Two minutes after and the black, fiery horse and little, dark, fiery rider were both out of sight.

And looking deeply troubled and anxious, gentle little Erminie returned to the house.

"Whew! what a little tempest! what a tornado! what a bombshell she is! Now, who in the world but her would fire up in that way for a trifle? This getting up steam for nothing is all a humbug! Girls always *are* a humbug, though, anyway," said the polite and gallant Mr. Lawless. "Luckily there's one sensible individual in the family."

"Yourself, I suppose," said Erminie, as she proceeded to set the room to rights, like the neat little housewife that she was.

"Yes," said Ranty; "all the good sense and good looks, too, of the family have fallen to my share, except what uncle

Harry Havenful has got."

"You seem to have a great idea of your own beauty," said Ray, turning from the window, where he had stood to hide his mortification, ever since his rebuff from Pet.

"To be sure I have," said Master Ranty, stretching out his legs, and glancing complacently in the mirror. "Nobody can see my perfections but myself; so I lose no chance of impressing them on the minds of the community in general. But I say, Ray, come out, down to the trout streams. I've got a plan in my head that promises good fun, which I'll tell you while we're catching something for Minnie's dinner-table."

"All right," said Ray, as he turned and went out with him, little dreaming how dearly he was destined to pay for Ranty's "fun."

"Now, I know they're going to torment somebody, and it's such a shame," said Erminie to herself, as she took the pocket-handkerchief she was hemming, and sat down by the window. "I guess it's the admiral; Ranty's always plaguing him when he's at home, and it's too bad; 'cause the admiral's the nicest old man ever was. My! I hope the niggers won't catch Pet," she added, half-aloud, as her thoughts strayed to that self-willed young lady.

A shadow fell suddenly across the sunshine streaming through the open door; and looking up, Erminie saw, to her great surprise, the tall, lank figure, and pallid freckles of Mr. O. C. Toosypegs.

"Why, Mr. Toosypegs, I thought you had gone," she said, in wonder.

"No, Miss Minnie, I ain't gone, I'm very much obliged to you," said Mr. Toosypegs, mournfully, seating himself. "I didn't like to go home; for when Miss Prisciller ain't well, she ain't always as pleasant as she might be, you know. She means real well, I'm sure; but then it's distressing sometimes to be *always* scolded. I ain't got long to live, either, you know," said Mr. Toosypegs, with increasing mournfulness; "and there is no use in me suffering more than is necessary—is there, Miss Minnie? I always thought I was to have troubles, but I never knew before they were to be so dreadful. I intend going to Judestown right after dinner, and having my will made out in case anything might—well, might happen, you know. I'm going to leave half to Aunt Prisciller, and t'other half to your grandmother. She's been real good to me, and I'm very much obliged to her, I'm sure," said Mr. Toosypegs, with emotion.

"Why, Mr. Toosypegs, you ain't weeping about what that old woman told you—are you?" said Minnie, looking up with her soft, tender, pitying eyes, as Mr. Toosypegs wiped his eyes and blew his nose, with a look of deepest affliction. "Why, it was only Ranty dressed up."

"Ranty!" said Mr. Toosypegs, springing to his feet.

"Yes: Ranty Lawless, you know, dressed up in old clothes. He is always doing things like that, to make people laugh. It wasn't any old woman at all—only him."

Mr. Toosypegs took off his hat, which, all this time, had been on his head; looking helplessly into it, and, finding no solution of the mystery there, clapped it on again, sat down, and placing both hands on his knees, faced round, and looked Erminie straight in the face.

"Miss Minnie, if it isn't too much trouble, would you say that over again?" inquired Mr. Toosypegs, blandly.

"Why, it isn't anything to say, Mr. Toosypegs," said Minnie, laughing merrily; "only Ranty, you know, wanted to make us think him an old witch, and dressed himself up that way, and made believe to tell your fortune. You needn't be scared about it, at all."

"Well, I'm sure!" ejaculated Mr. Toosypegs. "You *really* can't think what a relief it is to my feelings to hear that. Somehow, my feelings are always relieved when I'm with you, Miss Minnie. Young Mr. Lawless means real well, I'm sure, but then it kind of frightens a fellow a little. I felt, Miss Minnie," said Mr. Toosypegs, placing his hand on his left vest-pocket, "a sort of feeling that kept going in and out here, like—like—anything. I felt as if I was headed up in a hogshead, all full of spikes, with the points inward, and then being rolled downhill. You've often felt that way, I dare say, Miss Minnie?"

Minnie, a little alarmed at this terrible description, said she didn't know.

"Well, I feel better now. I'm very much obliged to you," said Mr. Toosypegs, drawing a deep breath of intense relief; "and I guess I won't mind my will this afternoon; though I sha'n't forget Mrs. Ketura when I'm going, if she should happen to survive me. How does she feel to-day, Miss Minnie? Excuse me for not asking before; but, really, I've been in

such a state of mind all the morning, that I actually couldn't tell which end I was standing on, if I may be allowed so strong a figure of speech."

"Grandmother's as well as she always is," replied Minnie. "She is able to sit up, but she can't walk, or come downstairs. She won't let me sit with her either, and always says she wants to be alone."

"I expect her son preys on her mind a good deal," said Mr. Toosypegs, reflectively.

"He was drowned," said Erminie, in a low tone.

"Yes, I know; she was real vexed with Lord De Courcy about it, too. I dare say you have heard her talk of him."

"Yes," said Erminie, with a slight shudder; "I have heard her tell Ray how he must hate him and all his family, and do them all the harm he could. I don't like to hear such things. They don't seem right. I heard Father Murray saying, last Sunday, in church, we must forgive our enemies, or we won't be forgiven ourselves. I always used to come away, at first, when grandmother would begin to talk about hating them and being revenged; but her eyes used to blaze up like, and she would seem so angry about it, that afterward I stayed. I don't like to hear it though, and I always try not to listen, but to think of something else all the time."

"I suppose young Germaine don't mind," observed Mr. Toosypegs.

"No. Ray gets fierce, and looks so dark and dreadful that I feel afraid of him then," said Erminie, sadly. "He always says, when he is a man he will go to England and do dreadful things to them all, because they killed his father. I don't think they killed him; do you, Mr. Toosypegs? They couldn't help his being drowned, I think."

"Well, you know, Miss Minnie," said Mr. Toosypegs, with the air of a man entering upon an abstruse subject, "if they hadn't made him go on board that ship, and he hadn't took anything else, and died, he would have been living yet. He didn't care about going, but they insisted, so he went, and the ship struck a—no, it wasn't a mermaid—the ship struck a coral reef—yes, that was it. The ship struck that and all hands were lost. Now, where the fault was, I can't say, but it was somewhere, Miss Minnie! That's a clear case."

And Mr. Toosypegs leaned back in his chair with the complacent smile of a man who has explained the whole matter, to the satisfaction of the very dullest intellect.

Little Minnie looked puzzled and wistful for a moment, as if, notwithstanding all he had said, the affair was not much clearer; but she said nothing.

"You're his daughter—ain't you, Miss Minnie?" said Mr. Toosypegs, briskly, after a short pause.

"Whose, Mr. Toosypegs?" asked Minnie.

"Why, him, you know: him that was drowned."

"No, I guess not," said Erminie, thoughtfully; "Ray called me his little sister, one day, before grandmother, and she told him to hush, that I wasn't his sister. I guess I'm his cousin, or something; but I don't think I'm his sister."

"Your father and mother are dead, I reckon," said Mr. Toosypegs.

"Yes, I suppose so; but I dare say you'll laugh, Mr. Toosypegs, but it never seems so. I dream sometimes of the strangest things." And Erminie's soft violet eyes grew misty and dreamy as she spoke, as though gazing on something afar off.

"Good gracious! what do you dream, Miss Minnie? I'm sure I haven't the least notion of laughing at all. I feel as serious as anything," said Mr. Toosypegs, in all sincerity.

But Erminie, child as she was, shrunk from telling any one of the sweet, beautiful face of the lady who came to her so often in her dreams; and so, blushing slightly, she bent over her work in silence.

"Doesn't young Germaine know who your father and mother were?" asked Mr. Toosypegs, after a while, seeing Erminie was not going to tell him about her dreams.

"No, Ray doesn't know, either. Grandmother won't tell, but he thinks I'm his cousin; I guess I am, too," said Erminie, adopting the belief with the careless confidence of childhood.

"Well, you were born in England, anyway," said Mr. Toosypegs, "for you were only a little baby, the size of that, when you left it," holding his hand about an inch and a half above the floor. "Most likely you're a gipsy, though—*she's* a gipsy, you know," added Mr. Toosypegs, in a mysterious whisper, pointing to the ceiling.

"Yes, I know," said Erminie, with an intelligent nod; "I heard her tell Ray so; she used to tell him a good many things, but she never tells me anything. I guess she thinks I don't love her, but I do. Did you ever see that Lord De Courcy?"

"No; but I saw his son, Lord Villiers, and his wife, Lady Maude. My gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, with an unexpected outburst of enthusiasm, "she was the handsomest woman in the world! I can't begin to tell you how good-looking she was! If all the handsome women ever you saw were melted into one, they wouldn't be near so good-looking as Lady Maude!"

"How I should like to see her!" said little Erminie, laying down her work with a wistful sigh. "Tell me about her, Mr. Toosypegs."

"Well, she had long black curls, not like Miss Pet's, you know, but long and soft; and the most splendid black eyes—go right straight through a fellow, easy! She was pale and sweet; I always used to think of white cream-candy whenever I saw her, Miss Minnie; and then her smile, it was just like an angel's—not that I ever saw an angel, Miss Minnie," said Mr. Toosypegs, qualifying his admission, reluctantly, "but they must have looked like her."

Erminie had listened to this description with clasped hands, flushed cheeks, parted lips and dilating eyes. As Mr. Toosypegs paused, she impetuously exclaimed:

"Oh, Mr. Toosypegs, I've seen her! I've seen her often!"

"Good gracious!" said the astonished Mr. Toosypegs, "I can't see where; I guess you only think so, Miss Minnie."

"Oh, no, I don't; indeed I don't; I know I have seen her. That lovely lady with the beautiful smile, and soft black eyes. Oh, I know; I've seen her, Mr. Toosypegs."

"Land of hope! where, Miss Minnie?"

But Minnie had recovered from her sudden joy and surprise at hearing of the resemblance between this beautiful lady and the lovely vision of her dreams, and pausing now, she blushed, and said:

"Please don't ask me, Mr. Toosypegs; you would think me silly, I guess. I must go and help Lucy to get dinner now. You'll stay for dinner—won't you, Mr. Toosypegs?"

"Thank you, Miss Minnie," said the gratified Mr. Toosypegs, "I certainly will, with a great deal of pleasure; I'm very much obliged to you."

CHAPTER XVIII.

PET'S PERIL.

"Who can express the horror of that night,
When darkness lent his robes to monster fear?
And heaven's black mantle, banishing the light,
Made everything in ugly form appear."

Miss Petronilla Lawless having, as Ranty would have expressed it, got the steam up to a high pressure, thundered over the heath, entered the forest road, and looked with eyes sparkling with defiance at the dark, gloomy pine woods on either hand. The bright morning sunshine, falling in a radiant shower through the waving boughs of the pines, gilded the crimson glow on her thin cheeks and lips, and brought fiery circlets of flame through all her short, crisp, jetty curls. Darkly beautiful looked the little wilful elf, as she slackened her pace through the narrow, sylvan forest path, as if to give any hidden enemy, if such lurked there, a full opportunity of making his appearance. None came, however; and twenty minutes brought her in sight of the gloomy gorge in the cleft mountain, so appropriately named Dismal Hollow.

Pet slackened the mad pace at which she had started still more, and loosening her bridle-reins, allowed her sure-footed pony, Starlight, to choose his own way down the narrow, unsafe bridle-path.

As she approached the house, she ran her eye, with a critical look, over it, and muttering, "Miss Priscilla's been making

improvements," prepared to alight.

A great change for the better, too, had taken place in the appearance of Dismal Hollow, since the advent of Miss Priscilla. The great pools of green slimy water were no longer to be seen before the door; the receptacles for mud and filth had vanished, as if by magic. A clean, dry platform spread out where these had once been; the windows were no longer stuffed full of rags and old hats, but with glass panes, that fairly glittered with cleanliness; broken fences were put up, outhouses were repaired, and the whole house had evidently undergone a severe course of regeneration. Inside, the improvements were still more remarkable. Every room had undergone a vigorous course of scrubbing, washing, papering, and plastering, and the doors and windows had been closed, and hermetically sealed, and no sacrilegious foot was ever permitted to enter and "muss up," as Miss Priscilla expressed it, those cherished apartments wherein her soul delighted. The only rooms in the old house which she permitted to be profaned by use were a couple of sleeping apartments, a little sitting-room, and the kitchen. The servants, for so long a time accustomed to do as they liked, and lazy about as they pleased, were struck with dismay at Miss Priscilla's appalling vigor and neatness. That worthy lady declared it was not only a shame, but a sin, to be eaten out of house and home by a parcel of "shiftless niggers;" and one of her very first acts was to hire half of them out to any one who would employ them. The remainder were then informed, in very short terms, that if they did not mind their P's and Q's, they'd be "sold to Georgy"—a threat sufficient to terrify them into neatness and order sufficient even to satisfy "Miss 'Silly," as they called her.

On this particular morning, Miss Priscilla sat up in her sitting-room—a little, stiff, square, prim, upright and downright sort of an apartment, with no foolery in the shape of little feminine nicknacks or ornaments about it, but everything as distressingly clean as it was possible to be. Miss Priscilla herself, radiant in a scanty, fady calico gown, reaching to her ankles, a skimpy black silk apron, and a stiff, solemn, grim-looking mob-cap, was ensconced in a rocking-chair, that kept up an awful "screechy-scrawchy," as she rocked backward and forward, knitting away as if her life depended on it. Very hard, and grim, and sour looked Miss Priscilla, as she sat there with her sharp, cankerous lips so tightly shut that they reminded one of a vise, and her long, bony nose running out everlastingly into the thin regions of space.

The sharp clatter of horse's hoofs arrested her attention, and she turned and looked sharply out of the window. The sour scowl deepened on her vinegar phiz, as she perceived Pet in the act of alighting.

"That sharp little wiper of a Lawless girl," muttered Miss Priscilla, "coming here, with a happetite that's hawful to contemplate, when she's not wanted; turning heverything topsy-turvy, not to speak of that there pigeon-pie what's for dinner being honly henough for one. Wah! wah!"

And with a look that seemed the very essence of distilled vengeance, and everything else sour, sharp and cankerous, Miss Priscilla went to the head of the stairs and called:

"Kupy! Kupy!" (her abbreviation of Cupid), "go and hopen the door for that Lawless girl, which is come, and bring her pony hinto the barn, and show her hup 'ere; hand don't mind a-givin' hof her hany hoats. Be quick there!"

As Miss Priscilla, who looked with contempt upon bells as a useless superfluity, had a remarkably shrill, ear-splitting voice of her own, the order to be quick seemed quite unnecessary; for Cupid, clapping his hand over his bruised and wounded ear-drums, hastened to the door as rapidly as possible, in order to get rid of the noise. Then Miss Priscilla walked back to her chair, and deposited her bony form therein—determining, with a sort of sour grimness, to make the best of a bad bargain. Not that Miss Priscilla thought anything of the courtesies of hospitality. She was above such weakness. But Pet Lawless was the daughter of one of the richest and most influential men in the State—would be a great heiress and fine lady some day; and Miss Priscilla, being only flesh and blood, like the rest of us, could not help feeling a deep veneration for wealth. Personally, she disliked our mad little whirligig more than anybody else she knew. But money, like charity, covereth a multitude of sins; and as Miss Pet would inherit half a million some day, Miss Priscilla Toosypegs, looking into the womb of futurity, was disposed to forgive her now the awful crime of "mussing up" her immaculate rooms, in the hope of a substantial return when the little madcap entered upon her fortune.

Pet, having by this time alighted, ran up the steps, and, with the end of her riding-whip, knocked so vociferously that she awoke every slumbering echo in the quiet old house.

Cupid, half-deafened between the piercing voice of Miss Priscilla within, and the vigorous clamor without, threw open the door; and Pet, with her riding-habit gathered up in one hand, and flourishing her whip in the other, stood there, bright, and sparkling, and fresh as a mountain-daisy before him.

"Well, Cupe how are you these times? Eh? Miss Priscilla at home?"

“Yes, Miss Pet. Miss Silly tole me to tell you you was to walk right up,” said Cupid.

“Very well. Take Starlight, and give him a good rubbing, and then plenty of oats and water. He’s had a hard gallop of it this morning—poor fellow!” said Pet, as she passed Cupid, and ran up-stairs. “Now to face the old dragon!” she muttered, as, puckering up her rosy mouth in a fruitless attempt to whistle, she swaggered into the presence of the dread spinster, with her usual springing, jaunty air.

“She hates me, and she hates kisses,” said Pet, mentally; “so I’ll kiss her, if I die in the attempt! But, ugh! vengeance! verdigris! vitriol, and vinegar! I’d as lief swallow a dose of sourkrout, and have done with it. It’s going to be awful, I know; but I’ll do it!”

“Morning, Miss Pet,” said Miss Priscilla, looking grimly up.

“Oh, Miss Priscilla, how do you do! Oh, Miss Priscilla! I’m so glad to see you again!”

And before Miss Priscilla dreamed of her diabolical intention, the elf had sprung forward, clutched her by the throat, and clung to her like a clawfish, while half a dozen short, sharp kisses went off like so many pop guns on the withered cheek of the luckless old maid.

With no gentle hand, Miss Priscilla caught the monkey by the shoulder, and hurled her from her with a violence that sent her spinning like a top across the room.

“It’s all very well for people to be glad to see people, which is honly ’uman nature,” began Miss Priscilla, in a high, shrill falsetto, while she adjusted her dislocated mob-cap; “but that hain’t no reason why people must ’ave the clothes tore hoff their back by people, just because they’re glad to see them—which is something I never was used to, Miss Pet; and though hit may be the fashion hin this ’ere country, hit’s something I don’t happrove of hat all, Miss Pet. Now, you’ll hexcuse me for saying I would rather you wouldn’t do so no more—which is disagreeable to the feelings, not to speak of mussing up people’s caps, as is some bother to hiron; though you mayn’t think so, Miss Pet.”

And having delivered herself of this brilliant and highly-grammatical oration, and thereby relieved her mind, Miss Priscilla picked up a stitch in her knitting, which, in the excitement of the moment, she had dropped.

“Why, Miss Priscilla, I’m sorry; I’m sure I didn’t mean to make you mad,” said Pet, in a penitent tone. “But I was so glad to see you, you know, I couldn’t help it. Where’s Orlando?”

“Hat them there Barrens, which is the desolatest place I hever seen,” said Miss Priscilla; “hall weeds; and there you’ll find him, with nothing growing but nasty grass, hall halong hof that there hold gipsy woman and little gal, ’stead hof staying at ’ome, hand ’tending to his ’fairs, as a respectable member hof s’ciety hought for to do; heaving away his money, with me slavin’ hand toilin’ from week’s hend to week’s hend, smoking hof nasty cigars, as spiles the teeth hand hundermines the hintellecks; which was something his blessed father (now a hangel hup there in the graveyard) never did; and shows ’ow youth is a degeneratin’. Wah! wah!” said Miss Priscilla, concluding with her usual grimace of sour disgust.

“Just so, Miss Priscilla, I’ve often had to talk to our Ranty about it, too,” said Pet, gravely; “but these boys are all a nasty set, you know, and don’t mind us girls at all. I’ve come to stay all day, Miss Priscilla.” And Pet took off her hat and gloves as she spoke. “I thought you might be lonesome, and knew you’d be glad to have me here; and I don’t really know of any place I like to be so well as I do to be here!”

All the time Pet had been uttering this awful fib, she was taking off her things, and pitching them about in a way that made Miss Priscilla gasp with horror. Her hat was thrown into one corner, her gloves into another, her whip into a third, and her pocket-handkerchief, collar and brooch anywhere they chose to fall.

“You needn’t go putting yourself out about dinner, Miss Priscilla,” said Pet, who well knew the spinster’s parsimoniousness in this respect, and thought she would just give her a hint. “Anything will do for me—a broiled chicken, with a mince pie and some grapes; or some nice mutton chops, fried in butter, with a rice-pudding, or a custard—anything, you know. But don’t put yourself out!”

“I don’t hintend to,” said Miss Priscilla, knitting away, grimly. “I never do put myself hout for hanybody; wouldn’t for the President hof the United States or the King hof Hingland—no, not hif he was to come hall the way from Lunnon hon his two blessed bare knees to hask hit hof me has a favor. Hand hif you’d pick up them there clothes of your’n, Miss Pet, which his hall pitched habout, hand gives the room a’ huntidy look, and put them hon the table, hand call to Haunt Bob to carry them hup-stairs, I’d feel heasier hin my mind.”

“Oh, let them lay!” said Pet, indifferently. “They’re old things; and I ain’t particular about them. I guess the floor won’t dirty them much!”

“My floor’s clean, Miss Pet, I’d have you for to know, hand wouldn’t dirty hanybody’s things!” answered Miss Priscilla, sharply, and with flashing eyes; “but them there things hof your’n musses hit hup, which his something I never likes my room to be, being neat myself, a-slavin’, and toilin’, and strivin’ to keep things to rights from morning till night, with people a-pitchin’ hof things round huntil hit looks like a ’og-stye. Wah! wah!”

And Miss Priscilla got up and picked up all Pet’s garments, and carried them up to her own bedroom, out of the way.

And then Pet, with her diabolical spirit of mischief uppermost, went flying through the house, opening, shutting, slamming and banging the doors, in a way that drove the peace-loving spinster to the verge of madness, and made her sour temper ten degrees sourer, until her very look would have turned treacle to vinegar. In and out, up and down stairs, getting astride of the bannisters and sliding down, at the imminent danger of breaking her neck, ransacking every room, and turning everything topsy-turvy and upside down, and “mussing things” generally, until Miss Priscilla Toosypegs “vowed a vow” in her secret heart that the next time she saw Miss Petronilla Lawless coming, she would lock every door in the house, and send Cupid out with his “blunderingbuss” to shoot her, rather than let her ever darken her doors again.

Dinner at length was announced, and Miss Priscilla began to breathe freely again, in the hope of at least a few moments, respite from her tormentor. As Pet entered the sitting-room—for Miss Toosypegs dined in her sitting-room—her thin, dark, bright face all aglow with fun and frolic; her black eyes dancing and sparkling with insufferable light; her short, crisp, black curls all tangled and damp over her shoulders and round, polished, saucy, boyish forehead, she looked the very embodiment, the very incarnate spirit of mischief and mirth. She looked like a little grenade, all jets and sparkles—a little barrel of gunpowder, at any moment ready to explode—a wild, untamed little animal, very beautiful, but very dangerous.

And there, at the head of the table, the greatest contrast to her dark, bright, fiery little neighbor that could well be found, sat Miss Toosypegs, as prim, stiff and upright as if she had swallowed a ramrod—as sour, sharp and acid as if she had been spoon-fed on verjuice from infancy upward.

Pet’s eyes went dancing over the table to examine the bill of fare. Now, reader, our Pet was not a gourmand, nor yet an epicure, by any means—what she got to eat was very little trouble to her, indeed; but she knew Miss Priscilla was intensely miserly, and, having plenty, begrudged every mouthful eaten at her board. Therefore, the wicked little elf determined to give her a slight idea of what she could do in the eating-line when provoked to it.

But alas! little was there on that table to provoke the appetite. Two cups of pale, sickly-looking tea, a plate with four small, dropsical-looking potatoes, a consumptive red-herring, and, by way of dessert, a pigeon-pie. That was all.

Pet’s face fell to a formidable length for an instant; the next, a bright idea struck her, and she inwardly exclaimed, as she saw Miss Priscilla’s eyes rest lovingly on the pigeon-pie:

“Pet, child, you’ll be starved, you know, if you don’t look out, before you get home. It’s your duty to show Miss Priscilla what she owes to her guests; so you walk right into that pigeon-pie, and eat every morsel of it, though you should burst!”

“Sit down, Miss Pet,” said Miss Priscilla, solemnly, pointing to her chair, and holding her knife and fork threateningly over the ghostly-looking red-herring, “for what we are about to receive. Which do you like best, the ’ead or the tail, Miss Pet?—take your choice.”

“Thank you, Miss Priscilla; for I don’t care for either—I ain’t fond of fish. I guess I’ll take this.”

And Pet coolly leaned over, took the pie, and commenced vigorously cutting it up.

“I always make myself at home here, Miss Priscilla,” said Pet, speaking with her mouth full. “I know you ain’t fond of dainties; and nobody has such nice pigeon-pies as you have. You made it on purpose for me—didn’t you? I told you not to put yourself to any trouble on my account; but you would, you know. It’s real nice, Miss Priscilla; and I’d ask you to have some, only I know you don’t care about it.”

And all this time Pet had been crunching away, half choking herself in her haste.

And Miss Priscilla! What pen shall describe her feelings when she saw that cherished pigeon-pie—the making of which she had been deliberating about for a week before—that pigeon-pie, which had been uppermost in her mind all morning, vanishing before her eyes with such frightful rapidity? The English language is weak, is utterly powerless to describe

how she felt. There she sat, as if turned to stone, her knife and fork still poised over the herring, speechless with horror and amazement, her eyes frozen to the face of Pet, while still her cherished pigeon-pie kept disappearing like mist before the morning sun.

"Do take your dinner, Miss Priscilla. Why, you ain't eating anything, hardly," said the wicked little wretch, as her fork went up and down from her plate to her mouth with the nearest approach to perpetual motion the horrified spinster had ever seen. "Just see how I'm getting along. This pie is really beautiful, Miss Priscilla. Oh, I love pigeon-pie; and only I know you'd rather see me eat it, I'd make you have a piece. There! I've finished!" said Pet, pushing aside the empty plate, and leaning back in her chair in a state almost "too full for utterance." "Oh, that pigeon-pie was—was—actually divine! It just was, Miss Priscilla; and I'd come to see you every day if you'd only make me one like that."

Without a word, but with a look that might have turned scarlet any face less hard than that of the wicked little elf, Miss Priscilla began her dinner. Nothing daunted, Pet sat and talked away unceasingly; but never a word came from the penknife-lips of Miss Priscilla Toosypegs. Then, when the slender repast was over, Aunt Bob was called up from the lower regions to clear away the service; and Pet sat in her chair, feeling it inconvenient to do anything but talk, just then; and talk she did, with a right good will, for two mortal hours; and still Miss Priscilla sat knitting and knitting away, and speaking never a word.

"The cross, cantankerous, sharp-nosed old thing!" muttered Pet, at last, getting tired of this unprofitable occupation. "The stingy old miser! to sit there sulking because I ate the only thing fit to eat on the table. I declare! if I haven't a good mind to come every day and do the same, just for her ugliness! Oh, yaw-w-w! how sleepy I am! I guess I've done all the mischief I can do, just now, so I'll go to sleep. I'd go home, only I said I wouldn't go till dark, and I won't, either! So, now, Pet, child, you drop into the 'arms of Murphy,' as Ranty says, as fast as you like."

And curling herself up in her chair, with her head pillowed on her arm, Pet, in five minutes, was sound asleep.

From her slumbers she was awoke by a vigorous shake, given by no gentle hand. Pet started up, rubbed her eyes, and beheld Miss Priscilla, by the light of a lamp she carried, bending over her.

"I'm a-going to bed, Miss Lawless," said Miss Priscilla, grimly; "hand hunless you intends staying all night—which I shouldn't be hany surprised at hif you was—hit's time you was a-going 'ome."

"Why, how late is it?" exclaimed Pet, jumping to her feet.

"Height o'clock, hand as dark as a wolf's mouth, hat that."

"My stars! And isn't tea ready yet, Miss Priscilla?"

"I've 'ad my tea a' hour ago," said Miss Priscilla, with a grim sort of smile. "You was so sound hasleep I didn't care about wakening hof you, not to speak hof aveing heat so much for your dinner, I didn't think you'd care for hany tea. 'Ere's your things, Miss Pet, and your 'oss is at the door; but you can stay hall night, hif you like."

"I won't stay all night! I'll never come here again—yes I will too! I'll come every single day—see if I don't," exclaimed Pet, bouncing across the room, and giving her hat a slap on her head. "I know you don't want me, and I'll just come! If you was to our house, do you think I'd pack you off without any tea? No, I wouldn't if I had to boil the tea-leaves we used the last time for it! It just shows the sort of folks Englishers are, and I wish there wasn't one in the world—I just do; and I don't care who hears me saying it. I'm a-going, Miss Priscilla, and I vow to Sam! I'll be back to-morrow, and the next day, and the next—see if I don't!"

And while scolding furiously, and flinging things about in a manner perfectly awful to so neat a housekeeper as the ancient spinster, Miss Petronilla had managed to dress herself and descend the stairs, while Miss Priscilla, grim as a cast-iron statue, stood at the head, holding the light. Pet flounced out of the hall, giving the door a terrific bang behind her, and stepped out into the night.

By the light that streamed from the glass top of the door, Pet saw Cupid holding her pony. Springing lightly on his back, she gathered up the reins, and paused a moment before starting to look around.

The night was pitch dark, still, and sultry. Not a breath of air moved, not a leaf rustled; but from the inky pall of deepest gloom overhead, short, fitful flashes of lightning at intervals blazed. A storm was at hand, and would soon burst.

“For de Lor’s sake! hurry, Miss Petronilla,” said Cupid, in a frightened whisper. “Dar’s de awfulest storm a-comin’ to-night you ever see’d. Miss ’Silly oughtn’t ’lowed you to go froo de woods to-night.”

“Miss ’Silly, indeed! I guess she hopes I may only get my neck broke before I get home,” said Pet, shortly, as she turned her pony’s head in the direction of the bridle-path leading through the gorge.

The sure-footed steed, left to himself, securely trod the narrow path, and entered, at last, upon the forest road. Having nothing else to do, Pet began ruminating.

“If that ain’t what I call mean!” she indignantly muttered; “sending me off like an Arab, without anything to eat. The hateful, stingy old thing! I like that soft, green, good-natured Orlando, but I can’t bear her. ’Sh-h-h! softly, Starlight, my boy! there’s niggers in these woods, you know, who wouldn’t mind chawing you and me right up.”

Even while she spoke, a hand grasped her bridle-rein, and a deep, stern voice cried:

“Stop!”

At the same moment there came a vivid flash of lightning, and Pet beheld, for a second, the face of a negro black as a demon. The next instant all was deepest darkness again.

CHAPTER XIX.

PLAYING WITH EDGED TOOLS.

“Thinkest thou there dwells no courage but in breasts
That set their mail against the ringing spears
When helmets are struck down? Thou little knowest
Of nature’s marvels.”
—Mrs. Hemans.

Miss Petronilla Lawless was an exceedingly precocious, an exceedingly courageous, and an exceedingly self-possessed young lady, as our readers are aware, yet now her brave heart for one moment seemed to die within her, and a terrified shriek arose and was barely suppressed on her lips. The hour, the scene, the darkness, the danger, might have made an older and stronger person quail. Alone in the woods, where no scream for help could be heard, with the gloom of Hades all around, save when the blue blaze of the heat-lightning flashed for a moment through the darkness, helpless and alone, in the power of a fierce, blood-thirsty negro. For one instant, a deadly inclination to swoon came over her; but the next, “coward and boaster,” as she heard the words from Ranty’s lips, came borne to her ear, nerving her heart with new courage and her childish arms with new strength.

“Am I a coward and boaster, as he said?” she mentally exclaimed, while her eye lit fiercely up. “Yes, I am, if I scream and faint; so I won’t do either. It wasn’t for nothing I learned to shoot and carry pistols about, and Ranty won’t call me a coward again, if I die for it!”

All these thoughts had passed through her mind in half an instant, and now the dauntless little amazon sat erect on her horse, and one little brown hand dropped to the pistol she carried in her belt.

The black, meanwhile, had held her rearing steed firmly by the bridle-rein.

“Come, get off with you!” said the negro, gruffly. “I’ll look after you for a few days, Miss Pet. Come; I’ve got a place all ready for you in here.”

Now, Pet was too young and guileless to fear any worse fate than robbery, imprisonment, or, perhaps, death; but as the negro attempted to pass one arm around her waist and lift her from her saddle, her face blanched with horror and loathing, and shrinking back she shrieked:

“Let me go—let me go, I tell you! I’ll kill you if you don’t let me go!”

“Oh come, now, missy—none o’ this. Little kittens spit and snap, but we ain’t afraid of ’em. You’ve got to come! so you

may as well come at once."

"Lift her off, and carry her 'long. No use a-standin' foolin' here!" said another deep, guttural voice.

"Let me alone! I tell you let me alone! I'll murder you, if you don't!" screamed Pet, passionately, her finger closing hard on the trigger.

"Oh, I'm getting tired of this yer!" exclaimed the black, as he resigned the horse to his companion.

And, going over to Pet, he flung his arm around her and attempted to lift her from her saddle.

A flash of lightning at that instant revealed the black, shining visage plainly to Pet as his face was upraised to hers.

Her teeth were clenched hard, her pistol was raised, one swift short prayer for help, and the brave little amazon fired!

A loud cry, that arose even above the sharp report, burst from the lips of him who held the horse, as he let go the reins and sprung toward his wounded companion.

The frightened Arabian, the moment he felt himself released, bounded madly away, and in five minutes Pet was beyond danger.

The cottage on the Barrens was the nearest habitation; but all was dark there, and the family had evidently retired to rest.

While Pet paused to deliberate a moment whether she would rouse them up or ride home to Heath Hill, she chanced to turn her eyes in the direction of the White Squall—as the old sailor, Admiral Havenful, had named his huge white palace of painted wood—and perceived a long line of red light streaming from one of the windows far over the dry level moor.

"Uncle Harry's up yet!" exclaimed Pet. "I'll go there, and stay all night. Gee up, Starlight! You have carried me out of danger once to-night; just take me to 'Old Harry's,' as Deb says, and then you may put your head under your wing and go to sleep as fast as you like."

As if he had understood her, her fleet steed bounded furiously over the heath; and five minutes later, Pet was standing knocking away with the butt-end of her whip on the door, loud enough to waken the dead.

The terrific thumping brought three or four servants scampering to the door; and close at their heels, holding a bedroom candlestick high over her head, came the "grand seigneur" of the household, himself looking slightly bewildered at this attempt to board him by force.

"Law! if it ain't Miss Pet!" ejaculated the man who admitted her. "Might 'a' known 'twar she; nobody else would come thumpin' like dat. Fit to t'ar de ruff off!"

"Don't be afraid, Uncle Harry; it's only me!" said Pet, as she came in dispersing the darkeys by a grand flourish of her whip.

"Port your helm!" exclaimed the admiral, still slightly bewildered, as he held the candlestick aloft and stared at Pet with all his eyes.

"Well, how can I port my helm out here, I want to know?" cried Pet, testily. "Look at these niggers gaping, as if I had two heads on me, and you, standing staring at me, with that old candlestick over your head, that's got no candle in it. Here! go along with you! Be off with you!"

And again Pet flourished her whip among them, in a way that had the effect of speedily sending them flying to the kitchen regions, while she gave her passive uncle a push that sent him into the parlor from which he had just emerged.

This done, Pet followed him, shut the door with a bang, flung her whip across the room, and dropped, with a long, deep breath of relief and security, into an arm-chair.

The admiral sunk into another, still holding the candlestick in his hand, and never removing his eyes from her face. Thus they sat for some minutes, she gazing on the floor, he gazing in helpless bewilderment on her; and while they are thus engaged, we will take the liberty of glancing round the parlor of the White Squall.

Like the sitting-room of Miss Priscilla Toosypegs, there was a "plentiful scarcity" of the ornamental, and, unlike hers, a great preponderance of the useless. The floor was covered by a thick, dark carpet; the windows were shaded by blue-paper blinds; the walls were as white as the largest possible amount of whitewash could make them, and adorned by pencil draughts of ships, brigs, schooners, corvettes, and every other kind of vessel that ever delighted the heart of a sailor and puzzled an uninitiated female to describe.

Over the mantel-piece was a huge painting of a straw colored and pink man-of-war, on a blue-green sea, blazing away at a terrified-looking little cutter, on whose deck could be seen a gentleman and a lady, both considerably taller than the mainmast. This work of art was the pride and glory of the admiral, and was displayed to every stranger who visited the White Squall as something that might make even the great old masters look to their laurels.

Deer-antlers bristled in various corners, and five or six huge cages, filled with owls, parrots, hawks, and a dozen other strange birds, hung from the ceiling, while the model of a ship, some three feet long, with all her sails set, her cargo and crew most probably under the hatches—for none were visible on deck—and apparently all ready for sea, stood on the mantel-piece, right under *the* painting.

A huge, wide fireplace, in which, despite the warmth of the evening, a bright fire was burning, occupied one corner of the apartment, and close beside this sat Admiral Havenful, in his elbow-chair, still staring at his niece.

The admiral was a man of fifty or so, short, stout, plethoric, with a rubicund face, a jolly sailor's swagger, and a simple, good-natured look, naturally, that made every heart warm toward him. Very rich, very generous, and very easily "taken in," he was the guardian-angel of all the poor in the neighborhood. The admiral had never married, and had only quitted the service a few years before to settle down and end his days in the pride of his heart, his huge, white, eye-blinding "White Squall." A fondness for whisky-punch, children, and nautical phrases, were the most noticeable traits in the old man's character. His niece, Pet Lawless, had never ceased to astonish him, from the first moment he saw her, and now he sat hopelessly gazing at her, and trying to make out what could have brought her there at that hour of the night, looking so pale and excited.

Pet, with her dark eyes fixed on the floor, was uneasily wondering whether she had killed the man she had shot at, and shuddering to think what a dreadful thing it was to shed blood, even in self-defense.

"Oh, I hope—I do hope I haven't killed him!" she exclaimed at last, involuntarily, aloud.

"Killed who? Firefly?" inquired the astounded admiral.

"Uncle Harry," said Pet, looking abruptly up, "I've gone and killed a man!"

This startling announcement so completely overwhelmed the worthy admiral, that he could only give vent to his feelings by a stifled "Stand from under!"

"Yes, I just have; and I expect they'll hang me for it, now. Ranty said I was to be hung, but who would think he could really tell fortunes?"

"Killed a man! St. Judas Iscariot!" ejaculated the dismayed admiral. "When, Flibbertigibbet?"

"To-night; not fifteen minutes ago. I expect he's as dead as a herring by this time!" said Pet, planting her elbows on her knees, dropping her chin in her hands, and gazing moodily into the fire.

Admiral Havenful glanced appealingly at the candlestick; but as that offered no clue to the mystery, he took off his hat, scratched his head (or, rather, his wig; for he wore one), and then clapped it on again, and turned briskly to his niece.

"Now, little hurricane! just shake out another reef or so—will you? I'm out of my latitude altogether."

"Well, I guess you'd have been more out of it, if you had been caught as I was to-night," said Pet, with a sort of gloomy stoicism. "I was coming through the woods, you know, between Dismal Hollow and the Barrens, when, all of a sudden, two great, big, black niggers jumped from behind the trees, and caught hold of my horse."

With something like a snort of terror and dismay, the admiral sprung to his feet, and brandished the candlestick fiercely over his head, while waiting for what was to come.

"Body of Paul Jones! And what did you do, whirligig?"

"Why, I told them to let go, and they wouldn't; and then I took a pistol, and shot one of them!" exclaimed Pet, with flashing eyes.

"Hoorah!" shouted the admiral, waving the candlestick delightedly above his head. "I knew there was some of the Havenful blood in you! Three cheers for Flibbertigibbet!"

"Then my horse started, and ran off, and I came right straight here," concluded Pet, her cheeks and eyes lighting up at the exciting recollection.

“Hoorah for little Bombshell!” roared the admiral, as he sprung forward, and catching Pet’s hand, gave it a squeeze that nearly crushed the little digits. “You ought to have been a boy, Firefly! By Saint Christopher Columbus! you are a female hero, Pet!”

“Well, but it isn’t nice to kill a man, or even a nigger! I hope he ain’t dead,” said Pet, uneasily.

“Never you mind the monkey! Served him right if he is! I do hope he’s gone to ‘Davy’s locker,’ where he’ll get a warmer welcome. Why, he would have killed you, Pet!”

“I expect he would; though I don’t see where would be the good of killing a little thing like me,” said Pet, thoughtfully humane. “I say, uncle, I’d like to go and see if he’s dead!”

“And may I be swung to the yard-arm if I let you go a step! Does the girl want to get killed again?” said the admiral, puffing up and down the room, with his hands stuck in his pockets, like a stranded porpoise.

“No; the girl doesn’t want to get killed,” said Pet, crossly. “I’m not going to be killed so easily, thank you! But it seems to me you might mount two or three of the servants, and let them come with me; and I will call for Ray Germaine; and we’ll all go together to the woods, and, maybe, catch those runaway niggers that are frightening the lives out of people. I shot one of ’em, I know; and we can track him by his bleeding. There’s a reward offered, too, for whoever takes them up; and who knows but I may get it?”

“Set fire to the reward! That’s a good notion, though, about going in search of them when they’re wounded, Pet. Oh, you’re a jewel, Flibbertigibbet, and no mistake about it! There ought to be a song made about you. I’ll go, too; and there’s no time to lose. Pipe all hands, Firefly, while I go and look for my boots.”

“Now, why couldn’t he say ‘Call the servants,’ as well as ‘Pipe all hands’? which hasn’t a sensible sound at all,” said Pet, as she arose to obey. “Here, you! Jake, Tom, Bob!” she added, opening the door, and shouting at the top of her lungs, “come here as fast as you can. There’s murder in the camp!”

“Tumble up!” roared the admiral, from within.

“Tumble up!” repeated Pet, imitating the old sailor’s gruff roar as well as she could. “Uncle says so.”

Jake, and Tom, and Bob, most probably thinking, from the uproar, the house was on fire, “tumbled up” accordingly, precipitating themselves over one another, in their eagerness to be first on the field of battle.

“Clear out, and saddle four horses, and arm yourselves with boarding-pikes and cutlasses!” commanded the admiral, fastening a rusty sword to his side, and sticking a couple of pistols in his belt. “And then mount, and ride round to the front door, and stand by for further orders. Oh, the blamed black villain! He deserves to walk the plank, if ever any one did!”

All this time, the admiral had been going panting and puffing round, like a whale, arming himself with every conceivable weapon he could lay hands on, and vociferating, alternately, to himself, to “heave to!” and “stand from under!”

Pet had run out, and sprung upon Starlight, while the three alarmed servants rode behind her. And in a few moments the admiral made his appearance, and got astride a solemn, misanthropic-looking old roan, with many grimaces and contortions; for the admiral did not believe in riding himself, and would sooner have faced a tornado, any day, on the broad Atlantic, than ride three yards on horseback.

The night was still intensely dark, but perfectly calm, and by the command of Petronilla, the men had provided dark lanterns. All were now ready; but the admiral, like most generals leading his troops to battle, considered it his duty to make a speech. Short, concise speeches on the eve of a battle are, I believe, most efficacious, and, acting on this conviction, Admiral Havenful’s was brief, pithy and to the point, beginning with an adjuration to his horse:

“Sho, Ringbone, sho! Steady’s the word, and steady it is! You are now going to fight the battles of your country, my boys, under the glorious Stars and Stripes. We ain’t got ’em here, but that’s no matter. The enemy’s before you; give ’em a raking broadside first, and then board ’em, sword in hand. The eyes of all the world are upon you now—or would be only they are sleeping about this time! Clap on all sail; and scud before the wind! Hoorah! Gee up, Ringbone!”

The effect of this spirited address could not be seen in the dark, and resolved at all hazards to practice what he preached, the admiral gave both heels a simultaneous dig into the ribs of his gloomy-looking steed, which had the effect of setting that ominously-named animal off at a shuffling dog-trot, or, rather, something between a trot and a canter, partaking of the nature of both, but being, in reality, neither. Up and down our fat admiral was churned, while groan after

groan was jerked from his jolted bosom by the uneasy motion of his steed.

"She—pitches—like—an—old—hulk—on—a—swell!" came churned, word by word, like short grunts, from the lips of the admiral. "Straight—up—and—down—, and—I'll—be—capsized—directly—by—the—confounded—old—brute!"

"Can't you hurry, uncle?" exclaimed Pet, impatiently, reining in her fiery horse with difficulty, to the dead march of the admiral. "Here we're going along like a funeral or a mourning procession, or a pilgrimage, or anything else that's slow and stupid. Can't you put some life into that spavined, knock-kneed, ring-boned, wheezy old nag of yours with your whip and spurs?"

"I—I'm—jolted—to—death—already—Pet. Every—timber—in—this—old—hulk—is—sprung. Couldn't—go-a—step—further—if—old—Neptune—was—to—rise—from the—ocean—and—ask—it—of—me—as—a—particular—favor!" grunted the jolted admiral.

"Well, then, I can't wait. Starlight won't be held in," said Pet. "I'll ride on to old Barrens Cottage, and wake up Ray. He'll have time to be up, and dressed, and mounted, before you reach there, at this solemn shuffle."

And off went Pet. A very few minutes brought her to the cottage. Alighting from her horse, she rapped more decorously than was her wont, fearing to alarm Erminie.

Softly a window was raised above, and a night-capped head and a sooty face was popped out and a frightened voice demanded:

"Who's dar?"

"It's me, Lucy—Pet Lawless. Come down and open the door."

"Golly!—What on yeth brings dat little debbil here, this onsarcumcised hour ob de night?" muttered Lucy, as she popped her black head in again, and shut down the window.

A moment after, and the door was opened by Lucy and Pet admitted. Lucy held a lamp in her hand, which displayed her in her *robe de nuit*, and showing more black ankles than grace.

"Now, then! Is Ray in bed?" abruptly demanded Petronilla.

But Lucy, who expected this nocturnal visit was to announce some one was dead, or dying, on hearing this indecorous question, set down her lamp in silence, and looked scandalized and indignant.

"Well—don't you hear me? Is Ray in bed?" repeated our impatient Nimrod, in a higher key.

"Miss Pet Lawsliss," said Lucy, drawing herself up stiffly, and forgetting that her costume was more light than dignified, "you may t'ink dis yer is mighty fine, to come at de dead hours ob de night, to ax if young mars'r's in bed, but it's somefin I wouldn't do, ef I is brack. Bress my soul! I's allers tooken care not to be cotched in sich wices; but young ladies, now-a-days, as have no 'spect for demselves, can't be 'spected—"

"Why, you hateful old thing!" exclaimed Pet, angrily. "I'dd like to know what business you have lecturing me? Vices, indeed! I declare! I have a good mind to lay my whip over your shoulders! Is Master Ray in bed? Tell me, or I'll—leave you to guess what I'll do to you."

The noise of voices in violent altercation now brought Erminie to the scene of action, looking like an angel in her flowing snowy night-dress.

"Why, Pet, what is the matter?" she asked in alarm.

"Nothing, only I want Ray. Is he in bed? If he is, wake him up."

"He is not home. He and Ranty went away somewhere, after tea, and haven't come back. We thought they had gone to Heath Hill. Oh, Pet! has anything happened to them?" said Erminie, clasping her hands.

"Not as I know of. Like as not they're at Heath Hill. I haven't been there, myself, since early this morning. Now, don't get frightened and be a goose, Minnie! I wanted Ray to help me in a splendid piece of—of—mischief; but as he's not in, it's no matter. Good-night, and pleasant dreams. I'm off."

And off she was, like a shot, slamming the door behind her, after her usual fashion, and just succeeded in springing into her saddle as the slow cavalcade came tramping up.

Slowly as they rode, a short time brought them now to the forest-road. Just as they entered it, a figure came rushing out,

shouting:

“Help! help! whoever you are, or he’ll bleed to death!”

“Why, it’s Ranty!” exclaimed Pet, in amazement, as she recognized the voice.

At the same moment, one of the men, lifting his lantern, let its rays stream upon the new-comer, and all started to behold a black, shining, ebony face.

“It’s a nigger!” howled the admiral. “Blow him out of the water, boys!”

“It’s not a nigger!” shouted the voice of Ranty. “If this soot was off, I’d be as white as you, if not considerably whiter. Come along; he’ll die soon, if he’s not dead already—poor fellow!”

“Who’ll die? Who are you talking about? Oh, Ranty! who is it?” exclaimed Pet, growing faint and sick with sudden apprehension.

“Why, Ray Germaine, to be sure! You’ll have something to brag of, Pet Lawless, after going and shooting Ray Germaine —won’t you, now? I always knew your lugging pistols round, like a female Blackbeard, would come to no good, and now, when you’re sentenced to State Prison for life, we’ll see how you like it. I wish to gracious there wasn’t a girl in the world!” vociferated Ranty, with a subdued howl of mingled grief and indignation.

For one dreadful moment, Pet reeled and nearly fell from her saddle. Then, with a long, wild, passionate cry, she leaped from her horse, and sped like an arrow from a bow into the woods.

She had not far to go. By one of the fitful flashes of sheet-lightning that at intervals illumined the dark, she saw a dark, slender boyish form lying motionless on the dew-drenched grass. The next instant, she was kneeling beside him, holding his head on her breast, and clasping his cold, stiff form in a wild, passionate embrace, as she cried out:

“Oh, Ray! I never meant it! I never, *never* thought it was you! Oh, Ray! I shall die if you do!”

“Yes, it’s all very well to take on and make a fuss now,” said Ranty, savagely, giving her a pull away; “but if you kneel hugging him there, and keep ‘never, nevering’#8217; till doom’s day, it won’t bring him to. Get out of this, and if you want to do any good, jump on Starlight and ride off as if Satan was after you (as he always is, I do believe), to Judestown, for a surgeon.”

“Oh, Ranty! do you think he will die?” exclaimed Pet, in a tone of such piercing anguish, that it thrilled through every heart but the angry one of Ranty, who considered she deserved to be punished for what she had done.

“Of course, he’ll die,” said Ranty, jerking her away, “if he’s not dead already—as I expect he is! Go for the surgeon—will you? They’ll want him for the coroner’s inquest, which must sit on the body to-morrow morning. And after you’ve sent the doctor to the cottage, the best thing you can do is to go and give yourself up to the sheriff and save him the trouble of coming to the house after you. Be off, now, and ride fast, if you ever want to atone for the mischief you have done. If you break your neck on the way it will be the greatest blessing bestowed on America since the Declaration of Independence was signed. Here, you fellows! off and get some branches, and spread your coats on them, and make a litter to carry poor Ray home.”

“Go for the doctor, Pet,” whispered the admiral. “I’ve got out of my reckoning again, somehow. Don’t see where the wind sits, for my part.”

Without a word, Pet leaped into her saddle and darted off, according to Ranty’s directions, as if “Satan was after her.” And then, superintended by Ranty, a rude litter was made and the cold, rigid form of Ray placed upon it. The negroes carefully raised it on their shoulders, and headed by Ranty and the admiral, the melancholy cavalcade set out for the cottage.

“How, in the name of Beelzebub, did this all happen?” was the worthy admiral’s first question, as he rode along beside his afflicted nephew.

“It’s my opinion Beelzebub, or some other of them old fellows, has had a hand in it, all through,” said Ranty, with another suppressed howl of grief. “The way of it, you see, Uncle Harry, was this: Pet would go to Dismal Hollow this morning in spite of all we could say or do. We told her there were savage negroes in the woods who would send her to kingdom come as fast as they would look at her; but it was only a heaving away of breath and eloquence to talk to her. Go she would and go she did. Well, I persuaded Ray to play a practical joke on her by blacking our faces and waylaying her on her road home, to see whether or not she was as courageous as she pretended to be, Ray consented, and we

stopped her here, and by George! before we knew what we were about she fired at Ray, and then dashed off before you could say 'Jack Robinson.' Ray fell like a stone, and I, with a yell like an Indian war-whoop, rushed up to him, and raised him up, and asked him if he was killed. He said 'no' but that he thought he was pretty badly wounded in the shoulder, and I could feel his coat all wet with blood. If I had been a grown-up man, the way I would have sworn at Pet, just then, would have been a caution; but as I wasn't, I contented myself with wishing I had a hold of her for about five minutes—that was all! A little later, Ray went and fainted as dead as a mackerel, and there we were, left like the two 'Babes in the Wood,' and I expect, like those unfortunate infants, the robins might have made us a grave, if you hadn't come along in the nick of time to my relief. I didn't like to leave poor Ray wounded, and helpless, and alone there, and I couldn't carry him home; so I was in just the tallest sort of a fix I ever want to be in again. So there's the whole story, preface, marginal notes, dedication and all."

"Keep her round a point or so," said the admiral, thoughtfully; "I see breakers ahead!"

"Where?" asked Ranty, looking involuntatrily in the direction of the sea.

"If old Mother Ketura finds out Firefly has shot her boy, there'll be mutiny among the crew," said the admiral, in a mysterious whisper; "don't tell her."

"What will I say, then?" said Ranty; "suppose I tell her he and I were fighting a duel in a peaceable, friendly sort of way, just to keep our hand in, eh?"

"No, no, Ranty, boy! Stick to the truth; every lie you tell is recorded in the great log-book up above—" here the admiral removed his glazed hat reverentially. "Say he was shot accidentally——"

"On purpose," interrupted Ranty.

"Or say he was shot by mistake—so he was, you know."

"All right! I'll fix it up; trust me to get up a work of fiction founded on fact, at a moment's notice! Here we are at the cottage. Now for it!"

Ranty knocked, and again the window up above was raised; and the same sable head, a second time aroused from its slumbers, was protruded, and in sharp, irritated tones demanded:

"Who's dar now, I'd like ter know?"

"A mighty polite beginning," muttered Ranty—then raising his voice—"it's me, Lucy—Ranty Lawless."

"Ugh! might have known it was a Lawless! Never seed such a rampageous set—comin' and rousin' people out der beds dis hour de night. Fust de sister, den de brudder; fust de 'un, den de udder," scolded Lucy, quite unconscious she was making poetry; "what in de name of Marster does yer want?"

"To get in, you sooty goblin!" shouted Master Ranty, in a rage. "Come down and open the door, and let us in; don't stand there asking questions."

"Belay your jawing tackle!" roared the admiral, in a voice like distant thunder.

"Deed, I won't den! Does yer tink I's no sort o' 'steem for myself to go lettin' in men dis hour de night? I hasn't lived forty odd years to come to dis in my old ages o' life." And down the window went with a bang.

Before Ranty could burst out with a speech more vigorous than proper, the door was softly opened, and Erminie, like a stray seraph in her white floating dress, stood before them, with a face pale with undefined apprehension, and exclaiming, with clasped hands:

"Oh, Ranty, something has happened! what is it? I could not go asleep after Pet left, and I felt sure something was going to happen. Where's Ray?"

"Hush, Erminie; don't be frightened. Go in and get a light, and don't wake your grandmother—go."

"But tell me first what has happened. I won't scream. I'll be very good," pleaded Erminie, her face growing whiter and whiter.

"Well, then—Ray's got hurt pretty badly, and Pet's gone for the doctor. Now don't go crying, or making a time, but light a candle, and kindle a fire, and get some linen bandages and things; they're always wanted when wounds are dressed. That's a good girl—worth your weight in gold not to speak of diamonds. Hurry up!"

Pale and trembling, but soon wonderfully quiet, Erminie obeyed, but started back with a faint cry of terror, when the light fell on the black faces of the boys.

"Hush, Erminie! give me some soap and water 'till I wash all this black off before the doctor comes," said Ranty. "I dare say, I ain't very pretty to look at just now; but never mind; a good scrubbing will set it all right. And now get some more, and wash the black off Ray's face, too; I fancy you'll find him white enough underneath by this time."

Still trembling, and with a face perfectly colorless, Erminie obeyed; and while Ranty was giving his frontispiece a vigorous scrubbing, Erminie was more gently bathing that of Ray. When the dusky paint was off, the deadly pallor of his face seemed in such striking contrast, that she barely repressed a cry of passionate grief. Cold, and still, and white he lay, like one already dead. Then Ranty, with a face shining from the combined influences of sincere grief, and a severe application of soap and water, went to the door to see, like Sister Annie in "Bluebeard," if there was "anybody coming." Very soon he returned with the welcome intelligence that he heard the tramp of approaching horses; and the next moment Pet burst wildly into the room, followed by a grave, old, baldheaded gentleman—the physician of Judestown.

"Oh, doctor, will he die?" passionately exclaimed Pet, looking up, with a face as white as Raymond's own.

"Hope not; can't tell just yet," said the doctor, as he proceeded to rip up Ray's coat-sleeve, and remove the saturated coat.

The wound was in the shoulder; and the doctor, with very little difficulty, extracted the bullet, dressed the wound, and proceeded to administer restoratives. Then seeing Pet's white, terrified face, and with black eyes looking at him so beseechingly, he chucked her good-naturedly under the chin, and said:

"Don't be afraid, little blackbird! Master Ray's good as half-a-dozen dead people yet. All you have got to do is, to nurse him carefully for a couple of weeks, and you'll see him alive and kicking as briskly as ever by the end of that time."

"Oh, I'm so glad," said Pet, drawing a long, deep breath and dropping into a chair, she covered her face with her hands.

The doctor now gave a few directions to Erminie, and then took his leave. The admiral followed him to the door, and whispered:

"Doctor, will you just stand off and on around here, till the lad in there gets seaworthy again? I'll stand the damages, and don't you say anything about it."

The doctor nodded, and rode off; and then the admiral, seeing he could be of no use in the cottage, mounted, with many groans and grunts, Ringbone, and wended his way, followed by his three valorous henchmen, to the White Squall.

"Ranty, go home," said Pet; "we don't want you. You can tell papa, if he asks you, how it all happened, and say I ain't coming home until to-morrow. As I've shot Ray, I'm going to stay here and nurse him; so be off!"

CHAPTER XX.

FIREFLY GOES TO SCHOOL.

"Puck found it handier to commence
With a certain share of impudence;
Which passes one off as learned and clever,
Beyond all other degrees whatever."
—Song of Old Puck.

Judge Lawless was in a rage! If you have ever seen an angry lion, an enraged bear, or a young lady with "her mantle pinned awry," you may conceive in some measure the state of mind in which that gentlemen trod up and down his library floor, while he listened to Ranty's account of Pet's exploit of the previous night.

Judge Lawless was a man of forty or so, and had been a widower for five years. His face was not particularly prepossessing though extremely handsome; his haughty, supercilious expression; his cold and somewhat sinister eyes,

and slightly sensual mouth, were, on the whole, rather repelling. He prided himself, as a general thing, on his gentlemanly urbanity; but on the present occasion he quite forgot all his customary politeness, and paced up and down in a towering passion.

His son and heir, Master Ranty, had ensconced himself in a velvet-cushioned easy-chair; and with his feet on a stool, and both hands stuck in his coat-pockets, took things very coolly indeed.

"To think that my daughter should act in such an outrageous manner!" exclaimed the judge, passionately; "making herself a town's talk, with her mad actions. What other young lady in her station of life would associate familiarly with those people at Dismal Hollow, who are a low set as far as I understand; or ride through those infested woods after night? I shall put an immediate stop to it, if I have to lock her up in the attic on bread and water. I have a good mind to keep her on bread and water for a month or so, and see if that will not cool the fever in her blood! And you, sir," he added, stopping in his excited walk, and turning furiously upon Ranty, "deserve a sound thrashing for playing such a trick upon your sister. It would have served that young puppy Germaine right if she had put an end to his worthless life. I never liked that boy, and I command you instantly to cease your intimacy with him. If your uncle chooses to make a fool of himself, adopting every beggar's brat for a *protégé*, that's no reason why I should follow his lead. Now, sir, let me hear no more of this. As the son of Judge Lawless, you should look for better companionship than the grandson of an old gipsy."

"I don't know where I'd find one, then," said Ranty, sturdily. "There isn't a boy from Maine to Louisiana a better fellow than Ray Germaine. He can beat me at everything he lays his hands to, from mathematics down to pulling a stroke-oar; and there wasn't another boy at school he couldn't knock into a cocked hat."

And with this spirited declaration, Master Ranty thrust his hands deeper into his pockets, and planted his feet more firmly than ever on the stool.

"How often must I tell you, sir," vociferated his father, in a voice of thunder, "to drop this vulgar habit you have got of talking slang? I presume your accomplished friend, Germaine, has taught you that, as well as your manifold other acquirements," he added, with a sneer.

"No, he didn't," said Ranty, stoutly; "and he *could* knock them into a cocked hat, if not further, too! Ray Germaine's a tiptop fellow, and I shouldn't wonder if he'd be a President some day. It will be the country's loss if he ain't—that's all."

"Silence, sir!" thundered the judge. "How dare you have the brazen effrontery to speak in this manner to me? You have improved under your sister's tuition rapidly, since you came home! Go immediately to old Barrens Cottage, and bring Petronilla here. I shall see that she does not go there again in a hurry."

Ranty rose, with anything but a sweet expression, and went out, shaking his fist grimly at the door, I am sorry to say, once it was safely shut between them.

On reaching the cottage, he found Ray flushed and feverish with Pet and Erminie sitting on either side of him.

"Pet, go home; father says so," was his first brusque salute.

"I won't then—not a step!" said the obstinate Pet.

"He'll be after you with a horsewhip mighty sudden, if you don't," said Ranty. "I wish you could see how he's been blazing away all the morning. I reckon he's stamping up and down the library yet, nursing his wrath to keep it warm till he gets hold of you."

"Well," said the disrespectful vixen, "if he's a mind to get mad for nothing, I can't help it. I shan't go."

"Oh, Pet! you'd better," said Erminie, anxiously. "He'll be so very angry. I can take care of Ray, you know; and your father will scold you dreadfully."

"La! I know that! I'm in for a scolding, anyway, so I may as well earn it. Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, you know."

"Oh, Pet! don't stand bothering here all day," broke in Ranty, impatiently. "I've got to bring you home, anyway, and I suppose you think a fellow has nothing to do but stay here and wait 'till you're ready. Father will half-murder you, if you don't come right straight along."

"Yes; go, Pet—please do," pleaded Erminie. "I had rather you would."

“Oh, well, if I’m to be turned out I suppose I must,” said Pet, taking her hat. “I’m ready, Ranty. Good-by, Minnie; I’ll be back after dinner.”

“I don’t know about that,” muttered Ranty, springing into the saddle. “People ain’t got out of attics so easily as you think.”

A rapid gallop of half an hour brought them to Heath Hill, a gently-sloping eminence, on which stood an imposing mansion of gray sandstone, the aristocratic home of Judge Lawless, the one great potentate of Judestown and environs.

The judge, from the window of the library, saw his son and daughter approach, and flinging himself into the lounging chair Ranty had vacated, he rung the bell, and ordered the servant who answered his summons to send Miss Petronilla up-stairs directly.

“Now, you’ll catch it, Pet,” said Ranty, with a malicious chuckle.

“Will I? Wait ’till you see,” retorted Pet, as, gathering up her riding-habit in her hand, she prepared to follow the servant up-stairs.

With his face contracted into an awful frown, destined to strike terror into the flinty heart of his self-willed little heiress, the judge sat, awaiting her coming. In she came, her hat cocked jauntily on one side of her saucy little head; her round, polished, boyish forehead laughing out from between clusters of short, crispy, jetty curls; her black eyes all ablaze with anticipated defiance; her rosy mouth puckered up, ready to vindicate what she considered her legitimate rights. Not the least daunted was Pet by her father’s look, as swinging her riding-whip in one hand, she stood erect and fearless before him.

“Well, Miss Petronilla Lawless,” began the judge, in a measured, sarcastic tone; “no doubt you are very proud of last night’s achievement. You think you have done something excessively clever now—don’t you?”

“Yes, I do,” said Pet; “and so would you and everybody else—if I had only shot a real nigger, instead of Ray Germaine. It wasn’t my fault. I’d just as lief shoot one as t’other.”

“No doubt. The race of Joan D’Arc is not quite extinct, I see. How will you like to have your name bandied from lip to lip ’till it becomes a common by-word in every low tavern and hovel in Judestown?”

“Well, I shouldn’t mind. I like to be talked about; and it isn’t the first time I have given them something to talk about, either.”

“No; but it shall be the last,” said the judge, rising sternly. “I command you, now, to go no more to that cottage. If you dare to disobey me, it will be at your peril.”

“Why, where’s the harm of going, I want to know?” demanded Pet, indignantly.

“I am not in the habit of giving reasons for my conduct, Miss Lawless,” said the judge, severely; “but in this instance I will say, it is exceedingly unbecoming in a young lady to nurse a youth who is a stranger to her. No other young lady would think for a moment of such a thing.”

“Well, I ain’t a young lady,” said Pet, “no more than Ray is a stranger. And if I *was* a young lady, and went and shot a young man, I ought to help to nurse him well again, I should think.”

“What you think, Miss Lawless, is of very little consequence, allow me to tell you. Your duty is to do as I say, without presuming to ask questions. I have hitherto excused your wild, rude conduct, and made every allowance for your want of proper female training; but really, your conduct is getting so outrageous there is no telling where it will end. My intention is, therefore, to put a stop to it at once.”

Pet’s eyes flashed open defiance, and her face assumed a look of resolute determination; but she prudently said nothing.

“I have resolved, therefore, Miss Lawless,” said the judge, re-seating himself, with a look of haughty inflexibility quite overpowering; “to send you immediately to school. I wrote some time ago to a lady who keeps a private boarding-school for young girls, and she has promised to take charge of you at any time. It is an exceedingly strict establishment, and the severe discipline there maintained will have the good effect, I hope, of taming down your glaring improprieties. As I feel that keeping you here any longer is like holding a keg of gunpowder over a blazing furnace, I intend setting out with you this very afternoon. You need dresses and various other things, I know, which I am not altogether qualified to procure; I will, therefore, leave a sum of money in the hands of Mrs. Moodie, sufficient to purchase you a complete outfit, and such other things as you may want. It is useless for you to remonstrate, Miss Lawless,” said the judge, with a

wave of his jeweled hand; "for nothing you can say will move me from my purpose. I anticipated violent opposition on your part, and I am quite prepared for it. Go, I have said, this afternoon, and go you shall. If you attempt to oppose my will, you shall receive the severe punishment you have already merited."

The judge stroked his dark, glossy mustache, and looked threateningly at Pet; but to his surprise that eccentric young lady offered not the slightest opposition. When she first heard his intention of sending her away to school, she had started violently, and her color came and went rapidly; but as he went on, her eyes dropped, and an inexplicable smile flickered around her red lips. Now she stood before him, with demurely cast down eyes—the very personification of meekness and docility; had he only seen the insufferable light of mischief blazing under their long, drooping, black lashes, resting on the thin crimson cheeks, what a different tale he would have read!

"Very well, sir," said Pet, meekly; "I suppose I can't help it, and have got to put up with it. I don't know as I should mind going to school, either, for a change. Mayn't I call and see Erminie before I go, papa?"

"Hem-m-m! ah—I'll see about it," said the judge, rather perplexed by this unusual submissiveness, and intensely relieved, too, if the truth must be told; for in his secret heart he dreaded a "scene" with his stormy little daughter. "You may call in, for a moment, as we go past, and say good-by; but once in school, you will form new acquaintances among your own standing in society, and drop all the low connections you have formed around here. The daughter of Judge Lawless," said that gentleman, drawing himself up, "is qualified, by birth and social position, to take her place among the highest and most exclusive in the land, and must forget that she ever associated with—paupers!"

A streak of fiery red flamed across the dark face of Pet, and her black eyes flew up, blazing indignantly at this insult to her friends. But the next moment she remembered her *rôle*, and down fell the long lashes again; and Pet stood as meek and demure as a kitten on the eve of scratching.

"This is all, I believe, Miss Lawless," said the judge, resuming his customary, suave blandness, and feeling intensely proud of his own achievement in having awed into submission the hitherto dauntless Pet; "you may go now, and if you have any trifling preparations to make before starting, you will have sufficient time before dinner to accomplish them. I shall expect when we reach Mrs. Moodie's, you will try to behave yourself like a young lady, as my daughter will be expected to behave. You must drop your rude, brusque ways, your slang talk, amazonian bearing, and become quiet, and gentle, and ladylike, and accomplished. You understand?"

"Yes, sir!" murmured Pet, putting her forefinger in her mouth.

"Very well, I hope you do. Go now."

With her long lashes still drooping over her wickedly-scintillating eyes, her finger still stuck in her mouth, Pet meekly walked out of the august "presence," and closed the library-door, but no sooner was she safely outside, than a change most wonderful to behold came over the spirit of her dream. Up flew the long eyelashes, revealing the dancing eyes, all ablaze with the anticipation of fun and frolic; erect towered the little form, as she turned; and facing the door, applied her thumb to her nose, flourished her four fingers in a gesture more expressive than elegant, and exclaimed:

"Oh! *won't* I be good, though! won't I be lady-like! won't I forget my friends! won't I be so quiet, and gentle, and good, that they'll make a saint out of me pretty soon! won't I be a pocket-edition of 'St. Rose of Lima!' Maybe I won't; that's all!"

Pet was as busy as a nailer until dinner was announced, packing up such things as she wished to take with her to school.

Great was the amazement of Ranty, when at the dinner-table his father, in pompous tones, announced his immediate departure with Pet. Ranty glanced at her, as she sat quietly looking in her plate, and being somewhat wider awake in respect to her than his father, inwardly muttered:

"Pet's up to something; I can tell that whenever she looks particularly quiet and saintly, like she does now; there's always 'breakers ahead,' as uncle would say. Mrs. Moodie will find her hands full when she gets our Pet. She'll discover she's caught a tartar, I'll be bound?"

Immediately after dinner, black Debby was ordered to dress Miss Pet for her journey, while the judge went to his own apartment to make himself as irresistible as possible. In half an hour both were ready. Pet was handed into the carriage by her father, and waved a smiling adieu to Ranty. The judge took his seat beside her, and the two superb carriage-horses, flashing with silver-mounted harness, started off at a rapid pace.

As they came within sight of the cottage, Pet who had been lying back silently among the cushions, started up,

exclaiming:

“Stop at the cottage, John; I’m going in there for a moment:”

The coachman drew up, and Pet sprung out.

“I will give you just five minutes to make your adieux,” said the judge, drawing out his watch; “if you are not back in that time, I shall go after you.”

Pet’s eyes again defiantly flashed, but without deigning to reply, she ran into the cottage.

Erminie met her at the door, and looked her surprise at seeing the stately equipage of Judge Lawless stop at the cottage, and Miss Lawless herself all arrayed for a journey.

“How is Ray?” was Pet’s first question.

“Just as he was this morning. Where are you going, Pet?”

“He is no worse?”

“No. Are you going away?”

“Has the doctor been here since?”

“Yes, he has just gone. Where are you going, Pet?”

“Oh—to school!”

“To school! going away!” echoed Erminie in dismay.

“Yes; going to a dismal old boarding-school, where I am to walk, talk, eat, pray, and sneeze by rule. Ain’t it nice?”

“Oh, Pet, I am so sorry!”

“Well, I’m not! I expect to have a real nice time. Everybody mightn’t see the fun of it; but I do! I intend to finish my education, and be back in a week!”

“Oh, Pet! I don’t know what I shall do when you are gone; I will be so lonesome,” said Erminie, her sweet blue eyes filling with tears.

“Why, didn’t I tell you I’d be back in a week? I will, too. There’s an old dragon there, Mrs. Moodie—I’ve heard of her before—and she’s to hammer learning into me. Oh, I’ll dose her!”

“Won’t you write me a letter, Pet?” said Erminie, who was sobbing now, and clinging to her friend’s neck.

“To be sure I will, and I’ll bring it myself, to save postage. Don’t you be afraid, Minnie. I can take care of Pet Lawless, and won’t let her be put down by no one. Good-by, now; I’ve only got five minutes, and I guess they’re up by this time. Now don’t cry and take on, Minnie; you’ll see I’ll learn so fast that I’ll be sent home finished in a week!”

And with these mysterious words, Pet gave Erminie a parting kiss, and ran from the cottage just as the judge put his head out from the carriage to call her.

The journey now proceeded uninterruptedly. They remained that night at a hotel, and continued their journey next morning.

A little after noon, they reached the four-story building where Mrs. Moodie kept her costly and exclusive boarding establishment for the young female aristocracy of the land, and “trained up” (as her circulars had it) the rising female generation in all the branches of an English, French, musical, and religious education.

Judge Lawless and his daughter were shown into a magnificently-furnished drawing-room, where a “cullud pusson” took the gentleman’s card and went off in search of the proprietress (if the word is admissible) of the establishment.

Fifteen minutes later, the rustle of silk resounded in the hall. Pet drew herself up straight as a ramrod, compressed her lips, cast down her eyes, folded her hands, and looked the very picture of a timid, bashful, shy little country-girl. Then the door opened, and magnificent in a four-flounced plaid silk, with a miraculous combination of lace and ribbons floating from her head, a tall, yellow, sharp-looking lady of middle-age floated in, and with a profound courtesy to the judge that made her four flounces balloon out around her, after the fashion of children when making “cheeses,” dropped into a sofa, half-buried in a maze of floating drapery.

“This is Miss Lawless, I presume?” said Mrs. Moodie, with a bland smile and a wave of her hand toward Pet.

“Yes, madam, this is my daughter; and I consider it my duty to tell you beforehand that I am afraid she will occasion you a great deal of trouble.”

“Oh! I hope not! You are a good little girl—are you not, my dear?”—with a sweet smile to Pet. “In what way, may I ask, my dear sir?”

“In many ways, madam. She is, in the first place, unbearably wild, and rude, and self-willed, and—I regret to say—disobedient.”

“Is it possible? I really would never have imagined it!” cried the lady, glancing in surprise and incredulity toward the shy, quiet looking little girl, sitting demurely in her chair, and not venturing to lift her eyes. “I think I have tamed far more desperate characters than this; in fact, I may say I know I have. Oh! I will have no trouble with your little girl! Why, she is one of the quietest looking little creatures I think I ever saw.”

The Judge glanced toward Pet, and was half inclined to fly into a rage at discovering her so unlike herself, giving the direct lie, as it were, to his assertions.

“Come over here, my love,” said the lady, holding out her hand with a bland smile to Pet. “I want to see you.”

Pet, after the manner of little girls when they are frightened or embarrassed, instead of complying, rubbed her knuckles into her eyes, and pretended to cry.

“Get up, and do as you are told! How dare you act so?” said the judge, forgetting his “company manners” in his rage at what he could easily see was clever acting on Pet’s part.

“Now, pray, my dear sir, don’t frighten the poor little thing,” cried the dulcet tones of the lady. “Little girls are always nervous and frightened when first sent to school. Come here, my love; don’t be afraid of me!”

“Go!” thundered the judge, with a brow like a thunder-cloud.

Pet, still sniffling, got up and went over to Mrs. Moodie.

“What is your name, my dear?” smiled the lady, taking Pet’s little brown hand in her own snowy fingers.

“Pet-Pet-ronilla,” sobbed the elf.

“Now, you must not cry, dear; we will take the best of care of you here. Of course, you will miss your papa for a few days; but after that we will get along very nicely. Were you ever at school before?”

“Ye-es, ma-am.”

“What did you learn, love?”

“I don’t know.”

“Petronilla?” sternly began the judge.

“Now, pray, my dear sir,” remonstrated the silken tones of the lady, “leave it to me. Just see how you are frightening the poor little thing. You can read, my dear, of course!”

“Yes, ma-am.”

“What books have you read, love? have you read many?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“What was their names?”

“‘Jack and the Bean-stalk;’ ‘The Goose with the Golden Egg;’ ‘Little Red—’”

“Oh! my dear, I don’t mean those! Have you read nothing else?”

“No, ma’am; only a spelling-book.”

“Can you write?”

“Yes, ma’am, when somebody holds my hand.”

“Have you studied grammar and geography? I suppose not, though.”

“She has, madam; at least she commenced,” said the judge.

“Ah, indeed! What is English Grammar, love?”

“A little book with a gray cover,” said Pet.

“No, no! What does English Grammar teach?”

“I don’t know—it never teached me anything; it was Mr. Hammer.”

“Oh, dear me! You are rather obtuse, I fear. Perhaps you know more of geography, though. Can you tell me how the earth is divided?”

“It ain’t divided!” said Pet, stoutly. “It’s all one piece!”

“Ah! I fear your teacher was none of the best,” said the lady, shaking her head. “We shall have to remedy all these defects in your education, however, as well as we can. I hope to send you a very different little girl home, judge.”

“I sincerely hope so,” said the judge, rising. “Farewell, madam. Good-by, Petronilla; be a good girl—remember.”

“Oh, I’ll remember!” said Pet, significantly, accepting her father’s farewell salute, with a great deal of *sang froid*.

Mrs. Moodie politely bowed her stately guest out, and then turning to Petronilla, said:

“The young ladies are all in the class-room studying, my dear. Would you prefer going there, or shall I have you shown to your room?”

“I’ll go where the girls—I mean the young ladies are,” said Pet, following the rustling lady up-stairs.

“Very well, this way, then,” said madam, turning into a long hall with large white folding-doors at the end, through which came drowsily the subdued hum of recitation.

“Well; I think I have done the bashful up beautifully!” mentally exclaimed Petronilla. “I reckon I’ve amazed papa. Maybe I won’t surprise them some if not more, before this night’s over. Oh! won’t I dose them, though?”

And, chuckling inwardly, our wicked elf followed the stately Mrs. Moodie, who marched on ahead, in blissful ignorance of the diabolical plot brewing in Pet’s mischief-loving head.

CHAPTER XXI.

PET BEGINS HER EDUCATION.

“A horrid specter rises to my sight.”

“I hear a knocking in the south entry.
Hark! more knocking!”
—MACBETH.

Throwing open the folding-doors, Mrs. Moodie passed into the school-room, closely followed by Pet.

It was a long, high, wide room, with desks running round the walls, and maps, globes, books and slates scattered profusely around. Before each desk was a chair, and some sixty girls of all sizes and sorts sat now busily conning their lessons.

Two or three teachers sat in various directions, round the room, before little tables, with their eyes fixed on the students, ready to note down the slightest infringement of the rules.

It was seldom the commander-in-chief of the establishment swept her silken flounces through the hot, dusty *classe*; and now, according to the long-established rule, teachers and pupils rose simultaneously, and courtesied profoundly to that

august lady. Then every eye in sixty-three heads turned and fixed themselves upon the new pupil with that sharp, searching, unpitying stare that only school-girls understand. Petronilla, however, was not in the remotest degree troubled with that disagreeable failing, yclept bashfulness; and glancing round composedly, she swept the whole room at a glance, and returned every stare with compound interest.

"Young ladies," said Mrs. Moodie, with a graceful wave of her hand toward Pet, "this young lady is Miss Petronilla Lawless, of Judestown, and will be your future companion and fellow-pupil. I hope you will be mutually pleased with each other, and try to make her at home among you as soon as possible. Miss Sharpe she will enter your division."

And, with a stately bow of her beribboned head, Mrs. Moodie rustled loudly from the room, while teachers and pupils again bowed in deepest reverence.

Pet gave an assenting nod to Mrs. Moodie's remarks, which had the effect of making two or three of the young ladies, indulge in a little giggle behind their handkerchiefs. Then, from a distant corner, came a small, keen, wiry-looking human terrier, known by the appropriate cognomen of Miss Sharpe, who immediately laid hands upon Pet, saying:

"Miss Lawless, come this way. You are to enter my class."

Pet, as good a physiognomist as ever lived, raised her keen eyes to the cantankerous face of the cross-looking old young lady, and conceived, upon the spot, a most intense dislike to her. The other girls, at a silent motion from their teachers, had dropped into their seats, and resumed their studies—still, however, covertly watching the new pupil with all a schoolgirl's curiosity.

Pet was led by sharp Miss Sharpe to the remote corner from whence she had issued, and where sat some dozen or two "juvenile ladies," all smaller than Pet. Miss Lawless looked at them a moment in indisguised contempt, and then stopped short, jerked herself free from Miss Sharpe's grasp, and coming to a sudden stand-still, decidedly began:

"I ain't a-going to sit among them there little things. I want to go over there!"

And she pointed to where a number of young ladies, whose ages might have varied from seventeen to twenty, sat in the "First Division."

A very little thing will produce a laugh in a silent school-room, where the pupils are ever ready to laugh at anything a new scholar does or says; and the effect of this brief speech was a universal burst of subdued laughter from the sixty "young ladies" aforesaid.

"Well, you can't go there!" said Miss Sharpe, sharply, looking daggers at Pet. "You are to sit in my division—which is the lowest!"

"Yes, I see it is," said Pet; "but you needn't get so cross about it. I should think, when my papa pays for me, I could sit wherever I like. I'm sure this hot old room, without even a carpet on the floor, ain't much of a place to sit in, anyway."

Another universal laugh, louder than the first, followed this; and the sixty pairs of eyes flashed with wicked delight—for Miss Sharpe was the detestation of the school.

"Silence!" called the head monitor, sternly.

Miss Sharpe clutched Pet's shoulder with no gentle hand, and jerked her into a seat with an angry scowl.

"You must keep silence, Miss Lawless," she began, with asperity. "Young ladies are not allowed to talk in the class-room. You will have to sit wherever you are placed, and make no complaints. Such rude behavior is not allowed here. Hold your tongue, now, and read this."

Hereupon she took from her table the "First Book of Lessons," and put it into Pet's hand, with another scowl, darker, if possible, than the first.

Pet took it, and holding it upside down for a while, seemed to be intently studying, thinking all the while that life in a school-room was not only as pleasant, but considerably pleasanter, than she had anticipated.

But for Pet Lawless to keep silent any length of time was simply a moral impossibility; so, finding the cross teacher's lynx eyes turned for a moment the other way, she bent over toward her next neighbor, a little red-eyed, red-haired girl, about her own age, and whispered, in strict confidence, pointing to Miss Sharpe:

"Ain't she a horrid cross old thing?"

But the young lady only glanced askance at the audacious little law-breaker at her side, and edged nervously away from her.

Petronilla not being easily affronted or slighted, however, came close to little red-head, and holding her book to her mouth, whispered again:

“Does she ever whip you or anything? She looks cross enough to do it. Ain’t it awful, coming to school?”

Seeing there was no escape from her persecutor, red-head thrust her knuckles into her eyes and began to cry.

“What’s the matter now?” said the teacher, turning sharply round, and looking threateningly at Pet.

“Why, Miss Sharpe, she keeps a-talking to me all the time and won’t stop,” whispered the unhappy owner of the red hair.

“What is she saying?” said Miss Sharpe, in a quick, irritated voice, that strongly reminded Pet of Dismal Hollow and Miss Priscilla Toosypegs.

“She—she—she says you’re a—a—a horrid cross old thing, please, ma’am!” wept the little one, digging her knuckles still further into her eyes.

Miss Sharpe’s face grew black as a thunder-cloud—owing to her peculiar complexion, she generally blushed black or deep orange. In all her thirteen years’ teaching, she had never encountered a pupil who had dared to call her a “horrid cross old thing” before. Old!—that was the the worst. To be called so before the whole school, too! Miss Sharpe sat for one awful moment perfectly speechless with rage, and so black in the face that there seemed serious danger of her bursting a blood-vessel on the spot.

Once again a loud laugh, that would not be restrained, came from the sixty pretty mouths of the sixty young ladies so often spoken of. Even the teachers, although they sternly called “silence!” were forced to cough violently to hide the smile that was creeping over their faces at Miss Sharpe’s rage.

Meantime, our dauntless Pet sat with a sort of head-up-and-heels-down look, that was a sight to see; her arms akimbo, and her bright black eyes blazing with defiance, daringly riveted on the face of the justly-offended teacher.

“Did—did you dare to say that, you—you impudent, impertinent—young saucy—”

“Abandoned, outrageous son of a gun!” put in Pet, composedly.

“Silence! Did you dare to call me that—that name?”

“I didn’t call you any name—I said you were a horrid cross old thing; and I’ll leave it to everybody here if you ain’t! I ain’t used to hold my tongue—and I’m not going to do it, either!” said Pet, all ablaze with defiance.

Miss Sharpe sat unable to speak, her rage almost swamped in her utter amazement. In all her experience she had never come across so desperate and utterly depraved a case as this. Every book was dropped, and every eye fixed on Pet. Even the other teachers, unable longer to repress their smiles, exchanged glances of surprise, and watched with interest and curiosity, the little original, who sat staring at Miss Sharpe as if for a wager.

“I—I won’t endure this! I am not to be insulted in this manner!” said Miss Sharpe, rising passionately. “I’ll go and report her to Mrs. Moodie; and either she or I must leave this class.”

“My dear Miss Sharpe, be calm,” said the head teacher, a pleasant-faced young girl, as she rose and came over. “There is no use in troubling Mrs. Moodie about the matter. This little girl, you perceive, has been indulged and spoiled all her life, and cannot readily submit to authority now. My dear,” she added, turning to Pet, “you must sit still and not talk. It is against the rules; and you perceive you are giving Miss Sharpe a great deal of trouble.”

“Well, so is she, just as bad! She’s giving me a great deal of trouble, too! I want to go and sit in your class.”

“But you can’t sit in my class, Miss Lawless. You must keep the place allotted you. Little girls should be docile and obedient, you know, and do as they are told. Will you sit still now, and be quiet?”

“Yes; if she lets me alone!” pointing to Miss Sharpe.

“You must do as your teacher says, child. Now, do be a good little girl, and don’t talk.” And the sweet-voiced young lady patted Pet’s black curly head kindly, and went back to her place.

Miss Sharpe, looking as if she would like to pounce upon Pet, and pound the life out of her, relapsed scowling into her seat; and Pet, curling her lip contemptuously at the cross teacher, took a lead pencil out of her pocket and began amusing

herself drawing caricatures of her all over the book she held in her hand.

A profound silence again fell on the hot, close *classe*, and the girls bent over to-morrow's tasks; now and then however, smiling slyly at each other, and glancing significantly at the new-comer, whose short half-hour in school had already created a sensation quite unparalleled in all the past history of the establishment, and which was destined to fill sixty letters home to "papa and mama" next time they wrote. Then, in half an hour more, a bell loudly rung, and every girl jumped eagerly up. This was the signal that school for the day was dismissed; and books, slates and pencils were hustled hastily out of sight; and two by two the girls marched through the now open folding-doors, beginning with the tallest, through the long hall staircase, through another hall, out of a side-room, and into an immense play-ground, furnished with wings, skipping-ropes, hoops and everything else necessary for recreation and amusement.

But no longer were hoops, and swings, and skipping-ropes seized with loud shouts as heretofore; newer and more attractive game was in view now, and every one crowded around our Pet, surveying her with open eyes as if she were some natural curiosity.

But Pet had no intention of standing there to be looked at and cross-questioned; and breaking through the ring with the yell of an Ojibewa Indian, she sprung into one of the swings, and invited "some of 'em to come and swing her."

Like hops in beer, Pet's presence seemed to throw the whole assembly in a ferment hitherto unknown. The swings flew wildly; the skipping-ropes went up and down with lightning-like velocity; the hoops whirled and flew over the ground in a way that must have astonished even themselves, if hoops ever can be astonished. The girls raced, and ran, and skipped, and laughed as they had never done before; and the noise and uproar waxed "fast and furious." And wherever the fun was highest, the laughter loudest, the excitement wildest, there you might find Pet, the center and origin of it all. Cross Miss Sharpe, who had been sent out to look after them, and see that none of them broke their necks, if possible, wrung her hands in despair at the awful din, and rushed hither and thither, scolding, shaking, threatening, and vociferating at the top of her lungs; but all in vain. They were every one going crazy—that was evident; and that little minx, who had come there that day to throw the whole school in convulsions, was the cause of it all.

But even school-girls, with lungs, and throats, and faces very often of brass, must get exhausted at last; and after an hour's steady screaming and yelling, the whole assemblage shrieked, laughed and shouted themselves into hoarseness and comparative quiet.

Pet, somewhat fatigued after her exertions, was seated in the midst of a group of girls, telling, in solemn tones, a most awful "raw-head and bloody bones" ghost story, which she "made up" as she went along, and which was destined to deprive at least twenty little individuals of a wink of sleep that night.

Every one was bending eagerly forward, listening breathlessly to Pet, who had just got "Jack" into the "haunted castle," and was announcing the coming of a "great big black man, with red-hot coals for eyes, and flames of fire coming out of his mouth," when a thin, sharp shadow fell over them, and, looking up with a terrified start, they beheld Miss Sharpe standing over them.

"What is she talking about now?" queried that lady, with no very amiable glances toward Pet.

"She's telling a ghost story; that's what she's talking about!" said Pet, instantly beginning to be provoking.

"Ghosts!" said Miss Sharpe, turning up her nose though nature had already saved her the trouble. "Such stuff! You must not terrify the children by telling them such things, little girl."

"It's not stuff!" said Pet; "It's as true as preaching. I've seen lots of ghosts myself. There, now!"

"Miss Lawless, do you know where little girls that tell fibs go to?" said Miss Sharpe, sternly.

"Yes, the same place you'll go to, I expect," said Pet, pertly; "but I ain't telling fibs—I never do. And I have seen plenty of ghosts, too. There's a whole settlement of them out where we live. I only wish I had brought some of them to school with me, and then you would see. That's all!"

"You naughty little girl!" said Miss Sharpe, angrily. "How dare you tell me such a story? You have seen ghosts, indeed! Why, everybody knows there is no such thing."

"What do you bet there's not?" said Pet.

"Miss Lawless, you forget to whom you are speaking!" said Miss Sharpe, with dignity.

"No, I don't; I know very well to whom I am speaking," said Pet, imitating her tone; "and I know just as well there are

ghosts. They're great, tall, thin people, in white, with hollow eyes, that come at midnight and scare people. I've seen them, and I guess I ought to know."

Miss Sharpe, disdaining an altercation with the elf, who was already bristling up in anticipation of a controversy, turned and walked away majestically, or, at least, as majestically as her four feet eight inches would allow.

Pet looked after her with a boding eye that told wonderful tales, if she could only have read it; but she contented herself with mentally exclaiming:

"Oh, I'll dose you! Maybe you won't see a ghost tonight, old Miss Vinegar."

"There, now, go on with the story," chorused half a dozen voices, when Miss Sharpe was gone.

"See here," said Pet, without heeding the request, "where does she—Miss Sharpe I mean—sleep at night?"

"With us," said one of the small girls, "in the children's dormitory. The large girls have rooms to themselves, every two of them; but we sleep in a long room all full of beds, and Miss Sharpe sleeps there, too."

"Hum-m-m! Do you know where I am to sleep?"

"Yes; all Miss Sharpe's division sleep in the children's dormitory. You'll be there."

"Um-m-m! I should like to see the place. Would we be let?"

"Oh, yes. If you can get one of the girls in the First Division to go with you, she can take you all over the house."

Off ran Pet, and without much difficulty she persuaded one of the First Division girls to show her through the house.

The first place they visited was the children's dormitory. This was a long room, with rows of white-curtained beds on either side for the children, and one larger than the rest, at the further end, for Miss Sharpe. Small washstands and mirrors were scattered around, and near each bed was placed a small trunk belonging to the children.

Pet scanned these arrangements with a thoughtful eye. Then, turning to her cicerone, she said:

"In which of the beds am I to sleep?"

"In this one," said the girl, indicating one at the extreme end of the room, opposite Miss Sharpe's. "The room was full; so they had to put it close to the window, and you will have a chance to see everybody that passes."

Pet went over to examine. Within a few inches of the bed was a window overlooking the street. It was partly raised now, and Pet thrust her head out to "see what she could see," as they say. The first thing that struck her was the fact that the window was in a straight line above the hall door, and only removed from it the distance of a foot or two. Instantly a demoniacal project of mischief flashed across her fertile brain; and as she withdrew her head her wicked eyes, under their long, drooping lashes, were fairly scintillating with the anticipation of coming fun.

"Do they use bells or knockers on their doors, around here?" she carelessly asked, as she flitted about.

"Some use one, some the other. There is a large brass knocker on this door. I am sure you must have seen it."

"I had forgotten. This is my trunk, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"What time do they go to bed here?"

"Nine in summer—eight in winter."

"Hum-m-m! I know now. And do they stay out in that yard all the time?"

"Oh, no. As soon as it gets dusk we come in, have supper, and then the larger girls practice their music, or read, or write to their friends or study, or sew, or do whatever they like; and the little girls of your division play about the halls and passages."

"Um-m-m! I see," said Pet, in the same musing tone, while her wicked eyes, under their long, dark lashes, were twinkling with the very spirit of mischief. "Could you get me a good long cord, do you think? I want it for something."

"Yes, I think so. Do you want it now?"

"Yes, please."

“Very well; wait here till I go up to my room and get it for you,” said the unsuspecting young lady.

“Oh, ching-a-ring-a-ring-chaw!” shouted Pet, dancing round the long room with irrepressible glee, when she found herself alone. “Oh, won’t I have fun to-night! Won’t I show them what spiritual rapping is! Won’t there be weeping and gnashing of teeth before morning!

‘Mrs. MacShuttle,
She lived in a scuttle,
Along with her dog and her cat.’”

sang the imp, seizing a huge pitcher from one of the washstands and flourishing it over her head as she sung. Round and round she whirled, until her pitcher came furiously against the wall, and smash! in a thousand fragments it fell on the floor.

Arrested in her dance, Firefly stood still one moment, in dismay. Here was a winding-up of her extempore waltz quite unlooked for. There on the floor lay the pitcher, shivered into atoms, and there stood Pet, holding the handle still, and glancing utterly aghast from the ruins on the floor to the fragment of crockery in her hand.

“Whew! here’s a go!” was the elegant expression first jerked out of Pet by the exigency of the case. “I expect this pitcher’s been in the establishment ever since it was an establishment, and would have been in it as much longer only for me. Pet, child, look out! There’ll be murder, distraction, and a tearing off of our shirts! Fall of Jerusalem! won’t Miss Sharpe give me a blowing up, though!”

“Oh, Miss Lawless! what have you done?” cried the young lady, in tones of consternation, as she suddenly entered.

“Smashed the crockery,” said Pet, coolly pointing to the wreck.

“Oh, dear me! Oh, Miss Lawless! how could you do so?”

“Didn’t go for to do it. Got smashed itself.”

“Miss Sharpe will be very angry, Miss Lawless.”

“Well, that don’t worry me much,” said Pet.

“I am afraid she will blame me. I should not have left you here alone,” said the young lady, twisting her fingers in distress.

“No, she won’t. I’ll send out and buy another one.”

“Oh, you can’t. The servants are not allowed to run errands for the young ladies without permission from Mrs. Moodie. You will have to tell Miss Sharpe.”

“Well, come along then; I’ll tell her. Did you bring the string?”

“Yes, here it is. Oh, Miss Lawless! I am exceedingly sorry.”

“Well—my goodness! you needn’t be. An old blue pitcher! I used to throw half a dozen of them, every day, at the servants, at home, and nobody ever made a fuss about it. A common old blue pitcher—humph!”

“Oh! but it was different at home. They were your own, there; and Miss Sharpe is so—queer. She will scold you dreadfully.”

“Well, so will I, then—there! I can scold as long and as loud as she can, I reckon. An old blue pitcher! Humph! Wish to gracious I had smashed the whole set, and made one job of it.”

By this time they had reached the play-ground; and making her way through the crowd, Pet marched resolutely up to Miss Sharpe, and confronted that lady with an expression as severe as though she were about to have her arrested for high treason.

“Miss Sharpe, look here!” she began. “I’ve been upstairs and smashed an old blue pitcher. There!”

“What!” said Miss Sharpe, knitting her brows, and rather at a loss.

“Miss Lawless was in the children’s dormitory, Miss Sharpe,” explained the girl who had been Pet’s guide, “and she accidentally broke one of the pitchers. She could not help it, I assure you.”

“But I know she could help it,” screamed Miss Sharpe. “She has done it on purpose, just to provoke me. Oh, you little limb you!—you unbearable little mischief-maker! You deserve to be whipped till you can’t stand.”

“See here, Miss Sharpe; you’ll be hoarse pretty soon, if you keep screaming that way,” said Pet, calmly.

“I’ll go and tell Mrs. Moodie. I’ll go this minute. Such conduct as this, you’ll see, will not be tolerated here,” shrieked the exasperated lady, shaking her fist furiously at Pet.

“Mrs. Moodie has gone out,” said one of the girls.

“Then I’ll tell her to-morrow. I’ll—”

Here the loud ringing of a bell put a stop to further declamation, and the girls all flew, flocking in, and marched, two by two, into another large room, where a long supper-table was laid out.

It was almost dark when the evening meal was over. Then the larger girls dispersed themselves to their various avocations, and the younger ones, under the care of a gentler monitor than Miss Sharpe, raced about the long halls and passages, and up and down-stairs.

Now was the time Pet had been waiting for. Gliding unobserved, up-stairs, she entered the dormitory, and securing one end of the string to the bed-post, let the remainder drop out of the window. Then returning down-stairs, she passed unnoticed through the front hall, and finally secured the other end of the string to the knocker of the door. It was too dark, as she knew, for any to observe the cord in opening the door.

This done, she returned to her companions, all aglow with delight at her success so far; and instigated by her, the din and uproar soon grew perfectly unbearable, and the whole phalanx were ordered off to bed half an hour earlier than usual, to get rid of the noise.

As Judge Lawless had said, it was a rigidly strict establishment; and the rule was that, at half-past nine, every light should be extinguished, and all should be safely tucked up in bed. Even Mrs. Moodie herself was no exception to this rule; for, either thinking example better than precept, or being fond of sleeping, ten o’clock always found her in the arms of Morpheus.

Therefore, at ten o’clock, silence, and darkness, and slumber, hung over the establishment of Mrs. Moodie. In the children’s dormitory, nestling in their white-draped beds, the little tired pupils were sleeping the calm, quiet sleep of childhood, undisturbed by feverish thoughts or gloomy forebodings of the morrow. Even Miss Sharpe had testily permitted herself to fall stiffly asleep, and lay with her mouth open, stretched out as straight as a ramrod, and about as grim. All were asleep—all but one.

One wicked, curly, mischief-brewing little head there was by far too full of naughty thoughts to sleep. Pet, nestling on her pillow, was actually quivering with suppressed delight at the coming fun.

She heard ten o’clock—eleven strike, and then she got up in bed and commenced operations. Her first care was to steal softly to one of the washstands, and thoroughly wet a sponge, which she placed on the window-ledge within her reach, knowing she would soon have occasion to use it.

Taking some phosphureted ether, which she had procured for the purpose of “fun” before leaving home, she rubbed it carefully over her face and hands.

Reader, did you ever see any one in the dark with their faces and hands rubbed over with phosphureted ether? looking as though they were all on fire—all encircled by flames? If you have, then you know how our Pet looked then.

Sitting there, a frightful object to contemplate, she waited impatiently for the hour of midnight to come.

The clock struck twelve, at last; the silence was so profound that the low, soft breathing of the young sleepers around her could be plainly heard. In her long, flowing night-wrapper, Pet got up and tiptoed softly across the room to the bed where the cross she-dragon lay.

Now, our Pet never thought there could be the slightest danger in what she was about to do, or, wild as she was, she would most assuredly not have done it. She merely wished to frighten Miss Sharpe for her obstinacy, unbelief in ghosts and crossness, and never gave the matter another thought.

Therefore, though it was altogether an inexcusable trick, still Pet was not so very much to blame as may at first appear.

Now she paused for a moment to contemplate the sour, grim-looking sleeper—thinking her even more repulsive in sleep

than when awake; and then laying one hand on her face, she uttered a low, hollow groan, destined for her ears alone.

Miss Sharpe, awakened from a deep sleep by the disagreeable and startling consciousness of an icy-cold hand on her face, started up in affright, and then she beheld an awful vision! A white specter by her bedside, all in fire, with flames encircling face and hands, and sparks of fire seemingly darting from eyes and mouth!

For one terrible moment she was unable to utter a sound for utter, unspeakable horror. Then, with one wild piercing shriek, she buried her head under the clothes, to shut out the awful specter. Such a shriek as it was! No hyena, no screech-owl, no peacock ever uttered so ear-splitting throat-rending a scream as that. No word or words in the whole English language can give the faintest idea of that terrible screech. Before its last vibration had died away on the air, every sleeper in the establishment, including madame herself, had sprung out of bed, and stood pale and trembling, listening for a repetition of that awful cry. From twenty beds in the dormitory, twenty little sleepers sprung, and immediately began to make night hideous with small editions of Miss Sharpe's shriek. Gathering strength from numbers, twenty voices rose an octave higher at every scream, and yell, after yell, in the shrillest soprano, pierced the air, although not one of them had the remotest idea of what it was all about.

At the first alarm, Firefly had flitted swiftly and fleetly across the room, jumped into bed, and seizing the sponge, gave her face and hands a vigorous rubbing; and now stood screaming with the rest, not to say considerably louder than any of them.

"Oh, Miss Sharpe, get up! the house is on fire! we're all murdered in our beds!" yelled Pet, going over and catching that lady by the shoulder with a vigorous shake.

And "Oh, Miss Sharpe! Oh, Miss Sharpe! Get up. Oh-oh-oh!" shrieked the terrified children, clustering round the bed, and those who could springing in and shaking her.

With a disagreeable sense of being half crushed to death, Miss Sharpe was induced to remove her head from under the clothes, and cast a quick, terrified glance around. But the coast was clear—the awful specter was gone.

And now another noise met her ears—the coming footsteps of every one within the walls of the establishment, from Mrs. Moodie down to the little maid-of-all-work in the kitchen. In they rushed, armed with bedroom-candlesticks, rulers, ink-bottles, slate-frames, and various other warlike weapons, prepared to do battle to the last gasp.

And then it was: "Oh, what on earth is the matter? What on earth is the matter? What is the matter?" from every lip.

Miss Sharpe sprung out of bed and fled in terror to the side of Mrs. Moodie.

"Oh, Mrs. Moodie, it was awful! Oh, it was dreadful! With flames of fire coming out of its mouth, and all dressed in white. Oh, it was terrible! Ten feet high and all in flames!" shrieked Miss Sharpe, like one demented.

"Miss Sharpe, what in the name of Heaven is all this about?" asked the startled Mrs. Moodie, while the sixty "young ladies" clung together, white with mortal fear.

"Oh, Mrs. Moodie, I've seen it! It was frightful! all in flames of fire!" screamed the terrified Miss Sharpe.

"Seen it! seen what? Explain yourself, Miss Sharpe."

"Oh, it was a ghost! a spirit! a demon! a fiend! I felt its blazing hands cold as ice on my face. Oh, good Heaven!" And again Miss Sharpe's shriek at the recollection resounded through the room.

"Blazing hands cold as ice! Miss Sharpe, you are crazy! Calm yourself, I command you, and explain why we are all roused out of our beds at this hour of night by your shrieks," said Mrs. Moodie, fixing her sharp eyes steadily upon her.

That look of rising anger brought Miss Sharpe to her senses. Wringing her hands, she cried out:

"Oh, I saw a ghost, Mrs. Moodie; an awful ghost! It came to my bedside all on fire, and—"

"A ghost! nonsense, Miss Sharpe!" broke out the now thoroughly enraged Mrs. Moodie, as she caught Miss Sharpe by the shoulder, and shook her soundly. "You have been dreaming; you have had the nightmare; you are crazy! A pretty thing, indeed! that the whole house is to be aroused and terrified in this way. I am ashamed of you, Miss Sharpe, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself to terrify those little children committed to your charge in this manner. I never heard of anything so abominable in my life before," said the angry Mrs. Moodie.

"Oh, indeed, indeed I saw it! Oh, indeed, indeed I did!" protested Miss Sharpe, wringing her hands.

“Silence, Miss Sharpe! don’t make a fool of yourself! I’m surprised at you! a woman of your years giving way to such silly fancies. You saw it, indeed! A nice teacher you are to watch young children! Return to your beds, young ladies; and do you, Miss Sharpe, return to yours; and don’t let me ever hear anything more about ghosts, or I shall instantly dismiss you. Ghosts, indeed! you’re a downright fool, Miss Sharpe—that’s what you are!” exclaimed the exasperated lady.

But even the threat of dismissal could not totally overcome Miss Sharpe’s fears now, and catching hold of Mrs. Moodie’s night-robe as she was turning away, she wildly exclaimed:

“Oh, Mrs. Moodie, let us have a light in the room for this night at least! I cannot sleep a wink unless you do.”

“Miss Sharpe, hold your tongue! Do you see how you have frightened these children? Go to bed and mind your business. Young ladies, I think I told you before to go to your rooms—did I not?” said Mrs. Moodie, with still increasing anger.

Trembling and terrified, the girls scampered like frightened doves back to their nests; and Mrs. Moodie, outraged and indignant, tramped her way to the bed she had so lately vacated, inwardly vowing to discharge Miss Sharpe as soon as ever she could get another to take her place.

And then the children in the dormitory crept shivering into bed, and wrapped their heads up in the bedclothes, trembling at every sound. And Miss Sharpe, quivering in dread, shrunk into the smallest possible space in hers, and having twisted herself into a round ball under the quilts, tightly shut her eyes, and firmly resolved that nothing in the earth, or in the waters under the earth, should make her open those eyes again that night. And our wicked Firefly chuckling inwardly over the success of her plot, jumped into hers, thinking of the fun yet to come.

An hour passed. One o’clock struck; then two, before sleep began to visit the drowsy eyelids of the roused slumberers again. Having assured herself that they had really fallen asleep at last, Pet sat up in bed softly, opened the window an inch or two, screened from view—had any one been watching her, which there was not—by the white curtains of the bed.

Then lying composedly back on her pillow, she took hold of her string, and began pulling away.

Knock! knock! knock! knock! Rap! rap! rap! rap! rap!

The clamor was deafening; the music was awful at that silent hour of the night. Up and down the huge brass knocker thundered, waking a peal of echoes that rung and rung through the house.

Once again the house was aroused; once again every sleeper sprung out of bed, in terror, wonder, and consternation.

“Oh, holy saints! what is that? Oh, good heavens! what can that be at this time?” came simultaneously from every lip.

Knock! knock! knock! Rap! rap! rap! louder and louder still.

Every girl flitted from her room, and a universal rush was made for the apartments of Mrs. Moodie—all but the inmates of the dormitory. Miss Sharpe was too terrified to stir, and the children, following her lead, contented themselves with lying still, and renewing their screams where they had left them off an hour or so before.

Now Mrs. Moodie, half-distracted, rushed out, and encountered her forty terrified pupils in the hall.

“Oh, Mrs. Moodie! what has happened to-night? We will all be killed! Oh, listen to that!”

Knock! knock! knock! knock! knock! The clamor was deafening.

“We had better open the door, or they will break it down!” said Mrs. Moodie, her teeth chattering with terror.

“Send for Bridget; she is afraid of nothing!” suggested one of the trembling girls.

Two or three of the most courageous made a rush for the kitchen; and Bridget—a strapping nymph of five feet nine, and “stout according”—was routed out of bed, to storm the breech.

“Faith, thin, I’ll open the door, if it was the divil himself!” exclaimed Bridget, resolutely, as she grasped the poker, and, like the leader of a forlorn hope, turned the key in the door.

Back she swung it with a jerk. The knocking instantly ceased. Up flew the poker, and down it descended with a whack, upon—vacancy! There was no one there!

“The Lord be between us an’ harm!” exclaimed Bridget, recoiling back. “The divil a one’s there, good, bad, or indifferint!”

“They must have run away when you opened the door!” said Mrs. Moodie, in trembling tones. “There is certainly some one there!”

Bridget descended the steps, and looked up and down the street; but all was silent, lonely, and deserted—not a living creature was to be seen.

“Come in, and lock the door,” said the appalled Mrs. Moodie. “What in the name of Heaven could it have been?”

“Oh, the house is haunted!—the house is haunted!” came from the white lips of the young ladies. “Oh, Mrs. Moodie! do not ask us to go back to our rooms. We dare not. Let us stay with you until morning!”

“Very well,” said Mrs. Moodie, not sorry to have company; “come into my room. Bridget, bring lights.”

The door was unlocked. The frightened girls hustled, pale, and frightened, and shivering with superstition, awe and undefined apprehension, into Mrs. Moodie’s room; while that lady herself, crouching in their midst, was scarcely less terrified than they. Bridget brought in lights; and their coming renewed the courage the darkness had totally quenched.

“Now, Mistress Moodie, ma’am,” said Bridget, crossing her arms with grim determination, “I’m goin’ to sit at that door till mornin’, if its plazin’ to ye, and if thim blackguardly spalpeens comes knockin’ dacint people out av their beds ag’in, be this an’ that, I’ll I’ve the mark of me five fingers on thim, as sure as my name’s Biddy Malone!”

“Very well, Bridget,” said Mrs. Moodie. “It may be some wickedly-disposed person wishing to frighten the young ladies; and if it is, the heaviest penalties of the law shall be inflicted on them.”

Arming herself with the poker, Bridget softly turned the key in the door, and laid her hand on the lock, ready to open it at a second’s notice.

Scarcely had she taken her stand, when knock! knock! it began again; but the third rap was abruptly cut short by her violently jerking the door open, and lifting the poker for a blow that would have done honor to Donnybrook Fair. But a second time it fell, with a loud crack, upon—nothing! Far or near, not a soul was to be seen. Bridget was dismayed. For the first time in her life, a sensation of terror filled her brave Irish heart. Slamming the door violently to, she locked it again, and rushed with open eyes and mouth, into the room where the terror-stricken mistress and pupils sat terrified with fear.

“Faith, it’s the divil himself that’s at it! Lord, pardon me for namin’ him! Och, holy martyrs! look down on us this night for a poor, disconsolate set ov craythers, and the Cross of Christ be between us and all harm!”

And dropping a little bob of a courtesy, Bridget devoutly cut the sign of the cross on her forehead with her thumb.

Unable to speak or move with terror, mistress, pupils, and servants crouched together, longing and praying wildly for morning to come.

Again the knocking commenced, and continued, without intermission, for one whole mortal hour. Even the neighbors began to be alarmed at the unusual din, and windows were opened, and night-capped heads thrust out to see who it was who knocked so incessantly. Three o’clock struck, and then, Pet beginning to feel terribly sleepy, and quite satisfied with the fun she had had all night, cut the cord, and drew it up. The clamors, of course, instantly ceased; and five minutes after, Firefly, the wicked cause of all this trouble, was peacefully sleeping.

But no other eye in the house was destined to close that night—or rather, morning. Huddled together below, the frightened flock waited for the first glimpse of morning sunlight, thinking all the while that never was there a night so long as that. Up in the children’s dormitory, all—from Miss Sharpe downward—lay in a cold perspiration of dread, trembling to stay where they were, yet not daring to get up and join their companions below.

“I’ll never stay another night in this dreadful place if I only live to see morning!” was the inward exclamation of every teacher and pupil who could by any means leave.

And so, in sleepless watchfulness, the dark, silent hours of morning wore on; and the first bright ray of another day’s sunlight streaming in through the windows, never beheld an assemblage of paler or more terrified faces than were gathered together in the establishment of Mrs. Moodie.

CHAPTER XXII.

PET FINISHES HER EDUCATION.

"And her brow cleaned, but not her dauntless eye;
The wind was down, but still the sea ran high."
—DON JUAN.

Accustomed to early rising from her infancy, the first beam of morning sunshine found Pet out of bed, and dressed.

The other girls, with Miss Sharpe, were up, too, hastily throwing on their clothes, and looking pale, haggard and worn, from the previous night's excitement and want of sleep.

Quivering with the remembrance of last night's frolic, and the terror and consternation that would follow it to-day, Pet stood before the mirror bathing her hands and face, and curling her short, boyish, black ringlets.

The others did not wait for this, but as soon as they were dressed made a grand rush for the lower rooms, where they knew the remainder of the household were assembled. And here they found them, still in their night-robes just beginning to find their tongues, and venturing to talk over the exciting events of the previous night. Petronilla, with her keen sense of the ludicrous, had much ado to keep from laughing outright at their wild eyes and affrighted whispers, but drawing her face down to the length of the rest, she talked away as volubly as any of them of her terror and wonder, protesting she would write to her papa to take her home, for that she wasn't accustomed to living in haunted houses. At last, becoming aware of their *deshabille*, the young ladies decamped up-stairs to don more becoming garments, and talk over, in the privacy of their own apartments, the ghost and the mysterious rapping.

Mrs. Moodie, recovering her presence of mind and dignity, with the coming of daylight, resolved to lose no time in having the matter fully investigated. Her first act was to have the house searched from top to bottom, and the young ladies willingly engaging in the search, every corner, cranny and crevice, from attic to cellar, was thoroughly examined. Had a needle been lost it must have been found, but no trace of last night's visitor could be discovered.

"Oh, it's no use looking; it was a ghost!" exclaimed Miss Sharpe.

"Oh, yes, it was a ghost! It must have been a ghost!" echoed all the young ladies simultaneously.

"But ghosts always come in though a key-hole—at least the ghosts up our way do," said Pet; "so where was the use of its knocking and making such a fuss last night."

No one felt themselves qualified to answer the questions, so the hunt was given over, and the hunters, in much disorder, were told they might amuse themselves in the play-ground that morning, instead of reciting, as usual. The teachers did not feel themselves able to pursue their customary avocations until some light had been thrown upon the mystery.

Then Mrs. Moodie put on her bonnet and shawl, and went out without any definite object in view unless it was to see if the ghost had left any clue to its whereabouts on the street. As a very natural consequence, her eye turned upon the huge brass knocker that had been so instrumental in last night's din; and from it, to her surprise, she beheld a long, stout cord dangling. Petronilla, of course, in cutting the string, could not reach down to sever it, and a half-yard or so still waved in triumph in the morning air.

Mrs. Moodie, though a fine lady, was sharp and "wide awake," and in this cord she perceived some clue to the affair of the previous night. As she still gazed on it in the same way as a detective might, at the evidence of some secret crime, the young girl who had given Pet the cord passed through the hall and paused to look at the open door which Mrs. Moodie was so intently surveying. Her eye fell on the cord; she started, took a step forward, looking puzzled and surprised.

"It was no spirit, you see, that was rapping last night, Miss Hughes," said Mrs. Moodie, sharply; "this cord has had something to do with it."

"Why, that cord is mine—or rather *was*," said the young lady, examining it; "we used to use it in our room for hanging pocket-handkerchiefs and collars to dry on."

"*Yours*, Miss Hughes," said Mrs. Moodie, facing round with an angry light rising in her eyes.

"It *was* mine, madam; I gave it last evening to the new pupil, Miss Lawless."

"To Miss Lawless?"

"Yes, madam, when we were in the dormitory last night, she asked me for a string, and I brought her this, having no other; she has cut it, I see."

"What did Miss Lawless want of it—do you know?"

"I do not know; she did not say; it is *very* strange how it can have got here."

A new light suddenly flashed through the mind of Mrs. Moodie. She recollected what Pet's father had told her of the mischief-loving propensities of that young lady. What if all her meekness and docility had been assumed! She glanced up at the window beside Pet's bed, and instantaneously the whole truth dawned upon her.

And then a change most wonderful to see came over the features of Mrs. Moodie. Dark and stern, and determined, she turned from the door, untied the cord, and marched directly into the house.

"Miss Hughes," she said, curtly, "go and tell all the teachers and pupils to assemble in the school-room at once. I think I have found out the origin of the disturbance now."

Wondering and perplexed, Miss Hughes went and delivered her message; and on fire with eager curiosity, a universal rush was made for the *classe*, and in silent expectation they waited for the coming of Mrs. Moodie.

They had not long to wait. With a hard, metallic tramp, that announced her state of mind, that lady rustled in, and in ominous silence took her seat, motioning the others to resume theirs with a wave of her hand.

Every eye was bent upon her in silent awe, as they noticed her stiff, rigid sternness. Her eye passed over the rest, and like a hound scenting his prey, fixed itself piercingly on Pet.

"Miss Lawless," she said, in a stern, measured tone, "come here." "Stars and stripes!" ejaculated Pet, inwardly, as she rose to obey; "can she have found me out so soon? Oh, Pet Lawless, maybe you ain't in for it now!"

All eyes were now turned in silent amazement on Pet. Slowly Mrs. Moodie thrust her hand in her pocket, still sternly transfixing Pet with her eyes, and drew out—a piece of cord!

At the sight, all Pet's doubts were removed; she was discovered. Then all personal apprehensions vanished, her perverse spirit rose, and bold, dauntless and daring she stood before her stern judge—her straight, lithe form defiantly erect, her malicious black eyes dancing with fun.

"Miss Lawless, do you know anything of this?" demanded Mrs. Moodie, holding it up.

"Slightly acquainted," said Pet; "saw it last night for the first time."

"Will you be kind enough to state for what purpose you borrowed it?"

"Yes'm, to have some fun with."

"Fun! pray be a little more explicit, Miss Lawless. Was it you that tied it to the door, last night?"

"Yes'm."

"And by that means you knocked at the door, and created all the alarm and confusion that so terrified us all," said Mrs. Moodie with a rapidly darkening brow.

"Yes'm," said Pet, loudly, nothing daunted.

A low murmur of surprise and horror, at this atrocious confession ran round the room.

"And what was your design in thus throwing the household into terror and consternation, Miss Lawless?"

"I told you before—just for fun," said Pet, coolly.

Mrs. Moodie compressed her lips, and though her sallow face was dark with suppressed anger, she remained outwardly calm. Low murmurs of amazement, anger and indignation ran through the room; but Pet stood upright, bold and defiant before them all, as though she had done nothing whatever to be ashamed of.

"Perhaps, then, since you are so fond of practical jokes, you were the ghost Miss Sharpe saw, likewise," said Mrs. Moodie.

"Yes, I was," said Pet, darting a flashing glance at that lady, who sat listening, with hand and eyes uplifted in horror.

“No, she wasn’t,” said Miss Sharpe; “the one I saw was all on fire.”

“Silence, Miss Sharpe! leave the matter to me,” said Mrs. Moodie, sternly. Then turning to Pet: “Since you are so candid, Miss Lawless, will you inform me in what manner you rendered yourself so frightful an object?”

“Yes, it was easy enough,” said Pet. “I just rubbed some phosphureted ether on my hands and face. It shone in the dark and scared *her*; and that was all I wanted.”

A profound silence for one moment reigned throughout the room. Every one sat, overwhelmed, looking at each other as though unable to credit what they heard.

“And what evil motive had you in terrifying us so?” resumed Mrs. Moodie, after a pause.

“I hadn’t any evil motive. I just wanted fun, I tell you. Papa sent me here, and I didn’t want to come, but I had to; so, as it was horrid dull here, I thought I’d just amuse myself scaring you all, and I can’t see where was the harm either! I’ve always been used to do as I like, and this ain’t no circumstance to what’s to come next!” And Pet’s flashing eyes blazed open defiance.

Mrs. Moodie rose from her seat, her sallow complexion almost white with anger, her sharp eyes bright with an angry light.

“Some one else will have a voice in this matter, Miss Lawless. Had I been aware of the sort of girl you were, rest assured that, much as I respect your father, you should never have entered here. In all my experience it has never been my misfortune to encounter so much depravity in one so young. I shall instantly write to your father to come and take you home, for no inducement could persuade me to allow you to become a member of this establishment. You will consider yourself expelled, Miss Lawless, and must leave the house as soon as your father can come to take you home.”

“Well, I’m sure I’m glad of it,” said Pet, impatiently; “for of all the stupid old holes I ever saw, this is the worst! I wouldn’t be paid to stay here—no, not if you were to make me President to-morrow for it.”

“No such inducement is likely to be offered, Miss Lawless. Your presence here, I can assure you, is not coveted. Miss Sharpe, take this young lady to one of the spare rooms, and remain there to watch her until her father comes and removes her. Young ladies, you will now resume your studies as usual.”

And with a frigid bow, Mrs. Moodie swept from the room, leaving all behind her lost in a maze of wonder and indignation.

Miss Sharpe, with her little eyes glistening, approached and took Pet by the shoulder, to lead her from the room, but Pet angrily jerked herself free from her hated touch, and exclaimed:

“Let me alone! I can walk without your help. Go ahead and I’ll follow, but keep your hands to yourself.”

Miss Sharpe, finding herself foiled even in the moment of victory, walked sullenly on, and Pet, with head up and elbows squared, tripped after her to the solitude of “one of the spare rooms,” where every amusement was debarred her but that of making faces at Miss Sharpe.

An hour after, a long epistle, detailing in glowing colors Pet’s wicked actions of the night before, was dispatched by Mrs. Moodie to Judge Lawless.

The result of it was, that the evening of the second day after, that gentleman arrived, nearly beside himself with rage.

Then Mrs. Moodie recapitulated the whole affair, and ended by protesting that no amount of money could prevail upon her to keep so vicious a child in her school another day. All her pupils would become depraved by her example; and the result would be, their parents would take them home, and thus she would lose her school. Judge Lawless haughtily replied she need be under no apprehension, for he would instantly take his daughter home.

Pet was accordingly dressed, her baggage packed up, and brought down to her father.

With all her boldness she yielded for a moment as she met his eye. But without one single word of comment, he motioned her to precede him into the carriage; and in silence they started.

During the whole journey home, the judge never condescended to open his mouth or address her a single word. Pet, just as well pleased to be left to herself, leaned back in the carriage to meditate new mischief when she would get home.

But Miss Petronilla Lawless soon found she was not quite so much her own mistress as she thought.

The evening of the second day brought them to Judestown. As they passed the village, entered the forest road, and came within sight of old Barrens Cottage, Pet began to think of Ray and wonder how he was, and if it would be safe to ask her father to let her go in and see.

One glance at that gentleman's face, however, convinced her that it would not be safe, and that prudence was by far the safest plan just then. Hoping Erminie might be at the door as she passed, she thrust her head out of the carriage window, when her father silently caught her by the shoulder, pulled her back with no gentle hand, and shut down the blind.

Then the very demon of defiance sprung into the eyes of the elf; and facing round, she was about to begin a harangue more spirited then respectful; but something in the cold, stern, steely eye bent on her quenched the indignant light in her own and she sulkily relapsed into silence, thinking a "dumb devil" would be more agreeable to her father just then than a talking one.

Ranty was out on the veranda, walking up and down with his hands in his pockets and whistling "Yankee Doodle." Pet favored him with a nod as she tripped into the house, while Ranty's eyes grew as large as two full moons in his amazement. Darting after her, he caught her by the arm as she was entering the door and exclaimed:

"I say, Pet; what in the world brings you home again? I thought you were gone to school!"

"So I was."

"Then why are you here?"

"Finished my education. Told you I would in a week," said Pet, with a nod.

"Randolph, go off and mind your business, sir," exclaimed his father, sternly. "Here—this way, *you*."

So saying he caught Pet by the shoulder, and unceremoniously drew her after him, upstairs into the library. Then shutting the door, he threw himself into his arm-chair, and folding his arms across his chest, favored Pet with an awful look.

Miss Lawless, standing erect before him, bore this appalling stare without blushing.

"Well, and what do you think of yourself now, Miss Petronilla Lawless?" was the first question he deigned to ask her since their meeting.

"Just what I did before," said Pet, nothing daunted.

"And what may that be, pray?" said her father, with an icy sneer.

"Why, that I'm a real smart little girl, and can keep my word like a man! I said I'd finish my education and be back in a week, and—here I am."

A dark frown settled on the brow of the judge, as he listened to this audacious reply; but, maintaining an outer semblance of calmness, he asked:

"And how have you determined to spend your time for the future, Miss Lawless?"

"Just as I did before—riding round and visiting my friends."

A chilling smile settled on the lips of the judge.

"So that is your intention, is it? Well, now hear *mine*. Since you will neither stay at school nor behave yourself as a young lady should when at home, I shall sell your pony and procure you a tutor who will be your teacher and guard at the same time. Whenever you move from the house, either he or I will accompany you; and I shall take proper steps to prevent your visiting any of those you call your friends. You will find, Miss Lawless, I am not to be disobeyed with impunity in the future. Perhaps, after a time, if I find you docile and attentive to my orders, I may forget your past misconduct and restore you some of your privileges again. This, however, will entirely depend on the manner in which you conduct yourself. I have already a gentleman in view who will undertake the office of tutor, and until he comes I shall have you locked in your room and your meals brought up to you. Not a word, Miss Lawless. I have borne with your impertinence too long, and you will now find I can adopt a different course. Solitude will cool your blood, I trust, and bring you to your senses."

So saying, the judge calmly arose, rung the bell and then reseated himself.

You should have seen how Pet stormed and raved, and scolded, then, vowing she would kill herself; she would jump out of the window; she would set the house afire and burn them all in their beds; she would have no tutor; she would murder

him if he came.

The judge listened to all this with the most perfect indifference, until the entrance of a negress put an end to the scene.

“Take Miss Petronilla up-stairs to the attic, and lock her in,” was the judge’s command.

But he soon found this was easier said than done; for, seizing a small chair, Pet brandished it over her head, and threatened instant annihilation to the first who would come near her.

The judge arose, and with a sudden snatch caught hold of it. Pet clung to it like a hero, scolding and vociferating at the top of her lungs still; but she was as a fly in her father’s grasp, and she was speedily disarmed and pinned.

“I will bring her up myself. Stand out of the way, Dele,” said the judge.

Holding her firmly, the judge drew her with him up-stairs, opened the attic door, thrust her in, locked it, and left Miss Pet in solitude and darkness, and to her own reflections.

There was no window in the attic, so her threat of casting herself from it went for naught. As for her other threats, the judge paid about as much attention to them as he would to the buzzing of a fly on the window. He then mounted his horse, and rode off having given orders that Miss Petronilla’s meals should be regularly brought to her, but on no condition should she be allowed to get out.

Pet, for once fairly conquered, sat down, determined to do something desperate; and in this frame of mind she was discovered by Ranty, who, hearing of her melancholy fate, came up-stairs and took his station outside the door.

“Hillo, Pet!” he began.

“Hillo, yourself,” replied Pet, sulkily.

“You’re locked up—ain’t you?” went on Ranty.

“Where’s your eyes? Can’t you see I am?” snapped Pet.

“Well, you know it serves you right,” said Ranty, by way of consolation, as he took out a jack-knife and began to whittle.

“Oh! if I was only out at him,” muttered Pet, between her teeth.

“You haven’t seen Erminie since you came home, I suppose,” said Ranty.

“No, I haven’t! You know very well I haven’t,” said Pet, crossly. “How’s Ray?”

“Oh, he’s first-rate—up and about. His wound didn’t amount to much. I’m going over there now; got any message to send?”

“No; only to bid them good-by. I never expect to see any of them again,” said Pet, with a deep groan.

“Why, where are you going?” asked Ranty, in surprise.

“To commit suicide. Do you know if choking hurts much, Ranty?”

“Can’t say—never tried it. If it’s an easy death, just let me know when you’ve done it. I’m off.” And Ranty decamped, whistling; and Pet was left locked up in the garret.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ADOPTED DAUGHTER.

“A brow whose frowns are vastly grand
And eye of star-lit brightness:
A swan-like neck, and arm and hand
Of most bewitching whiteness.”

—PRAED.

And now, reader, are you willing to retrace your steps with me, and go back to those we left behind, long ago, in England?

The sudden death of the Earl De Courcy fell heavily on the hearts of Lord Villiers and Lady Maude; but they mourned as those on whom the heaviest blow Fate can bestow has already fallen, and all other griefs seemed light in comparison.

The servants spoke of the dark, shrouded figure who had been seen to enter but never depart; but as it was evident the earl had died, and not been murdered, no suspicion was attached to this. And so, with stately pomp and ceremony, Hugh Seyton, fourth Earl De Courcy, was laid to rest in the family vault, and Lord Villiers took the title, and was now fifth Earl De Courcy.

In the bustle of the funeral, and the duties of his elevated station he found means to withdraw his mind at times from the loss of his child; but his lovely countess mourned still, and "would not be comforted."

Had she been assured of Erminie's death, she would have grieved, it is true: but not as she grieved now. Had she beheld her beautiful child laid in the grave, she would have mourned; but not with mourning like this.

What had been her fate? Was she living or dead? into whose hands had she fallen? What would be her future fate?

Night and day, these thoughts were ever uppermost in her mind, darkening her very soul with anguish and despair. Enormous rewards had been offered for the slightest clue to her abductor; for upward of a year, the keenest detectives in England were put on the track. But all was in vain. The wide sea rolled between parents and child, and as well might they looked for last year's snow as for lost Erminie. And so at last the search was given up in despair; the sensation it had created died away; the circumstance was almost forgotten by all but the bereaved parents. But they—oh! never could they forget sweet, blue-eyed little Erminie! While the search continued, Lady Maude had hoped. Day after day passed, and no tidings were brought her of the lost one; but still she wildly hoped. Month after month waned away; no trace of her child could be discovered, and still she madly hoped. Each day she rose with beating heart, at the thought that perhaps before night sweet Erminie might be restored. Every passing footstep sent a thrill to her heart, in the anticipation that it might be the bearer of the glad tidings. Through all the long, weary months of vain watching and waiting, she had hoped against hope until the last.

But now—now when the search was given over in despair—came the full realization of her utter bereavement. Then the mortal anguish and despair she had long struggled against overwhelmed her soul; and, hating the sunlight, the glad earth, and bright sky above, she buried herself in deepest mourning, shut out the light from her room, and, in silence and darkness, still mourned for her lost one, and "would not be comforted."

On the heart of her husband the blow had fallen no less heavily; but crushing back his bitter sorrow to his own noble heart, he calmed himself to console her. Of all her friends—of all who loved her, she would admit no one to her presence but him; and folded to his heart, she sat for hours, day after day, white, still, cold, and silent. When he left her, she threw herself on her couch, and, in the same strange stupor, remained there until he came back.

At first, he had permitted Nature to have her way, thinking her sorrow would be less enduring if left to wear itself out; but when months and months passed, and no change came, and he saw her growing whiter and more fragile day after day, he began to think it was time something else was done to rouse her from this destroying grief.

"Maude, Maude! this is wrong—this is sinful!" he said, holding her little wan hands, and looking sadly down into the white, cold face. "This rebellious murmuring must not be indulged longer. Dearest Maude, rouse yourself from this trance of despair, and remember our Erminie is in the hands of One who 'doeth all for the best.' He who noteth even the fall of a sparrow will protect our angel child."

A shiver, a shadow, a fluttering of the heart, and that was all. No words came from the pale lips.

"Have faith, sweet wife, and trust in God. Overcome this selfish grief, and remember there still remain many for you to love—many who love you. Live for them, my own Maude; live for me; live for the heaven where our Erminie has gone."

"Oh, my child! my child! Would to God I had died for thee!" broke in a passionate cry from the white lips of the mother.

The manly chest of Lord De Courcy rose and fell; the muscles of his face twitched for a moment convulsively, and his arms strained her in a closer clasp.

"Our child prays for her mother in heaven. Grieve not for her, dear love. And am I not left to you still?"

"Oh! it was my fault—it was my fault! I left her alone, helpless and unprotected, while I was enjoying myself down-

stairs. There was no one to watch her—no one to save her. All were gone, and she was left to perish! Oh, my child! my child!"

No words can describe the agony, the remorse, the undying despair of her tones, so full of a mother's utmost woe. Then blessed tears came to her relief and, bowing her head on her husband's shoulder, she wept convulsively.

It was the first time she had shed a tear since the loss of her child. Lord De Courcy hailed this as a favorable symptom, and permitted her to weep, undisturbed, until the very violence of her grief had exhausted itself; and then raising her head, and smoothing back the dark curls from her high, pale brow, he said, softly:

"My Maude is morbid in her grief. She has nothing to reproach herself with. Since Heaven willed we should lose one angel it gave us, is it not our duty to be resigned?"

"Oh! if she had died—if I knew she were sleeping quietly in her grave, I could be resigned. But this dreadful uncertainty is killing me. Oh, Ernest! since God gave me two children to love, why has He decreed I should lose them both?"

It was the first time since her marriage she had spoken of that other child; and, for one instant, Lord De Courcy's brow grew dark at the unpleasant memories it brought back. The shadow was gone as quickly as it came; and, stooping down, he pressed a kiss on her brow, as he replied:

"He knows best, love. If He has given us griefs, was He not a sufferer of sorrow himself? Rouse yourself from this lethargy of grief, Maude. Does it console you to make those around you wretched? For, Maude, I can not tell you how much it adds to my grief—how miserable it makes all those who love you, to see you yield to this lethargy of despair. Do you think I do not feel the loss of our beautiful child? And yet, Maude, I do not give way to this utter abandon of despair, because I know it is positively wrong. There is a sort of luxury in yielding to grief, and permitting it to have its way; but it is an essentially selfish luxury; and I trust my Maude will view it in its proper light, and pray for a more Christian spirit."

"Forgive me, my husband," she softly murmured. "Bear with me a little longer. I know I am weak and rebellious; but oh! there never was sorrow like unto mine!"

But from that day, a change was manifest in Lady Maude. Loving her husband with almost adoring worship, for his sake she strove to shake off the "luxury of grief" he had spoken of, and resume her place in the world as before. At first, the trial was hard—almost too hard for her to bear, but his pleasant smile, his thrilling whisper of thanks, the earnest pressure of his hand, told her her efforts were understood and appreciated, and more than rewarded her for the sacrifice she had made.

And thus five years glided away, unmarked by any event worth recording.

The young Earl De Courcy as a statesman and politician, had become a demigod with the public, and one of the leading men of the day. In the whirl of busy life, in the maelstrom of politics, little Erminie was not forgotten, but her memory had grown to be a sweet, haunting shadow of the past—a tender, beautiful recollection, that came to him like a strain of sweet music heard amid the discordant crash and din of the busy world. He thought of her now as an angel-visitant, sent to smile on him for a moment, and then taken back to the heaven from which she had come, to pray for him there.

The intense sorrow of the Countess De Courcy had also been subdued and rendered far less poignant by time. She too, had been obliged, by her elevated position, to resume that place in the fashionable world she was so well fitted to fill. But when in the glittering assembly, the brilliant ball, the gorgeous pageant, was sweet, lost Erminie forgotten? Never? Outwardly, that one great sorrow had left its traces still in the deeper pallor of the lovely face, in the subdued light of the large, melancholy dark eyes, in the soft, tender smile that seemed something holy as it hovered around the sweet, beautiful lips. It had made her a gentler, better woman, with a heart ever melting at the cry of distress, with a hand ever ready to relieve it. It had humbled her pride; it had elevated her soul; it had made her gentle, tender, and more saintly then ever before. Her love for children amounted almost to a passion; those "human flowers," as some one prettily calls them, could at any time arrest her attention, and make her forget all else. Not a child among all the earl's tenantry that had not received proof of her affection, in the shape of creature-comforts and even as she idolized children, so was she invariably loved by them in return.

The country seat of the De Courcys was a fine old mansion, embowered in trees, with splendid parks, fine preserves, and surrounded by beautiful scenery. Here, with their friends, the earl and countess were in the habit of going each summer, to spend a few weeks; and here the happiest moments of Lady Maude were spent, wandering through the dim old woods, where she could dream, undisturbed, of her lost darling.

Taking her accustomed walk, one day, she was arrested by the loud cries of a child near. With her sympathies ever enlisted for children, she glanced quickly in the direction, and beheld a little, infantile-looking child of two years old apparently, gazing bewildered, and screaming away at the top of its lungs.

Lady Maude approached, and at a single glance became deeply interested in this little stray waif.

It was a face of singular beauty that met her eye. A dark olive complexion, large, brilliant black eyes, coal-black hair that now hung tangled and disordered over her shoulders. Her little dress was torn, and her hands and face scratched with brambles. The child was evidently lost.

Lady Maude approached; and the child, turning to gaze on her, for a moment ceased her cries. Stooping down, she parted the elf-locks off the dark little face, and gazed long and earnestly down into the bright eyes that fearlessly met her own. Something in that face haunted and troubled her; it seemed to her she had seen it before. Yet that could hardly be; for this was not a face easily forgotten, when once seen. The longer she looked, the more and more troubled she grew. It seemed to her she must have seen a face like this somewhere before, and that it was connected with some dark memory—what, she could not tell.

The child, with the confiding confidence of infancy, looked up in the pale, sweet face of the lovely lady, and artlessly lisped:

"*Ma mere.*"

"French," murmured Lady Maude, in surprise. "How in the world can she have come here? Where is 'mother,' little one?" she asked, in the same language.

"Gone away—bad man get Rita," lisped the little innocent, pulling Lady Maude's dress, as if to urge her along.

The countess was at a loss, and perhaps would have gone with the little one further into the woods, had not one of the earl's gamekeepers come up at that instant, and taking off his hat, said:

"Better not venture into the woods, my lady; a gang of gipsies passed through, last night." Then catching sight of Rita, as the child called herself, he burst out in surprise; "Why, bless my soul! here's one of 'em!"

"Does this child belong to the gipsies?" asked Lady Maude, who never could hear the word gipsy without a sudden red light flushing to her pale cheek.

"Yes, my lady; saw her with them when they passed through, last night. S'pose she's got left behind, in a mistake. I don't believe she's one of 'em, though; stole, most likely."

"Do you think so?" said Lady Maude with interest. "She does not look unlike a gipsy. Why do you think she has been stolen?"

"Why, my lady, if she had been one of themselves, some of the women would have had her; but nobody seemed to own this one, or to care about her. I saw one of the men draw her along side of the head, last night, with a blow that knocked her down. Lord! how my fingers were itching to do the same to him!"

"Poor little thing!" said Lady Maude, compassionately, folding her in her arms with a sudden impulse. "Poor little thing! Yes, now I think of it, it is more than probable she has been stolen, for she cannot speak English. Carry her to the hall; her poor little feet are all cut and bleeding, and we can not allow her to perish here."

The man lifted the child in his arms, and followed the countess to the hall, where she gave orders to have the little foundling properly dressed and cared for, before presenting her to the earl. He smiled as he listened to her story, and followed her to the room where little Rita, now washed and neatly dressed, sat on the floor playing with some toys. But as his eyes rested on the dark, brilliant face, the smile faded away, and a half-puzzled, half-doubtful look took its place.

"Is she not beautiful, dear Ernest? Does she not remind you of some bright, rich, tropical flower?" said Lady Maude, in admiration.

"Or some bright-winged, gorgeous little butterfly—yes," said Lord De Courcy. "But, Maude, it seems to me—I can not account for it—but it seems as if I had seen her somewhere before."

"Oh, my lord! have you, too, observed it?" cried Lady Maude, breathlessly. "It was the first thing that struck me, too. How very singular!"

"I suppose she resembles some one we have both known. There is no accounting for the strange likenesses we see

sometimes in total strangers. Well, what do you intend to do with this little bird of paradise you have caught?"

"Let her remain here in charge of the housekeeper. I cannot account for the strange interest I feel in this little one, Ernest."

"I should like to see the child you do not feel an interest in, Maude," he said, smiling. "But are there no means of finding out to whom she belongs? Her parents may be living, and lamenting her loss, even now, dear wife."

A sudden shadow fell on them both at his words and the recollection they recalled. Earl De Courcy's eyes softened with a tender light as he gazed on the child's, and Lady Maude's were full of tears as she stooped down and kissed the small, red mouth.

"There are no means of discovering them, Ernest," she said, half sadly. "The gipsies are gone; but Martha found a little silver cross round her neck, on which were engraven the letters 'M. J. L.' I have laid it carefully aside, though I fear her parentage may never be discovered."

"Well do as you like with her, dear Maude. The child is certainly very beautiful. I believe you love all children for our lost treasure's sake."

"Oh, I do—I do! my sweet, precious Erminie! Oh, my lord! if this little one had blue eyes and fair hair like her, I could find it in my heart to adopt her, for our darling's sake."

"You would not let such a trifle as that prevent you, Maude, if you really wished it. But let the child remain. Rita—that's her name, isn't it?—come here, Rita."

He held out his arms. Rita looked at him from under her long eyelashes, and then going over, nestled within them just as Erminie used to do.

The simple action awoke a host of tender memories that for a moment nearly unnerved the earl. Rising hastily, he kissed Rita and left the room. But from that day the little stray waif was an inmate of the hall, and with every passing day grew more and more deeply dear to the earl and countess. When they returned to the city, Lady Maude would not hear of parting with her pet; so Mademoiselle Rita and her nurse accompanied them; and soon both earl and countess learned to love her with a love only second to that they had cherished for little Erminie.

And so, without legally adopting her, they learned to look up on her, as time passed, in the light of a daughter sent to take the place of the lost one. Rita addressed them by the endearing name of father and mother; and the world tacitly seemed to take it for granted that little "Lady Rita" was to be heiress and daughter of Earl De Courcy.

At seven years old, Lady Rita had her governess and commenced her education. She seemed to have forgotten she ever had any other father and mother than Lord and Lady De Courcy; and they, quite as willing she should think so, never undeceived her.

And so, while the lost daughter was living in poverty, in a little cottage, in her far-distant home, dependent on the bounty of others, the adopted daughter was growing up surrounded by every luxury that fond hearts could bestow upon her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PET GIVES HER TUTOR A LESSON.

"Then on his blow the swelling vein
Throbbed, as if back upon his brain
The hot blood ebbed and flowed again."
—Byron.

Your pardon, dear reader, if, without further preface, I skip over a period of six years. One brief bird's-eye glance at the past, and then to go on with our history.

Those six years had changed Ray and Ranty from boys of fifteen to young men of twenty-one, and had metamorphosed

Erminie and Petronilla from little girls of twelve and eleven to young ladies of respectively eighteen and seventeen. Beyond that, it had wrought little change in Judestown or its inhabitants.

Master Ranty having displayed, during his rapid career at college, sundry "fast" tendencies, was sent to sea to take the nonsense out of him. That young gentleman bore his fate with most exemplary patience and resignation, affirming that he always had a strong partiality for bilge-water and short allowance, and rather liked the cat-o'-nine-tails than otherwise.

Great was the delight of the worthy admiral, his uncle, when he heard of his nephew's destination; and it was partially through his influence that, some months after, Ranty, radiant in blue roundabout and bright brass buttons, stood on the deck of the Sea Nymph, and wrote his name, in tremendous capitals, as "Randolph Lawless, U. S. N."

"Now remember, Minnie, you mustn't go and fall in love with anybody else," were his parting words; "if you do, I'll knock all creation into everlasting smash; I'll hurl the whole universe into the regions of space; I'll set fire to every blessed one of the United States, and bring all the world and Nebraska Territory to universal ruination!"

Duly impressed by these appalling and blood-chilling threats, Erminie dutifully promised not to "go and fall in love with anybody else;" and Mr Lawless, transformed into a dashing middy, gave his friends at home his blessing, and set off on his first voyage.

Ray, who, even in his boyhood, had displayed great talent in legal matters, was now, by the kindness of the admiral, in New York city, studying law.

Erminie, too, was absent from home now. Having completely captivated the heart of the generous and eccentric Admiral Havenful, as she did that of most others, he set about thinking, one day, what was the best means to display his affection. Just then he recollected her fondness for learning, and the few opportunities she had to indulge that fondness; and jumping up, he struck the table a vigorous blow, exclaiming:

"I'll send her to school! Pet learns all them heathenish foreign languages, and makes a noise on that big sea-chest of a piano, and so shall little Snowdrop. I'll send her to school this very day!—shiver my timbers if I don't!"

And on the spur of the moment, the admiral, with many a doleful grunt, dumped himself on old Ringbone's back, and jogged over the heath to the cottage.

There he made his proposal to Erminie, whose sweet blue eyes lit up at first with joy and gratitude; then came the thought of Ketura, now a helpless cripple, unable to leave her room, and her countenance fell, and the joyful light faded from her face.

"I am very sorry, but I cannot leave my grandmother," was her sad reply.

"Fiddle-de-dee!" exclaimed the admiral, testily. "She's got Lucy to attend to her; and if Lucy is not enough, she can have half a dozen female women from the White Squall to keep her in proper sailing order. I know a good place to send you to, Snowdrop, and go you shall, and that's all about it! I'll speak to the old lady myself about it."

So the admiral stamped up-stairs and spoke to Ketura, accordingly, who gave a cold, curt assent. And the result of this was that, three weeks after, Erminie was sent to a Convent of the Sacred Heart, to study everything necessary for a finished education.

So, of our four young friends, only Firefly remained at home, under the surveillance of a tutor. Pet had lost none of her mischief-loving propensities as she grew up; in fact, they seemed to grow with her growth, until she became the maddest, merriest, skip-over-the-moon madcap that ever threw a peaceable community into convulsions. Never did a pupil drive a well-disposed teacher to the verge of distraction as Pet did hers; never did a naughty daughter throw a dignified "parient" into such undignified paroxysms of rage as our Firefly did; never was a quiet, orderly, stately mansion thrown upside down, as if a tornado had torn through it every day, as Heath Hall was; never in any other house was here heard such awful banging of doors, and slamming down of windows, and tearing like a maniac up and down-stairs, and rushing like a living whirlwind in and out of every room in five minutes, as might be seen and heard here; never were servants so completely at their wits' end; never were quiet, business-like neighbors so completely and utterly shocked and astonished before as they were by the freaks of Judge Lawless' heiress. Well-named was Pet; for never, since the plagues of Egypt, was the earth afflicted with a more lawless little hurricane than the hot-headed, laughter-loving, mischief-making heiress in question. Very charming, withal, and bewilderingly beautiful was Pet; and there was not a young man in Judestown, or within twenty miles round, who would not have given his whiskers and mustaches for one glance from her "bonnie black e'e." But Pet didn't care a snap for all the young men in America, except, perhaps, Ray

Germaine; and she flirted away unmercifully, turned countless heads, and had more sighing swains at her feet than all the other belles of Judestown put together.

Pet was naturally clever, bright and talented, and could have progressed wonderfully in her studies if she had chosen; but she didn't choose, and followed her own sweet will about learning, in spite of all the lectures, entreaties and persuasions of her tutor, and the stern reproofs and angry out-bursts of her father. Therefore, at eighteen, she could play a little, draw a little—her talents in this respect were chiefly confined to caricature—sing a good deal, talk more than she could sing, and was still aware that English grammar was a little book with a gray cover. At first, Mr. Garnet, her teacher, had insisted upon her applying herself; but seeing that Pet only listened very dutifully and then did as she liked after, he gave it up, and allowed her now pretty much to do as she liked.

Pet had from the first conceived a strong dislike to this gentleman—a dislike that increased every day. This was the more surprising, as his conduct, morals, and manners, were irreproachable, and he was an immense favorite with the judge and everybody else. In person he was a tall, light-haired, gray-eyed, effeminate-looking young man; easy and courteous in manner, polished in address, a finished scholar, and—strict Christian. But Pet's keen gaze had detected the concealed cunning in the eye; the sardonic smile, the unscrupulous look the face sometimes wore; the hard, crafty, cruel expression of the mouth. Therefore, all his virtue was to her hypocrisy; his goodness, a mask for evil designs; his politeness, a cloak for covert wickedness. Pet disliked him, and took no pains to conceal it.

And Pet had read his character aright; he had been a young man of fortune—he was a ruined debauchee, reduced to this by his excesses. At first he had looked upon his scholar as a pest and plague; but as she grew up, his feelings changed. Love and ambition began to enter his heart. What, he thought, if he could win this peerless beauty, this wealthy heiress, to be his wife? His fallen fortunes would be retrieved, and his pride and passion gratified possessing her. Concealing his schemes, he wound himself round the heart of the judge, until he became his bosom friend and confidant. He knew Pet disliked him, but he thought this was because she looked upon him as a cross master; if she could be taught to regard him as a lover, it would be very different. Therefore, as months passed, he became all kindness, tenderness, and affability—the most devoted slave and admirer Miss Lawless had.

"When Satan turns saint, there's room for suspicion!" said Pet, looking at him with a cool, critical eye. "You're up to something you shouldn't be, my good youth. I'll keep my eye on you, Mr. Rozzel Garnet."

But though Pet kept her "eye on him" as she threatened, no clue to the change could she discover; for as a lover she had never dreamed of him in her wildest moments. Until one day, bursting into the library where he sat, with an open letter in her hand, her cheeks flushed to a deeper crimson than usual, her dancing curls all irradiate, her brilliant eyes flashing back the sunshine, her whole face sparkling with delight, he looked up from the book he was reading, and asked:

"You seem in unusually good spirits to-day, Miss Lawless—may I ask the cause?"

"Yes; I've got a letter from Ray, and he's coming home in a month or so! Tra, la, la, la, la, la, la."

And Pet went waltzing round the room.

A cloud settled for a moment on the bland face of the gentleman, and his small eyes shot a sharp, jealous gleam at the bewildering figure floating dimly over the carpet. It vanished, however, as quickly as it came, as he said, in a tone of assumed carelessness: "Ah! and who is Ray, Miss Petronilla?"

"Why, you know well enough," said Pet, impatiently. "Ray Germaine—you saw him when he was here last."

"Bless me! Yes, I had forgotten; but you remember that was three years ago, Miss Lawless, so I may be pardoned for not recollecting him. If I took as much interest in him as you seem to do, my memory would doubtless be better."

His tones were low, bland and oily, but his gleaming eyes were like two drawn stilettoes.

"I expect you would," said Pet. "I have a faint idea that I would have some trouble—if not more—in forgetting Ray Germaine. Don't believe he would approve of my doing so at all, either."

"I did not think Miss Lawless cared for the approval or disapproval of any one in the world," insinuated the gentleman, with one of his bland smiles and needle-like glances.

"We'll see what thought done! That proves, Mr. Garnet," said the elf, mockingly, "how careful the general run of mankind should be in trusting their thoughts, since even a gentleman so near perfection as you are can be deceived."

"Then you do care for the approval of this fellow, Germaine?" said the tutor, trying to hide a dark scowl.

“This fellow, Germaine? Well, there’s a nice way for a young lady’s tutor to talk of her friends. I’d prefer to hear him called Mister Germaine, sir, if it’s all the same to you,” said Pet, drawing herself up.

“Oh, very well!” said Garnet, with a curling lip; “only as he is a pauper, educated by the bounty of your uncle—”

But his speech was cut short by Pet’s springing suddenly round, with blazing eyes, passion-darkened face, and fiercely and passionately bursting out with:

“It is false! It is a foul slander! Ray Germaine is no pauper; and if you ever dare to say such a thing again, I shall have you turned out of the house! Take care how you talk, Mr. Rozzel Garnet! It’s treading on dangerous ground to slight my friends before me!”

Mr. Garnet saw that he had made a false move, and that it was dangerous work handling this fiery little grenade, so he banished all traces of his recent scowl from his face, and his tones were of honeyed sweetness when he spoke again.

“Ten thousand pardons, Miss Lawless, for my offence. Believe me, I had not the remotest intention of slighting your excellent friend, Mr. Germaine. You and he were very intimate, I presume?”

“Thick as pickpockets,” said Pet, forgetting her momentary anger. “Heigho! I wish he was here; he was the only masculine I ever knew, who wasn’t as stupid as an owl.”

“That’s a very flattering speech, Miss Lawless,” said Garnet, biting his lip, “and a very sweeping assertion. Are there no exceptions but him?”

“Not that I’ve ever met. I dare say there may be one or two in the world; but I haven’t come across them.”

There was a moment’s pause, during which Garnet sat gnawing his nether lip, and Pet flitted round the room, humming an opera air. He watched her covertly, and then, seeing her about to leave, he started impulsively up, exclaiming:

“One moment, Miss Pet—I have something to say to you.”

“Well, fire away,” said Pet, composedly, turning round, and standing with her back to the door.

But for once in his life, his customary assurance seemed to have failed him. There was something in the bold, fearless open gaze of those brilliant black eyes that daunted him, brazen as he was. A slight crimson flushed to his face, and his eyes for an instant fell.

“Now, what in the name of Diana and all her nymphs is coming?” mentally exclaimed Pet, as she watched in surprise his embarrassment. “The cool, self-possessed, dignified Mr. Rozzel Garnet blushing like a boiled lobster before poor little Pet Lawless! Snakes and sarpints, and varmints generally, the world’s coming to an end—that’s certain!”

Then aloud:

“Mr. Garnet, I desired you to fire away, which translated from the original Greek, means go ahead, and say whatever you want to. No need to be bashful about it seeing it’s only me.”

The flush on Mr. Garnet’s cheek deepened, as he said:

“Perhaps, Miss Petronilla, what I am about to say may be unexpected, but it can hardly take you by surprise. The change in my manner toward you for the last few months must have prepared you for it.”

He stopped short, and began walking up and down. Pet stuck both hands in her apron-pockets, and stood waiting, “like Patience on a monument,” for what was to come next.

“It’s no gunpowder-plot, or hanging matter, now, is it?” she began. “For though I wouldn’t mind setting the Chesapeake on fire, or blowing up the Alleghanies, I’ve an immense respect for the laws of my country, Mr. Garnet, and would not like to undermine the Constitution, or anything of that sort. Any common matter, though, from riding a steeple-chase to fighting a duel, and I’m yours to command.”

“Miss Lawless, may I beg of you to be serious for a few moments—this is no jesting matter,” said the gentleman, looking annoyed.

“Well, my goodness! ain’t I serious? I’ll leave it to the company, generally, if I’m not as solemn as a hearse. If you’d only condescend to look at me instead of watching the flowers in the carpet, you would see my face is half a yard long.”

“Then, Miss Lawless, to come to the matter at once—for I know you do not like long prefaces—I love you, I worship you, Petronilla! Petronilla, dearer then life! may I hope one day to possess this dear hand?”

Now, if our Pet had been sentimental, she would have blushed becomingly, burst into tears, or covered her face with her hands, maybe; but Pet wasn't a bit sentimental, and so, arching her eyebrows, and opening her eyes till they were the size of two saucers, she gave utterance to her complete amazement in a long, shrill whistle.

Garnet approached her, and would have taken her hand, only as they were still stuck in her apron-pockets, she didn't appear to have such a thing about her. Accordingly, therefore, he attempted do the next best thing, that is, put his arms around her waist; but Pet very coolly edged away saying:

"Hands off, Mr. Garnet, until better acquainted. I don't believe in having coat-sleeves round my waist—as a general thing. Just say that over again, will you; it was mighty interesting!"

And Pet flung herself into an arm-chair, and put her feet upon an ottoman with a great display of carelessness and ankles, and stared Mr. Garnet composedly in the face.

"Cruel girl! You know your power, and thus you use it. Oh, Petronilla! my beautiful one! have I nothing left to hope for?"

"That's a question I can't take it upon myself to answer," said Pet. "There's your next quarter's salary, though, you can hope for that."

"Is that meant as a taunt? Oh, Petronilla! you little know how deeply, how devotedly I love you! I could give my life to make you happy."

"Thanky, Mr. Garnet—shows a highly Christian spirit in you: but, at the same time, I guess I won't mind it. As to your loving me, I have not the slightest doubt about it. I'm such an angel in female form that I don't see how people can help loving me, any more than they can help the toothache. So you needn't go telling me over again you love me, because you've said it two or three times already; and the most interesting things get tiresome, you know, when repeated too often."

"Capricious, beautiful fairy! how shall I win you to seriousness? Fairest Petronilla, I would serve for this little hand even as Jacob served for Rachel!"

"Mr. Garnet, it's real polite of you to say so, but you'll excuse me for saying I'd a good deal rather you wouldn't. You've been here six years now, and if I thought I was to undergo six more like them, I'd take the first bar of soft-soap I could find and put an immediate end to my melancholy existence."

"Mocking still! Oh, beautiful Petronilla! how shall I reach this willful heart?"

"There's no heart there, Mr. Garnet; it took a trip to the fast city of Gotham three years ago, and hasn't come back since."

"With Raymond Germaine?" he said, with a sharp flash of his eyes.

"Ex-actly; you've struck the right thing in the middle—hit the nail straight on the head—jumped, with your accustomed sagacity, at my exact meaning. After all, you're not half so stupid as you look, Mr. Garnet."

"Miss Lawless," he broke out, angrily, "this levity is as unbecoming as it is unnecessary. I have asked you a question, which, as a lady, you are bound to answer."

"Mr. Garnet, look here," said Pet: "did papa hire you to knock reading, writing and spelling into me, or to make love?"

"Miss Lawless!"

"Perhaps, though," said Pet, in a musing tone, "it's customary with tutors when winding-up a young lady's education, to put her through a severe course of love-making, that she may know how to act and speak properly when occasion requires. Mr. Garnet, excuse me, I never thought of it before; I see it all now. Just begin at the beginning again, if it's not too much trouble, and you'll see how beautifully I'll go through with it."

He started up passionately, and bit his lip till it bled.

"Once for all, Miss Lawless," he exclaimed, stifling his impotent rage, and striding fiercely up to her—"once for all, I demand an answer. I love you—will you be my wife?"

"Well, upon my word, Mr. Rozzel Garnet," said Pet, confusedly, "you have the mildest and pleasantest way of your own I ever witnessed. Here you come stamping up to me as if about to knock me down, and savagely tell me you love me! Love away, can't you, but don't get in a rage about it! I'm sure you're perfectly welcome to love me till you're black in the face, if you'll only take things easy."

"Miss Lawless, forgive me; I'm half-mad, and scarce know what I said."

"I forgive you," said Pet, stretching out her hands as if about to warm them; "go, sin no more. I thought you were a little light in the head myself; but then it didn't surprise me, as it's about the full of the moon, I think."

"Miss Lawless, I *did* think you were too much of a lady to despise and scoff at true affection thus. If I have the misfortune to be poor, that does not make me the less sensitive to insult."

"Now, Mr. Garnet, look here," said Pet, rising. "I'm getting tired of this scene, and may as well bring it to an end at once. Your love I fully understand; you have several reasons for loving me—several thousands, in fact, but we won't speak of them. As to insulting you, I flatly deny it; and if you think I have done so, just refer me to a friend, and I'll fight a duel about it to-morrow. Scoffing at true affection is another thing I'm not in the habit of doing, neither in despising people for being poor; you know both these things as well as I do. But, Mr. Garnet, I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man in the world, and I was to go to my grave a forlorn, hatchet-faced old maid for refusing you. If it's any consolation to you to know it, I wouldn't marry you to save your neck from the hangman—your soul from you know who—or your goods and chattels, personal, from being turned, neck and crop, into the street. Now, there!"

His face blanched with rage; his eyes gleamed with a serpent-like light; his thin lips quivered, and for a moment he stood glaring upon her as if he could have torn her limb from limb. But there was a dangerous light in her eye, too, as she stood drawn up to her full height, with reddening cheeks, and defiant, steady gaze, staring him still straight in the face. So they stood for an instant, and then the sense of the ludicrous overcame all else in Pet's mind, and she burst into a clear, merry peal of laughter.

"Well, upon my word, Mr. Garnet, if this is not as good as a farce; here we are, staring at each other, as if for a wager, and looking as savage as a couple of uncivilized tigers. I dare say, it would be a very nice way to pass time on an ordinary occasion; but as it's drawing near dinner-time, and I have a powerful appetite of my own, you'll excuse me for bidding you a heartrending adieu, and tearing myself away. If you have anything more to say, I'll come back, after dinner, and stand it like a martyr."

"Not so fast, Miss Petronilla Lawless!" said Garnet, grasping her by the arm, his sallow face fairly livid with rage; "since it has been your good pleasure to laugh me to scorn, and mock at the affection I have offered, just hear me. I swear to you, the day shall come when you will rue this! There is but a step between love and hatred and that step I have taken. Remember, you have made me your deadliest enemy, and I am an enemy not to be scorned! Girl, beware!"

"Well, now, I declare," said Pet, "if this is not as good as a play and moral. I'm afraid you're only plagiarizing, though, Mr. Garnet, for that melodramatic 'girl, beware!' sounds very like something I read in the 'Pink Bandit of the Cranberry Cove.' Confess, now, you've been reading it—haven't you?—and that's an extract from it; and, at the same time, you'll oblige me by letting go my arm. It's not made of cast-iron, though you seem to think it is."

"Laugh, girl!" he said, hoarsely, "but the day will come when you shall sue to me, and sue in vain, even as I have done to-day. Then you will know what it is to despise Rozzel Garnet."

"Why, you horrid old fright!" exclaimed Pet, with flashing eyes, *"I* sue to you, indeed! I guess not, my good teacher! How dare you threaten me, sir, your master's daughter! Upon my word and honor, Mr. Rozzel Garnet, I have the best mind ever was to have you horsewhipped out of the house by my servants. A pretty chivalrous gentleman you are, to stand up there and talk to a lady like this! I declare to goodness! if I hadn't the temper of an angel, I wouldn't stand it!"

Still he held her, glaring in her face with his threatening eyes, and half-choked with passion.

"Let me go," said Pet, jerking herself first one way, and then another, to free herself from his tenacious grasp. "I vow I'll go and tell papa every blessed word of this, and if you stay another night under the same roof with me, my name's not Petronilla. Take your claw from my arm, will you? and let me go!"

Pet jerked and pulled in vain; Mr. Garnet held her fast, and smiled a grim, sardonic smile at her futile efforts.

"Spit and snarl, my little kitten," he said mockingly; "see what a sparrow you are in my grasp. Go you shall not, till it is my good pleasure to release you!"

With a sharp, passionate cry of rage, Petronilla darted down like lightning, and sunk her sharp, white teeth into his hand. The red blood spurted from a little circlet of wounds, and with an oath of pain and fury, he sprung back from the little wild-cat. No sooner was his hold released, than Pet darted like a flash through the door, turned the key in the lock and held him captive.

“Aha! Mr. Garnet!” she cried, exultingly; “little kittens can bite as well as snarl, you see. You caught a Tartar that time—didn’t you? You’re a model gentleman; you’re the saint that ought to be canonized on the spot; you’re the refined scholar—ain’t you? I’ll leave you, now, to discover the charms of solitude, while I go and tell papa the lesson I have taught you this morning. A little fasting and solitary imprisonment won’t hurt your blood in the least. Bon jour, Seigneur Don Monsieur Moustache Whiskerando! May your guardian-angel watch over you till I come back, and keep you from bursting a blood-vessel in your rage. If anything should happen to so precious an individual, society might as well shut up shop at once, so the gods have a care of you, Mr. Rozzel Garnet!” And off danced Pet.

In the dining-room she found her father awaiting her.

“Where is Mr. Garnet?” he asked as she entered.

“Mr. Garnet will not be down to dinner,” said Pet, inwardly determining to keep that gentleman as long imprisoned as she could.

The judge, without troubling himself to inquire further, took his seat, and proceeded to administer condign punishment to the good things spread before him, assisted by Pet, whose appetite was by no means impaired by the pleasant scene she had just passed through, and whose stony conscience was not in the least troubled with remorse for having locked a young gentleman up without his dinner.

About ten minutes after, the judge started to leave the room, and Pet, guessing where he was going, called to him:

“Papa!”

“Well,” said the judge, pausing, and turning round.

“Where are you going?”

“To the library, Miss Lawless,” said the judge, with dignity.

“Well, look here, papa, there’s a prisoner of war in there.”

“What, Miss Lawless?” said the judge, knitting his brows in perplexity.

“A prisoner I have taken—captivated—locked up! In other words, the pupil has turned teacher and locked her master up, as mothers do refractory children, to bring him to his senses.”

“Miss Lawless,” said the judge, in his most stately manner, “I have no time to listen to your nonsense. If you have anything to say—say it. If not, hold your tongue, and learn to be respectful when you address your father.”

“Well, I never!” ejaculated Pet. “No matter how seriously, sensibly, or solemnly I talk, people say I’m talking nonsense. But that’s just my fate; everything awful and horrid is destined to happen to me; and if I say a word against it, I’m told I’m imprudent and ungrateful, and dear knows what. Now, I told you I have locked my teacher up, and you tell me you have no time to listen to my nonsense. I guess Mr. Garnet finds it an unpleasant truth, anyway.”

“Petronilla! what do you mean?” said her father, beginning to think there might be method in this madness.

“Why, that I’ve locked Mr. Garnet up in the library for not behaving himself,” said Pet, promptly.

“Locked him up!”

“Yes, sir; and served him right, too, the hateful old ghoul!”

“Locked your teacher up?”

“Yes, sir; teachers require locking up as well as pupils.”

“Miss Lawless, it’s not possible that you have been guilty of such an outrageous act!” said the judge, with an awful frown.

“Yes, it is possible,” said Pet; “and he deserves twice as much for what he did. Oh, wouldn’t I like to be a man for one blessed half-hour, that I could horsewhip him within an inch of his life!”

“Good Heavens! what a visitation this mad girl is! What has Mr. Garnet done, you dreadful girl?”

“Dreadful girl!” burst out Pet, indignantly, “there’s the way I’m abused for taking my own part. Your daughter’s teacher has been making all sorts of love to me all the whole blessed morning!” and thereupon Pet commenced with a “full, true, and authentic” account of her morning interview in the library.

As the judge listened, the scowl on his brow grew blacker and blacker till his face was like the double-refined essence of a thunderbolt. But when Pet mentioned his threats and indignity in refusing to free her, his rage burst all bounds, and his wrath was a sight to see.

"The villain! the scoundrel! the blackleg! the low-bred hound! to dare to talk to my daughter in such a way! I vow to Heaven I have a good mind to break every bone in his body! To insult my daughter under her father's roof, and threaten her like this! Petronilla, where is the key? I'll kick the impertinent puppy out of the house."

"The key's in the door," said Pet. "I expect he's in a sweet frame of mind by this time."

Up-stairs, in a highly choleric state, marched the judge, and turning the key in the library-door, he confronted Mr. Garnet, who was striding up and down the room in a way not particularly beneficial to the carpet, with flashing eyes, scowling brows, and an awful expression of countenance generally, and began, in a tone of withering sarcasm:

"So, Mr. Garnet, you have done my daughter the honor to propose for her hand this morning, and when that digit was refused you, you caught her, and had the impudence to insult her in her father's house. Oh! you're a model teacher of youth, Mr. Garnet! You're an exemplary young man to be trusted with the education of a young female. Come, sir, out of my house, and if ever I catch sight of you again, I'll cane you while I'm able to stand. Off with you this instant." And the judge, who was as strong as half a dozen broken-down *roues* like Garnet, caught him by the collar and unceremoniously dragged him down stairs. In vain the *quondam* teacher strove to free himself, and make his voice heard; not a word would the judge listen to; but upon reaching the hall door, landed him by a well-applied kick on the broad of his back, and then went in, slamming the door in his face.

Crestfallen and mortified, Mr. Garnet picked himself up, and glancing hurriedly around, beheld Petronilla standing laughingly watching him at the window. A very fiend seemed to leap into his eyes then, and shaking his fist at her, he strode off breathing words of vengeance, "not loud, but deep."

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. TOOSYPEGS IN DISTRESS.

"Ah, me! for aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history
The course of true love never did run smooth."
—SHAKESPEARE.

"Admiral Havenful, it's kind of you to ask, but I ain't well at all; I'm very much obliged to you," said Mr. Toosypegs, in a deeply dejected voice, as he walked into the parlor of the White Squall and took his seat without ever raising his eyes from the floor.

"Stand from under!" growled the admiral, in a tone like a bear with the bronchitis, as he gave his glazed hat a slap down on his head, and looked in a bewildered sort of way at the melancholy face of Mr. O. C. Toosypegs.

"Admiral Havenful, it's my intention to stand from under as much as possible," said Mr. Toosypegs, mournfully; "but, at the same time, I'm just as miserable as ever I can be, thank you. I don't see what I was born for at all, either. I dare say they meant well about it; but at the same time, I don't see what I was born for," said Mr. Toosypegs, with increased mournfulness.

The admiral laid both hands on his knees, and leaning over, looked solemnly into Mr. Toosypegs' face. Reading no expression whatever in that "Book of Beauty" but the mildest sort of despair, he drew himself up again, and grunted out an adjuration to "heave ahead."

"Admiral Havenful, would you oblige me by not saying that again?" said Mr. Toosypegs, giving a sudden start, and keeping his hand to his stomach with a grimace of intensest disgust. "You mean real well, I know; but it recalls unpleasant recollections that I wish buried in oblivion. Ugh!" said Mr. Toosypegs, with a convulsive shudder.

The admiral looked appealingly at the great painting on the mantel; but as that offered no suggestion, he took off his hat, gave his wig a vigorous scratching, as if to extract a few ideas by the roots, and then clapping it on again, faced around, and with renewed vigor began the attack.

"Now, Mr. Toosypegs, I'm considerable out of my latitude, and if you'll just keep her round a point or so, I'll be able to see my way clearer, and discover in which corner the wind sets. What's the trouble, young man?"

"The trouble, Admiral Havenful, is such that no amount of words can ever express it. No, Admiral Havenful!" exclaimed the unhappy Mr. Toosypegs, "all the words in all the dictionaries, not to mention the spelling books, that ever was printed, couldn't begin to tell you the way I feel. It worries me so, and preys on my mind at such a rate that my appetite ain't no circumstance to what it used to be. My Sunday swallow-tails (the one with the brass buttons, Admiral Havenful), that used to barely meet on me, goes clean around me twice now. I don't expect to live long at this rate, but I guess it's pleasantest lying in the graveyard than living in this vale of tears," added Mr. Toosypegs, with a melancholy snuffle.

Once again the perplexed admiral looked helplessly at the picture; but the work of art maintained a strict neutrality, and gave him not the slightest assistance. Then he glanced at Mr. Toosypegs, but still nothing was to be read in those pallid, freckled features, but the mildest sort of anguish. The admiral was beginning to lose patience.

"Belay there! belay!" he roared, bringing his fist down with a tremendous thud on his unoffending knee. "Come to the point at once, Orlando Toosypegs! What the dickens is the matter?"

"Admiral Havenful, don't swear!" exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, looking deeply scandalized. "I dare say you mean well; but profane swearing isn't so edifying as it might be. I've a little tract at home that tells about a boy that told another boy to 'go to blazes!' and three years after he fell out of a fourth-story window and broke two of his legs, and some of his arms. That shows the way profane swearing is punished. I'll bring you over the book some day, Admiral Havenful, if you like; it's a very interesting story to read about."

The admiral fell back with a groan.

"I haven't read anything lately but the 'Lamentations of Jeremiah,'" said Mr. Toosypegs, resuming his former objections; "it's very soothing to the feelings, though I can't lay it to heart so much as I would like to, on account of Aunt Priscilla scolding all the time. She means real well, I know, but it ain't so pleasant to listen to as some things I've heard. I laid awake all last night crying, but it don't seem to do me much good."

And Mr. Toosypegs wiped his eyes with his handkerchief.

The admiral said nothing; he had evidently given up the point in despair.

"I wouldn't mention this to anybody but you, Admiral Havenful," said Mr. Toosypegs; "because my feelings are so dreadfully lacerated it's a great affliction to me to speak of it. I know you won't tell anybody that I've revealed it, because I would feel real bad about it if you did."

"Orlando Toosypegs, just stand by a minute, will you?" said the admiral, in the tone of a patient but persecuted saint. "Now, hold on—what have you revealed to me? what have you told me? There's two questions I'd feel obliged to anybody to answer."

"Why, my goodness!" said Mr. Toosypegs, in much surprise, "haven't I told you? Why I thought I had. Well, then, Admiral Havenful, I've went and fell in love, and that's all there is about it."

"Main topsail haul!" roared the admiral, immeasurably relieved; "who'd ever have thought it? Who is she, Orlando?" said the admiral, lowering his voice to a husky whisper.

"Your niece, Miss Pet Lawless," said Mr. Toosypegs, blushing deeply.

This announcement took the admiral so much by surprise that he could only give vent to it by another appealing glance at the picture, and a stifled growl of "Splice the main-brace!"

"Admiral Havenful, it's my intention to splice the main-brace as much as possible. I'm very much obliged to you," said Mr. Toosypegs, gratefully, "but, at the same time, I'm afraid it won't do me the least good. I know very well she don't care anything about me, and will go and marry somebody else some day. By gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, with the energy of desperation, "I've a good mind to go and do something to myself, whenever I think of it. Why, it's enough to make a fellow go and heave himself away into an untimely grave—so it is."

“Don’t, Orlando, don’t,” said the admiral, in a tone of grave rebuke; “it’s not proper to talk so. When you come to overhaul your conscience, by-and-by, you’ll be sorry for such rash threats. Now, look here—I’m going to talk to you for your own good. Does Pet know you’ve gone and splashed your affections onto her?”

“Good gracious, no!” ejaculated Mr. Toosypegs, in much alarm; “I wouldn’t tell her for anything—no, not for any amount of money you could give me for doing it, Admiral Havenful.—Oh, my goodness! the idea! why, she would laugh at me, Admiral Havenful.”

“Avast there, messmate! avast!” growled the admiral, administering a thump to his glazed hat. “Now, look here. When a young man goes and falls into love with a young woman, what does he do? or, what do they do?”

“I’m sure I don’t know, Admiral Havenful,” said Mr. Toosypegs, looking dejectedly at the carpet; “I never was in love before, you know, and it’s just the queerest feeling ever was. I never experienced anything like it before. It’s not like the colic, or the toothache, or a cramp, or anything: you feel—well, I don’t know as I can describe it; but you kind of feel all over. And whenever I meet Miss Pet suddenly and she turns them two great, black eyes of hers right onto me—my gracious! Admiral Havenful, the state it sets me into! Why, I actually feel as if I’d like to crawl out of the toes of my boots or have the carpet open and swallow me up.”

And, Mr. Toosypegs, carried away by the exciting recollection, got up and paced up and down two or three times, and then dropped back into his seat and began wiping his heated visage with the flaming bandanna so often spoken of.

“Belay! belay!” said the admiral, impatiently; “you’re steering in the wrong direction altogether, Orlando. Now, look here; I asked you, ‘when a young man goes and falls in love with a young woman, what does he do?’ and says you ‘I don’t know, Admiral Havenful.’ Well, now look here; I’ll tell you. When a young man goes and falls in love with a young woman, *what does he do*? Why, Orlando Toosypegs, he goes and marries her. That’s what he does!”

And hereupon the admiral administered another vigorous slap to his glazed hat, that very nearly stove in the crown of that ill-used head-piece; and leaning back in his chair, looked with excusable triumph and exultation at Mr. Toosypegs.

That young gentleman gave a sudden start, such as people are in the habit of giving when they sit on a tin tack turned up, and got very red, but did not reply.

“Now, look here, Orlando Toosypegs,” reiterated the admiral, bringing the forefinger of his right hand impressively down on the palm of his left, “they goes and gets married. That’s what they does.”

Mr. Toosypegs gave another start, which could only be justified by the idea of another upturned tin tack, and blushed deeper than ever, but still replied never a word.

“They goes and gets married. That there’s what they does,” repeated the admiral, folding his arms and leaning serenely back, like a man who has settled the matter forever. “And now, Orlando Toosypegs, in the words of Scripture,”—here the admiral got up and took off his glazed hat—“‘go thou, and do likewise.’”

And then clapping his hat on again, with a triumphant slap, he sat down and looked Mr. Toosypegs straight and unwinkingly in the face.

“Admiral Havenful, I’m very much obliged to you, I’m sure,” said the “lovyer,” in a subdued tone; “but—but maybe she wouldn’t have me. She might, just as likely as not, say ‘No,’ Admiral Havenful.”

This was a view of the case the admiral had never once taken, and it took him so completely “aback,” to use his own phrase, that he could only cast another appealing glance at the picture and growl a low, bewildered adjuration to society in general, to “Stand from under!”

“I shouldn’t be a bit surprised if she said ‘No,’ Admiral Havenful; not one bit, sir,” said Mr. Toosypegs, mournfully; “it’s my luck, always, to have the most dreadful things happen to me! I declare it’s enough to make a fellow mad enough to go and do something to himself—it actually is.”

“Don’t now, Orlando, don’t now,” said the admiral, severely; “it isn’t proper, you know, and you really shouldn’t. There’s a proverb I’m trying to think of,” said the admiral, knitting his brow in intense perplexity; “you know the Book of Proverbs, Orlando, don’t you? Hold on, now, till I see: ‘Fain’—no—yes, ‘Fain heart—fain heart never won a fair lady.’” Again the old sailor reverentially removed his hat. “That’s it, Orlando; ‘fain heart never won fair lady.’ Now, look here: you go straight along and ask Firefly if she’s willing to cruise under your flag through life, and if she lays her hand in yours, and says ‘I’m there, messmate!’ by St. Paul Jones! we’ll have such a wedding as never was seen in old Maryland since Calvert came over. Hoorah!” yelled the admiral, waving his hat over his head in an unexpected outburst

of delight, that quite startled Mr. Toosypegs.

"Admiral Havenful, I'll do it! I will, by granny!" exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs jumping up in the excitement of the moment. "I'll go right straight over to Heath Hill and ask her. Why, she actually might say 'Yes,' after all. Oh, my gracious! if she does, won't it be nice? What will aunt Prisciller say? Admiral Havenful, it was real kind of you to advise me so, and tell me what to do; and I'm ever so much obliged to you—I really am," said Mr. Toosypegs, bustling around, and putting on his hat, and turning to go.

"Keep her to the wind's eye!" roared the admiral, in a burst of enthusiasm, as he brought one tremendous sledge-hammer fist down with an awful thump on the table.

"Admiral Havenful, it is my intention to keep her to the wind's eye as much as possible," said Mr. Toosypegs, who comprehended the sentence about as much as he would a Chinese funeral-oration. "Good-by, now; I'll come right back when it's over, and tell you what she said."

And like the frog immortalized in Mother Goose, who "would a-wooing go," Mr. O. C. Toosypegs "set off with his opera-hat," on that expedition so terrifying to bashful young men—that of going to "pop the question."

CHAPTER XXVI.

PET "RESPECTFULLY DECLINES."

"Doubt the stars are fire—
Doubt the sun doth move—
Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love."
—HAMLET.

In all the ardor of his momentary excitement, Mr. Toosypegs got astride of a serious-looking pony, a family relation of the admiral's favorite nag, Ringbone, and set out at a shuffling gallop for Heath Hill. Mr. Toosypegs did not look quite so pretty on horseback as some people might suppose: for he went jigging up and down with every motion of his steed, and being remarkably long in the legs, his feet were never more than a few inches from the ground; so that altogether, he was not the most dashing rider you would have selected to lead a charge of cavalry. But Mr. Toosypegs was not thinking of his looks just then, but of a far more important subject—trying to screw his courage to the sticking-point. The further he went, the faster his new-found courage began oozing away. As the White Squall receded, so did his daring determination; and as the full extent of the mission he was on burst out on him, a cold perspiration slowly burst out on his face, despite the warmth of the day.

"Good gracious! it's going to be awful; I know it is!" exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, wiping his face with the cuff of his coat. "And how I'm ever going to get through with it, I'm sure I don't know. I wish to goodness I had never said nothing about it! If only knew any man that's in the habit of proposing, he could tell me how they do it, and then I wouldn't mind. But now—by granny! I've a good mind to turn, and go right back to Dismal Hollow. But then, the admiral—what will he say? Well, I don't care what he says. How would he like to go and pop the question himself, I wonder? By gracious! I will go back. It's no use thinking about it; for I'd sooner be chawed alive by rattlesnakes, and then kicked to death by grasshoppers, than go and tell Miss Pet the way I feel. I couldn't tell her the way I feel; it's the most peculiar sensation ever was. And them black eyes of hers! Land of hope and blessed promise! the way they do go right through a fellow's vest-pattern! How in the world so many men can manage to get married is more than I know; for I'd sooner march up to the muzzle of a pistol while Old Nick held the trigger, than go and do it! Whoa, Charlie! Turn round. I'm going home to Dismal Hollow!"

Whir, whir, whir! came something, with lightning-like rapidity, over the soft heath. Mr. Toosypegs turned round; and there came Miss Pet herself, flying along like the wind, on her fleet Arabian, her cheeks crimson, her splendid eyes blazing, her red lips smiling; her short, jetty curls flying in the wind she herself raised; her long, raven-black plume just touching her scarlet cheeks; the red rings of flame flashing out in the sunlight from her dazzling eyes and hair. She was

bewildering, dazzling, blinding! Mr. Toosypegs had his breath completely taken away as his heart had long since been, and in that moment fell more deeply, deplorably, and helplessly in love than ever. Every idea was instantaneously put to flight by this little dark, bright bird-of-paradise—this blinding little grenade, all fire, and jets, and sparkles.

"Halloa, Orlando! Your very humble servant!" shouted Pet, as she laughingly dashed up, touching her hat gallantly to the gentleman. "How does your imperial highness find yourself this glorious day?"

"A—pretty miserable, thank you. A—I mean I ain't very well, Miss Pet," said Mr. Toosypegs, stammering, and breaking down.

"Not very well, eh? Why, what's the matter? Not cholera-morbus, or measles or a galloping-decline, or anything—is it?" said Pet, in a tone of deepest anxiety. "The gods forbid anything should happen to you, Orlando, for the sake of all Judestown girls whose hearts you have broken! You do look sort of blue—a prey to 'green and yellow melancholy,' I shouldn't wonder! Make Miss Priscilla apply a mustard-poultice when you get home—it doesn't matter where—and go to bed with your feet in a tub of hot water, and I'll bet you anything you'll be as well as ever, if not considerably better, in the morning. I'm going to take in nursing some of these days, and ought to know!"

"Miss Pet, it's real good of you to advise me, and I'm very much obliged to you," said Mr. Toosypegs, gratefully; "but, at the same time, I don't believe mustard-poultices and tubs of hot water would do me the first mite of good. No, Miss Pet, not all the hot water in all the hot springs that ever was, could do me the least good," said Mr. Toosypegs, firmly. "I'm in that state that nothing can do me any good—no, no, nothing!" repeated Mr. Toosypegs, with increased firmness. "It's all internal, you see, Miss Pet."

"Oh! is it?" said Pet, puckering up her mouth as if she was going to whistle. "You ought to take something, then, and drive it out! Hot gin, or burnt brandy and cayenne is good—excessively good—though not so nice to take as some things I've tasted. Just you take a pint or so of hot burnt brandy and cayenne to-night, before going to bed, and you'll see it will be all out in a severe rash early to-morrow morning. I'm advising you for your good, Orlando; for I feel like a mother to you—in fact, I feel a motherly interest in all the nice young men in Judestown and the surrounding country generally, for any extent you please, and am always ready to give them no end of good advice, if they only take it."

"It's real good of you, Miss Pet I'm sure," said Mr. Toosypegs, wincing, as the very thought of the hot brandy and cayenne brought tears to his eyes, "and I would be real glad to take your advice, and brandy, only what ails me can't be brought out in a rash. No, Miss Pet, all the brandy from here to Brandywine," said Mr. Toosypegs—with a hazy idea that all ardent spirits came from that place—"couldn't do it. It's real good of you, though, to recommend it; and I'm very much obliged to you, I'm sure."

"Well, really, I'm afraid I'll have to give the case up, though I hate to do it. What's the symptoms, Orlando?"

"The what, Miss Pet?"

"The symptoms, you know—I don't exactly understand the word myself; and I forgot my dictionary when I was coming away. It means, though, the feelings or something that way—how do you feel as a general thing?"

"Well, I can't say I feel very well," said Mr. Toosypegs, mournfully. "I'm sort of restless, and can't sleep of nights!"

"Ah! that's owing to the musketoes!" said Pet. "That ain't dangerous. Go on."

"No, Miss Pet, it's not the musketoes; it's my feelings," said Mr. Toosypegs, with increased mournfulness. "I've lost my appetite!"

"Well, I'm sure I don't wonder at that, either," again interrupted Pet. "Miss Priscilla half-starves you over there—I know she does. Just you come over and dine with us two or three times a week, at Heath Hill, and you'll be astonished slightly at the way you'll find your appetite again. Oh, I don't despair of you at all!"

"Miss Pet," burst out Mr. Toosypegs, in a sort of desperation, "it's very good of you to ask me, and I'm very much obliged to you; but you don't understand my feelings at all. It's an unfortunate attachment—"

"An attachment?" exclaimed Pet. "Whew! that is bad. Why, Orlando, I didn't think you owed anybody anything. When was this attachment issued against you?"

"Oh, Miss Pet! can't you understand? My gracious! that ain't the sort of attachment I mean at all. It's not legal—"

"Then it's illegal," said Miss Pet, with a profoundly-shocked expression of countenance. "Why, Mr. Toosypegs, where do you expect to go to? I never expected to have any such confession from your lips. An illegal attachment! Mr.

Toosypegs, the community generally look upon you as a highly exemplary young man, but I feel it my painful duty to announce to them immediately how they have been deceived. An illegal attachment! Oh, my stars and garters! Excuse me, Mr. Toosypegs, but after such a highly improper confession, I must bid you good-morning. No young and unsuspecting female like me can be seen with propriety in your company for the future. I am very sorry, Mr. Toosypegs, and I should never have suspected you of such shocking conduct had you not confessed it yourself." And Pet drew herself up, and put on that severely moral expression only seen on the faces of school-mistresses and committeemen when lecturing young ideas on the proper way to shoot.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, in a distracted tone, nearly driven out of his senses by this harangue. "Oh, land of hope! was a fellow that never done nothing to nobody ever talked to like this before? By granny! it's enough to make a fellow get as mad as anything; so it is! Why, Miss Pet, I haven't done anything improper—I wouldn't for any price; upon my word and honor, I wouldn't. I've fell in love with—a—with—a young lady, and I don't see where's the harm of it. It's unkind of you, Miss Pet, to speak so, and I don't see what I've ever done to deserve it. You mean real well, I'm sure, but it makes a fellow feel bad to be talked to in this way all the time," said Mr. Toosypegs, with a stifled whimper.

"Well, there, don't cry, Orlando," said Pet, soothingly, "and I won't say another word. What young lady have you had the misfortune to fall in love with?"

"Miss Pet, excuse me, but I—I'd rather not tell, if it's all the same," replied Mr. Toosypegs, blushing deeply.

"Oh, fool! tell me, as a friend, you know. Won't ever mention it again, so help me! Do I know her?"

"Ye—yes, Miss Pet, slightly."

"Hem! It isn't Annie Grove?"

"No, Miss Pet—why, she's forty years old, if she's a day," said Mr. Toosypegs, indignantly.

"Yes, I know—twenty-five, she says; but she's been that as far back as the oldest inhabitant can remember. Well, then, Jessie Masters?"

"Miss Pet, allow me to say I ain't in the habit of falling in love with women with wooden legs," said the young gentleman, with dignity.

"Well, I didn't know; it's cheaper, in shoe-leather, especially. Hem-m-m! Perhaps it's Mrs. Jenkins?"

"Mrs. Jenkins! a widow! No, Miss Pet, it ain't. I should think you might know I don't like second-hand women," said Mr. Toosypegs, as near being indignant as he ever was in his life.

"Well, who the mischief can it be then! It must be Huldah Rice."

"A little stout thing, with—with a hump, and cross-eyes? Miss Pet, it ain't!" exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, with tears of vexation in his eyes.

"Not her, either? then I give up. Who is it, Orlando?"

"Miss Pet, I don't like to tell—you'll laugh at me," said Mr. Toosypegs, blushing deeply.

"Laugh! No, I won't; honor bright! I'll look as grim as a death's-head and cross-bones! Now then, out with it!"

"Miss Pet, it's—it's—"

"Yes—well?"

"It's—"

"Well?"

"It's *you*," fairly shouted Mr. Toosypegs, driven to desperation by her perseverance.

"Me! O ye gods and goddesses, without skirts or bodices! Me! Great Jehosaphat! I'll know what it feels like to be unexpectedly struck by a cannon-ball, after this! Me! Well, I never!"

"Miss Pet, I knew you would laugh; I knew it all along, and I told him so this morning," said Mr. Toosypegs, with a sniffle; "you mean well, I dare say, but it don't seem kind at all."

"Laugh!" exclaimed Pet; "come, I like that, and my face as long as an undertaker's! You may take a microscope and look

from this until the week after next, and then you won't discover the ghost of a smile on my countenance. Laugh, indeed! I'm above such a weakness, I hope," said Pet, with ineffable contempt.

"Then, Miss Pet, perhaps you will have me," said Mr. Toosypegs, with sudden hope. "Miss Pet, I can't begin to tell you the way I love you; you can't have any idea of it; it goes right through and through me. I think of you all day, and I dream about you all night. I'm in the most dreadful way about you, ever was. Miss Pet, I'd do anything you told me to. I'd go and drown myself if you wanted me to, or shoot myself, or take ratsbane, and rather like it than otherwise, if you'll only have me, Miss Pet—"

"Orlando, I'm very sorry; but—I can't."

"Miss Pet, you don't mean it; you can't mean it, surely. I know I ain't so good-looking as some," said Mr. Toosypegs, in a melancholy tone; "but I can get something to take the freckles off, and I expect to fatten out a little by-and-by, so—"

"Now, don't go to any such trouble for me," said Pet, with difficulty keeping from laughing at his mildly-anguished look. "I don't mind the freckles at all; I rather like them, in fact; they vary the monotony of the complexion, just as oases do in the deserts we read of; and as for being thin—well, I'm rather on the hatchet-pattern myself, you know. But you must quit thinking about me, Orlando, because I'm only a wild little Tomboy, that everybody gets furious about, and I never intend to get married at all—that is, unless—well, never mind."

"Miss Pet, if you only knew how badly in love I am."

"Oh, you only think so; you'll forget me in a week!"

"I'll never forget you, Miss Pet, never—not even if I was to be taken out of this world altogether, and sent up to New Jersey. It's awful to think you won't have me—it really is," said Mr. Toosypegs, in great mental distress.

"Well, I'm sorry, Orlando, but I can't help it, you know. Now be a good boy for my sake, and try to forget me—won't you?" asked Pet, coaxingly.

"I'll try to, Miss Pet, since you wish it," said poor Mr. Toosypegs, with tears in his eyes; "but it's blamed hard. I wish to gracious I had never been born—I just do! I don't see where is the good of it at all."

"Oh, now, Orlando, you mustn't feel bad about it, because it won't amount to anything," said Pet, in a consoling tone; "don't let us talk any more about it. Guess what I heard last night over at Judestown."

"I'm sure I don't know, Miss Pet," said Mr. Toosypegs, giving his eyes and nose a vigorous wiping with his handkerchief.

"Well, then, that the gang of smugglers who have been for so long a time suspected of having a rendezvous around the coast somewhere, have been seen at last. Two or three of them were observed pulling off in a boat, the other night, and going on board a dark, suspicious-looking schooner, anchored down the bay. They are known to have a hiding-place somewhere around here, but the good folks of Judestown can't discover it, and consequently are in a state of mind at having such desperadoes near them. I am going to hunt all over the shore far and near myself, this very day, and see if my eyes are not sharper than those of the Judestown officials. Oh, I would love, of all things, to discover their hiding-place; perhaps my smartness wouldn't astonish the natives slightly."

"But, good gracious, Miss Pet! if they get hold of you," said Mr. Toosypegs, his blood running chill with horror at the very idea; "why, it would be awful."

"If they did," said Pet, "they would find, as others have done, to their cost, before now, that they had caught a Tartar; a snap-dragon; a pepper-pod; an angel in petticoats! Oh, they'd have their hands full, in every sense of the word. I'm bound to go on my exploring expedition this afternoon, wind and weather permitting, anyway, and see what will be the result. Where are you going, may I ask?"

"To Dismal Hollow, or—no, I've got to go to the White Squall, first."

"Very well; I won't detain you, then. I'm off to Judestown—good-by; remember me to uncle Harry."

And giving her jaunty, plumed hat another gallant touch, Firefly dashed off, leaving Mr. Toosypegs gazing dejectedly after her until the last flutter of her dark riding-habit vanished amid the trees; and then he slowly and mournfully turned his solemn-faced nag in the direction of the White Squall, to tell the admiral the unsatisfactory result of his proposal.

CHAPTER XXVII.

GREEK MEETS GREEK.

"'I scorn,' quoth she, 'thou coxcomb silly,
Quarter or counsel from a foe.
If thou canst force me to it, do,'"
—HUDIBRAS.

"I had rather chop this hand off at a blow,
And with the other fling it in thy face,
Than stoop to thee."
—SHAKSPEARE.

Petronilla rode gayly along to the little bustling, half-village, half-city, Judestown, thinking over her late surprising proposal, and scarcely knowing whether to laugh at or pity poor Mr. Toosypegs. As she reached the town these thoughts were dispelled by the busy scenes around, and Pet found herself fully occupied in nodding to her various friends and acquaintances as she passed.

Pet's destination was the post-office, a large building which served as a store, hotel, and post, all in one. As she drew rein at the door, the mail-coach drew up, and Pet lingered where she was a moment, in order to avoid the crowd.

The passengers crowded in, and as the coach-door opened, a young gentleman sprung out and assisted a lady, closely veiled, to alight. Neither of them noticed Pet; so they did not observe her quick start, her sudden flush, and the vivid lighting up of her beautiful eyes.

These outward and very unwonted signs of emotion on Pet's part passed away as quickly as they came, and in one minute more she was as cool, saucy and composed as ever.

"Is there any one here who will drive us to Old Barrens Cottage?" said the young gentleman, glancing at the landlord.

"Yes, sir; in ten minutes, sir; just step in, sir; my boy's gone off in a gig with a gent, but he'll be back soon. Walk right in this way, sir," replied the obsequious landlord, with a profusion of bows to the well-dressed and distinguished-looking stranger before him.

"I would rather not wait," said the gentleman. "Can you not let me have some other conveyance, and I will drive over myself?"

"Very sorry, sir, but they're all engaged. Just step in, sir, you and your good lady, sir."

Pet fancied she heard a low, sweet laugh from under the thick, brown veil, and the gentleman smiled as he followed the bustling host into the well-sanded parlor.

In one moment Pet was off her horse, and consigning him to the care of the hostler, darted in by a side-door and rung a peal that presently brought the hostess, a pleasant-faced, fat, little woman, in a tremendous flutter, into the room.

"Laws! Miss Petronilla, is it you? Why, you haven't been to see me this long time. How do you do?"

"I'm very well, thank you, Mrs. Gudge; but see here—did you notice that gentleman and lady who have just gone into the parlor?"

"That tall, handsome young man, with all them there mustaches?—yes, I seen him, Miss Pet."

"Well, do you know who he is?"

"No; though it does kinder seem to me as if I'd seen him somewhere before. The lady, his wife, I take it, kept her veil down, and I couldn't see her face. No; I don't know 'em, Miss Pet."

"Well, that don't matter; I *do*. And now, Mrs. Gudge, I want you to help me in a splendid piece of—of—"

"Mischief, Miss Pet," said the woman, slyly.

"No, not exactly—just fun. I want you to bring a suit of your son Bob's clothes up here. I'm going to dress myself in

them, and when he comes with the gig let me drive them over. My riding-habit and pony can remain here till I send for them."

"Now, Miss Pet—"

"Now, Mrs. Gudge, don't bother me! Go, like a dear old soul. I'll give you a kiss if you do."

"But the judge—"

"Oh, the judge won't know anything about it unless you tell him. There, be off! I want to be dressed before Bob comes. If you don't hurry I'll lose the most splendid joke ever was. Hurry now! Put Mr. Gudge up to it, so the cat won't get out of the bag."

With a deprecating shake of her head and upturning of her eyes, the little hostess bustled out, inwardly wondering what "Miss Pet would do next."

Pet, in the meantime, with her wicked black eyes scintillating with the prospect of coming fun, was rapidly divesting herself of her hat and riding-habit. And then little Mrs. Gudge made her appearance with her son and heir's "Sunday-go-to-meetin's" and stayed to assist the fairy in her frolic, and find out who the handsome owner of the "mustarchers" was. But Pet was as close as a clam, and only laughed at the landlady's "pumping," while she dived desperately into Bob's pants and coat, which—except being narrow where Pet thought they ought to be wide, and wide where they ought to be narrow, fitted her very well. Then she combed her short, dancing, black curls to one side, over her round, boyish forehead, and setting upon them a jaunty Scotch cap, stood there, bright, saucy, and smiling, as handsome and dashing a little fellow as you could see in a long summer-day.

"Well, laws! you *do* make a pretty boy and no mistake, Miss Pet," said the woman, admiringly; "them handsome eyes of yours and shaking, shining curls is jest the thing! But your hands—they're a heap too small and deliky-looking for a boy's."

"Oh! well, I'll rub some mud on them when I get out. They're not the whitest in the world anyway; and besides, they won't look very closely at a little cab-boy's hands."

"Now, if you want to be like a boy, you must take long steps, and stick your hands in your pockets, and swear. Can you swear, Miss Pet?" said the woman, seriously.

"Well, I never tried," said Pet, laughing; "and as I don't know any oaths off by heart, I guess I won't mind, for fear the effect would be a failure."

"It's a pity you don't," said Mrs. Gudge, thoughtfully; "all boys allers swears at the horses. You must look sassy—but that comes natural enough to you; and you had better smoke a pipe or chew some tobacco, on the road—which will you do, Miss Pet?"

"Well, really, Mrs. Gudge, I'd rather not do either, if it's all the same to you," said Pet; "but you mus'n't keep calling me 'Miss Pet,' you know; my name's Bob, now, Bob Gudge."

"So it is. Laws! if it ain't funny; but I'm afraid they'll find you out if you don't do none of those things. Can you whistle, Miss—Bob, I mean?"

For reply, Pet puckered up her rosy mouth, and whistled "Hail Columbia," in a way that made little Mrs. Gudge's eyes snap with delight.

"Here comes Bob!" she cried, as a gig came rattling into the yard. "You wait here a minute and I'll fix things all right."

Out flew Mrs. Gudge, and called off Bob to some secret corner, and then she showed her head in at the door and called:

"Come, now, Miss—Bob, and drive round to the front door while I tell the lady and gentleman all's right now."

Pet, imitating Bob's shuffling swagger, went out to the yard, sprung up on the front seat, took the reins, and, in masterly style, turned the horses, and drove around to the front door.

Scarcely had she got there and struck up "Hail Columbia" in her shrillest key, than the dark, handsome gentleman with the "mustarchers" came out with the lady, who was still veiled, followed by the host and hostess, on whose faces rested a broad grin. Pet, with her cap pulled over her eyes, to shade them from the hot sun, and also to subdue their dark, bright splendor a little, sat whistling away, looking as cool as a cucumber, if not several degrees cooler.

The young gentleman handed the lady in, and she took her place on the back seat.

“Now, Minnie, I’m going to sit here with the driver and have a chat with him”, said the young man; “these cunning little vagrants know everything.”

The shrill whistle rose an octave higher.

“Very well,” said the young lady, in low, laughing tones; “anything to put an end to that piercing whistle. I suppose he cannot talk to you and whistle together?”

“Can’t I, though?” thought the small urchin, who held the reins. “We’ll see that, Miss Erminie Germaine,” and higher and higher still rose the sharp, shrill notes.

“Come, my lad, start,” cried the gentleman, springing in, “and if it’s not too much trouble, might I request you to stop whistling? It may be, and no doubt is, owing to our bad taste, but we cannot appreciate it as it deserves.”

“Don’t see no harm in whistling; nobody never objects to it,” said Pet, imitating to perfection the gruff, surly tones of Master Bob. “I’m fond of music myself, if you ain’t, and so is the hoss, who would not go a step if I didn’t whistle; so I’ll just keep on if it’s all the same to you.”

And another stave of “Hail Columbia” pierced the air.

“How long does it take you to drive to the Barrens?”

“Well, sometimes longer and sometimes shorter; and then again not so long,” said the driver, touching the horse daintily with his whip.

“Quite enlightened, thank you! Do you know the family at old Barrens cottage?”

“There ain’t no family there; there’s only the old woman what can’t walk or nothin’; and a nigger. Them two don’t make one whole member of society, let alone a family. Was you acquainted with them, square?”

“Slightly so,” said the gentleman, smiling.

“Well, maybe you knew that there cove that went away—young Mr. Ray?”

“I believe I had that honor,” replied the young man, with the smile still on his handsome face.

“Honor! humph! I reckon you’re the only one ever thought it an honor to know him,” said the lad, grimly. “He always was a vagabones, and ended as all vagabones must, at last.”

For one moment the young gentleman glanced at the driver, evidently hesitating whether to pitch him then and there out of the gig or not; but seeing only a little boy with an exceedingly muddy face, he thought better of it, and said:

“Well, this is really pleasant to listen to! And how did this vagabones, as you call him, end?”

“Why, he was sent away from home, when they couldn’t stand him any longer; and the last we heard of him was that he was in State Prison for life.”

A low peal of laughter from the young lady followed this, in which, after a prolonged stare of astonishment, the gentleman was obliged to join.

“Well, for cool, innate impudence, and straight-forward bluntness, I’ll back you against the world, my good youth,” said the young man, while the little driver sat looking as sober as a judge.

“And the young lady who lived there, what became of her?”

“There wasn’t never no young lady,” said the lad; “there was a little gal with yaller hair, but she went off, too; and I expect, ran away with some one-eyed fiddler or other. They was English, and no better couldn’t have been expected,” said the boy, in strong accents of contempt.

Another low laugh from the young lady and a prolonged whistle from the gentleman followed this.

“Well, I am sorry my friends have turned out so badly. How about the others, now; Judge Lawless and his family, for instance; Admiral Havenful, Mr. and Miss Toosypegs, and the rest?”

“They’re all hanging together! Mr. Toosypegs is going to get married and take in sewing for a living; and Miss Priscilla goes round making vinegar.”

“Making what?”

“Vinegar,” said the lad, gravely. “The grocers gets her to look into barrels of water, when they turns into vinegar ’mediately.”

“I shouldn’t wonder,” said the gentleman, laughing; “but the others—Judge Lawless, Miss Lawless, what of her?”

“Oh, she’s all right. Don’t expect she’ll be Miss Lawless, though, much longer,” said the boy.

“No? why? how? what do you mean?” said the young gentleman, starting so suddenly that the boy looked up, apparently quite terrified by this unexpected outburst.

“See here, square, you’ll skeer the hoss if you keep on like this. If you’re subjick to ’tacks of this kind you ought for to have told me before we started, and not ’larm the hoss,” said the boy, sharply.

“Tell me what you mean by that? Speak!” said the young man, vehemently.

“By what? skeering the hoss?” said the lad.

“No, about Miss Lawless,” was the impetuous rejoinder.

“Oh! Well, I have hearn tell she was goin’ to be married. Likely as not she is too; got lots of beaux.”

The young gentleman’s face flushed for a moment, and then grew set and stern.

“Did you hear who she was to be married to?” said the young lady, leaning over.

“No, marm; nobody never can tell what she’ll do; likely as not she’ll get married to the one nobody expects her to marry. She always was the contrariest young woman always that ever was,” said the boy, casting a quick, bright, searching glance from under his long eyelashes, at the handsome face of the gentleman. And it was a handsome face, the very handsomest the saucy little driver had ever seen; and it might have been its close proximity to its owner that sent such quick thrills to the heart of the quondam boy, and set it beating so unnecessarily fast under the jaunty black coat. The dark, clear complexion; the straight, classic features; the thick, jetty, clustering hair; the high, princely brow; the bold, flashing, falcon, black eyes; the thin, curving nostril, that showed his high blood; the proud, haughty mouth, shaded by a thick, black mustache; the tall, slight, elegant form; the high, kingly movements—these made up the outward attractions of him by whose side Pet sat. Of course, every reader above the artless age of five knows as well as I do who it is, so there is not the slightest necessity for announcing his name as Raymond Germaine.

There was a long silence after this. The young gentleman, with a cold, almost sarcastic look, watched the objects as they passed, and the little boy drove on, whistling as if his life depended on it.

Then the young lady leaned over and began a conversation in a low voice with her companion, to which he replied in the same tone. The lady had thrown back her veil, disclosing a face of such rare loveliness that it seemed a downright shame, not to say sin, to hide it behind that odious brown covering. The driver turned round to catch a better view of her face, and the young lady met the full splendor of those dazzling dark orbs. The boy instantly turned, and began whistling louder than ever.

“What a handsome boy!” said the young girl, in a low tone, yet loud enough for the “boy” in question to hear. “What splendid eyes! I thought there could be but one such pair of eyes in the world, and those—”

Her companion made a slight gesture that arrested the name she would have uttered; and glancing at the boy, said, rather coldly:

“Yes; he is handsome, if his face was washed.”

“Now, Ray,” said the young lady, laughing “that is altogether too bad. Those radiant eyes are destined to break many a heart yet.”

“That they are!” mentally exclaimed the lad.

“How fortunate for some of your admirers, Ermie, he is not a few years older,” said Ray (we may as well call him so at once, and have done with it). “Those dark, bright, handsome eyes wouldn’t have left you the faintest trace of a heart; and then what would poor Ranty have done?”

“Pshaw, Ray,” said Erminie, with a most becoming blush, “what nonsense! Oh, look! we are almost home. There is Dismal Hollow, and there—there—I declare! that’s Mr. Toosypegs himself, riding out of the pine woods. Why, he hasn’t

changed the least in the world since I saw him last."

The little driver gave his cap a pull further over his face as Ray shouted to Mr. Toosypegs.

The next moment, that disconsolate wooer was by the side of the gig, shaking hands with Ray and Erminie, and asking a dozen questions in a breath.

"How did you come? When did you come? How did you meet?" breathlessly demanded the astonished and delighted Mr. Toosypegs.

"I called for Erminie at her convent. She is not going back any more; my visit will probably be a short one. I hope Miss Toosypegs and all our friends are well?"

"Yes; all well. I am very much obliged to you. Did you pass through Judestown?"

"Of course. How else could we get here?"

"And didn't you meet Miss Pet?"

"Miss Lawless? No. Was she at Judestown?" said Erminie, eagerly; while Ray found something so attractive among the trees that he could not possibly remove his eyes from it. "Oh, I should have liked to have seen her so much!"

"Yes; she went to Judestown this morning, and has not got back. My goodness! it is the greatest wonder you didn't see her. What a pity she didn't know you've come! she would be here in a flash."

"Is she to be married, do you know, Mr. Toosypegs?" said Erminie, in a low voice; "we heard she was."

The little boy glanced from the corner of his eye, and saw a faint red on the dark cheek of the tall, handsome, Spanish-looking gentleman beside him.

Mr. Toosypegs turned pale; even his very freckles turned the color of buttermilk curds at the question.

"Get married! Goodness gracious! I was just saying so. Oh, I knew very well she would go and heave herself away on somebody. Who is she going to be married to, Miss Minnie?"

"I don't know; it was this little boy who told us," said Erminie, glancing toward him.

"Well, I don't know neither; only hearn tell," said the lad, shortly.

"Perhaps it is only a report. When will you come over to the cottage, Mr. Toosypegs?"

"This evening, Miss Minnie; and I guess Aunt Prisciller will come, too. She hasn't had any new caps or collars since you went away, and has ever so many to get made."

"Very well; I will make them. Good-by, till then," said Erminie, smiling as they drove on.

A short time sufficed to bring them to the cottage.

The driver was invited in, but declined, and turned to go.

"If you see Miss Lawless on your way, will you tell her to hurry here?" said Erminie, as she alighted.

"Yes'm; all right!" said the boy, closing his hand over the coin Ray gave him; and then touching his cap to Erminie, dashed away.

Lucy's delight exceeded all bounds at beholding "young mars'r and missis" again; and then Ray and Erminie, with some difficulty, extricated themselves from her violent caresses, went up-stairs, and entered the room of Ketura.

Many and sad were the changes years, and sorrow, and a sort of chronic remorse for her past acts had wrought in her. She sat in a large easy-chair, unable to move any portion of her body but her head; her hard, dark, grim face, bony, sharp, and hollow, the protruding bones just covered by a wrinkled covering of skin; but the fierce, blazing, black eyes were still unchanged.

Erminie, with the exclamation, "My dearest grandmother!" went over, and throwing her snowy arms around her neck, kissed the dark, withered cheek.

The old woman glanced at her, and saw the now beautiful, feminine, but perfect image of Lord Ernest Villiers. The same large, dark, beautiful violet-blue eyes; the same fair, silken, golden hair; the game clear, transparent complexion; the same elegant, graceful movements; the very expression of the features complete. All her old hatred revived at the sight of

the lovely, high-born girl. With a quick, fierce gesture, she pushed her aside, and strove to glance around for the other she expected.

Ray stepped forward, and touched his lips tenderly to her forehead.

Holding his hand, she made him stand off where she could the better see him, and then she scrutinized him from head to foot. There, before her, he stood, the living embodiment of what her son had been at his age, the very image of him she had so passionately loved and so sadly lost. She could scarcely persuade herself that Reginald had not risen from the grave to meet her again. There was his very gipsy skin, and eyes of darkened fire; the curling locks of jet, and tall, princely form; but the expression of the mouth was different; his smile was Erminie's exactly; and altogether there was a strong, undefined, puzzling resemblance between them, that for a moment darkly clouded the brow of the gipsy as she observed it. The only being in the wide world she cared for now, was Ray. Erminie might win all other hearts, but the gipsy Ketura's was as flint to her. She had hated her from the first; she hated her still; she would hate her until the last, for the sake of the race from which she sprung.

Seeing she was not wanted, Erminie left the room to change her traveling-dress; and Ray, seating himself beside his grandmother, proceeded to tell her of his studies, his progress, his hopes and ambition for the future. One name he did not mention, that of Pet Lawless; and yet it was thrilling and vibrating at his heart-strings, as he listened impatiently for the quick, sharp clatter of her horse's hoofs.

But hours passed, and she came not; and Ray, angry at himself for caring or feeling so deeply disappointed, descended to join Erminie at the tea-table.

"What is Miss Lawless to me?" was the impetuous thought that sent the fiery blood careering to his brow. "She an heiress, and I a pauper—a beggar, with the tainted gipsy blood in my veins. We were friends—something more, perhaps—in the years that have passed; but neither of us understood our relative positions, then. No; proud as she is, she shall never know I have dared to lift my eyes to her father's daughter. I was a fool to come on here at all. I have heard she has driven dozens of better men crazy with her witchery; and can I rely on my own strength to shield me from her arts? Pshaw! she will not think it worth while, though, to stoop to flirt with me. I, a menial, educated by the bounty of her uncle. I am safe enough, and will think of her no more."

A very laudable resolution it was, on the young gentleman's part, but one which he found some difficulty in carrying out, inasmuch as Mr. and Miss Toosypegs and Admiral Havenful came in just then; and after the first greetings were over, the whole conversation turned on Pet, her tricks, frolics, flirtations, capers, and caprices; and Ray found himself listening with an intense eagerness that he was half inclined to be enraged at himself for feeling.

Then, just as night was falling, the gallop of a horse was heard coming though the forest road; and a few minutes later, Pet alighted at the gate, darted up the walk, burst, like the impetuous little whirlwind she was, into the cottage, clasped Erminie in her arms, and kissed her again and again, until Ray—though nothing earthly would have made him own it, even to himself—would have given untold wealth to have stood in his sister's gaiters. Three somewhat furious embraces, that quite took away Erminie's breath, being over, Miss Lawless found time to glance at the rest of the company, and seeing Ray, as he stood, tall, and dark, and silent, by the window, went over and held out her hand.

There was something more nearly approaching to timidity in the action, and in the quick glance and quicker dropping of her resplendent eyes than any one had ever seen Pet manifest before. Ray bent over the little dark hand, whose touch sent a quick, sudden thrill to his inmost heart, and thought that, in all his life, he had never seen any one so beautiful as she looked then, with her veiled eyes, and drooping ringlets, and long, waving plumes that bent over her hat, touching her glowing cheeks as if enamored of the darkly splendid face beneath.

"Humph! A cold welcome, my little Mother Cary's Chicken," grunted the admiral. "Why don't you kiss him like you did Snowdrop? That's no way to welcome a friend you haven't seen for three whole blessed years."

Ray's eyes met hers, and the color flushed to her very brow; then, withdrawing her hand, she tossed her saucy head till all her jetty curls flashed, and throwing herself into a seat, began talking to Erminie, as if for a wager.

"Who told you we were come?" asked Erminie.

"No one," said Pet. "It was an inspiration from on high, I expect, that told me I should find you here."

"It's a wonder you did not see us at Judestown; we remained there some time."

"Well, how do you know I didn't see you?" said Pet.

“Why, you surely—oh, Pet! did you see us and never spoke?” said Erminie, reproachfully.

“Well, I was otherwise engaged, you know—in fact, there was a young gentleman, a very young gentleman, in the case—and I couldn’t very well have presented myself any sooner then I did,” said Pet.

“One of her lovers,” thought Ray, with a curling lip.

“Guess what the little boy, who drove us over, told us about you, Pet?” said Erminie, laughing.

“What? Nothing naughty, I hope.”

“Well, I don’t know; that’s as it may be. Shall I tell you what he said?”

“Of course; I like to hear what people say about me.”

“Well, then, he said you were going to be married.”

“Not possible! What an astounding revelation! Did you think I was going to be an old maid?”

“Then it is true? Is it any harm to ask who the happy man is, Pet?”

“Well, I haven’t quite decided yet. I have some four or five on trial, and I generally put them through a severe course of martyrdom every day. The one who survives it (not more than one can possibly survive it) I shall probably make miserable for life, by bestowing upon him my hand—and heart, I was going to say, only, fortunately, they forgot to give me one when I was made.”

Erminie laughed, and then the conversation became general, and two hours imperceptibly slipped away. Ray having wrought himself up to the belief that Miss Lawless was a heartless flirt, worthy of no higher feeling than contempt, he, in order to resist the dark witchery of her magnetic eyes, wrapped himself up in his very coldest mantle of pride, and addressed just as little of his conversation to her as he possibly could, without being positively rude. Pet, as proud in her own way as himself, noticed this at once, and her cheeks flushed, and her eyes flashed, for a moment, with anger and pride. Then these signs of emotion passed away, and she grew her own cold, careless self again, talking away recklessly, and laughing contemptuously at all sentiment, until Ray was more then ever convinced that the world had spoiled her, and that she was as arrant a coquette as ever made a fool of a sensible man.

As they arose to go, Ray, feeling himself bound in courtesy, offered to escort her home, but Pet coldly and curtly declined; and vaulting into her saddle, dashed off at a break-neck pace, madly reckless even for her.

Looking back once, she caught a glimpse of a tall dark form leaning against a tree with folded arms and watching her still. Did she, with her light, sparkling, thoughtless nature, realize the struggle going on in that young heart, between love and pride, at that moment?

Of course, the arrival of Ray and Erminie precluded her “exploring expedition,” as she called it, to the seashore. The next morning, and part of the afternoon, were spent with Erminie; but reaching home a little before sunset, she suddenly remembered it, and started off on the spur of the moment, like a female Don Quixote, in search of adventures.

“It’s too late to begin a regular search,” thought Pet, as she ran down the bank leading to the shore; “so I’ll just have a look round the place, and come back some other day and have a real good hunt for smugglers.”

Fifteen minutes brought her to the beach, and there she paused to look round. The sands for a long distance out were bare; but the tide was slowly tramping inward. On the other hand, a huge wall of beetling rocks and projecting crags met the eye; but these walls of rock were so smooth and perpendicular, and so dizzily high, that the boldest sailor, used to climbing all his life, would have hesitated before attempting to clamber up. There were two paths leading to the shore—the one Pet had just descended, and another about half a mile distant. Between these the massive wall of rock chose to indulge itself in a sudden impetuous rush out, forming a huge projecting shoulder, up which a cat could hardly have climbed safely. The tide always covered this a considerable length of time before it could reach the sands on either side, so that a person caught at high tide on either side found himself cut off from crossing over to the opposite side, unless he had a boat, or could swim.

“Now,” thought Pet, “I’ll have to look sharp and not let the tide catch me on the other side of that bluff, there, or if I do, I’ll have a walk of half a mile along the beach to the other road, and after that over a mile to get home, which is a promenade I am not anxious for. I might swim across, it is true, but swimming with all one’s clothes on is not the pleasantest or safest thing in the world; and all the smugglers this side of Pompey’s Pillar are not worth the cold I would catch. I’ll just walk over and look at the rocks, and then come back again.”

Following up this intention, Pet walked slowly along, scanning the high, dark, frowning rocks with a curious eye. As far as she could see, there was not the slightest trace of an opening anywhere; yet the people said that some place along the shore the smugglers had a rendezvous. Pet's keen eye detected every fissure large enough to hold a mouse, but no trace of secret cave or hidden cavern could be seen.

"I might have known it was all nonsense," said Pet, mentally. "The notion of finding an under-ground cave full of robbers and jewels, and all that sort of thing, is too much like a play, or a story in the 'Arabian Nights,' to be natural. However, as the night's fine, I'll just go and look on the other side of the bluff."

By this time she had reached the high projecting bowlders, and she paused for a moment to glance at the sea. It was still several yards distant, and Pet felt sure she could go down some distance, and return again before the rising tide would bar her passage.

The sun had set and there was no moon; but the starlight was bright and the sea-breeze cool and invigorating; so Pet, in high spirits, walked on. Here and there she could catch the white sail of some boat, skimming over the waves; but the long beach was lonely and deserted.

"Well, I guess I may as well turn back now," said Pet, half aloud. "I am afraid my search after smugglers is going to be unsuccessful, after all. I haven't caught anything this evening, that's certain."

"But something has caught you, pretty one," said a voice, close behind her, so close and sudden that Pet jumped round with a startled ejaculation, and found herself face to face with her sometime tutor and discarded lover, Rozzel Garnet.

His face was flushed, his eyes were gleaming with triumph, as he laid one powerful hand on her shoulder, and held her fast.

In one instant the whole danger of her situation flashed upon Pet. She had made this man her deadly enemy; he had probably long waited for an opportunity for revenge—here she was completely in his power, alone on the long, dreary, deserted beach, where her cries, if she uttered any, could reach no ear. Above her towered the high, precipitous, beetling rocks that she could not climb; on the other hand, spread out the boundless ocean, more merciful than him into whose hands she had fallen.

Like lightning, it all passed through her mind, and for one moment she quailed. But then her brave heart rose; this was no time for puerile fears, and she faced round, drew up her slight form to its full height, and met her enemy with a dauntless eye.

"Good-evening, Mr. Garnet," she said, composedly. "This is an unexpected pleasure. We thought you had gone away."

"Ah! did you? Gone where, Miss Lawless?" he said, with a sinister smile.

"Well—anywhere—to the county jail, as likely as not; but people don't always get their deserts in this world."

"Very true, Miss Pet; but you are, at present, in a fair way to get yours."

"Humph! You'll allow me to differ from you, there. I deserve something better than bad company, I hope; so permit me to wish you a very good-evening, Mr. Garnet."

"Not so fast, Miss Lawless; you must do your humble servant the honor of conferring your company upon him for a few days. As I have not seen you for so long a time, it would be highly impolite, not to say cruel, to hasten away so soon now."

"Indeed! Mr. Garnet—indeed!" said Pet, arching her brows. "Your lesson in the library did not cure you, I see. Are you aware there is such a thing as a jail in Judestown, where refractory gentlemen who threaten peaceable citizens are sometimes taken for a change of air? Really, Mr. Garnet, I think a little wholesome correction would not hurt you in the least."

"No, Miss Lawless, I have not forgotten that scene in the library of your father's house," said Garnet, tightening his grasp, till Pet winced with pain. "My hand bears the mark of your sharp teeth yet; and as I am deeply your debtor for that Judas-kiss, I shall pay you in your own coin before either of us are many hours older. Did you think how near retribution was when you gave me that sharp caress, Miss Lawless?"

"'Sharp caress.' I suppose that means a bite. If you're not anxious to test their sharpness again, Mr. Garnet, you'll let go my arm. Faith! I wish I had made one of my servants horsewhip you from my gates, that day; you would not have dared to come sneaking round like a white-livered coward, that you are—now!"

“Petronilla Lawless, take care!” he hissed, with a fierce gleam of his eye.

“Take care of what? I’m not afraid of you, Rozzel Garnet,” flashed Pet. “Anything in the shape of a man who would go round playing the spy on an unprotected girl, has sunk rather low to be feared by me. Take care, you! I vow if there is such a thing as a cowhide in the country, I shall have you thrashed for this, within an inch of your cowardly life.”

“And get your attached friend, the gipsy beggar, to administer it—eh, Miss Lawless?” he said, with the smile of a fiend. “What a pity he is not here, like a true knight-errant, to rescue his lady-love!”

“It’s well for you he’s not, or he wouldn’t leave a whole bone in your miserable skin. Let me go, I tell you! Your presence is pollution,” said Pet, struggling to get free.

He held her with a grasp of iron, and watched her ineffectual efforts with a grim smile.

“I told you when we would meet again you would plead to me,” he said, with an evil gleam of his snake-like eyes. “That time has come.”

“Has it, indeed?” said Pet. “Well, if you have heard or are likely to hear me pleading to anybody under heaven, I must say you have a wonderful pair of ears. I have read of a gentleman called Fine-ear, who could hear the grass growing; but, upon my word, he couldn’t hold a candle to you!”

“The time will come, girl, when you will grovel and plead at my very feet, only to be spurned!” “Now, Mr. Garnet, look here,” said Pet; “you’re plagiarizing a story out of ‘The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments.’ You needn’t think to palm it off on me as original, for I’ve read it, as well as you, and know all about the glass merchant, who fancied he would marry the vizier’s daughter, and have her kneeling at his feet, just as I am to do at your royal highness’s, you know; and then he would very ungallantly give her a kick, and in so doing smashed his basket of glass all to pieces. You needn’t think to take me in, you see; for my education has not been neglected more than your own.”

“Cease this fooling,” said Garnet, angrily, “and come with me. Resistance is useless. You are completely in my power, and may as well come quietly.”

“I won’t then! Not a step will I budge, if I die for it!” said Pet, planting her feet fairly in the yielding sand. “I am not in the habit of walking out with gentlemen at this hour of the evening, I would have you to know.

> ‘Come one, come all, this rock shall fly
> From its firm base as soon as I.’”

And Pet, with an undaunted look, that would have made her fortune as a virtuous heroine in difficulties on the stage, looked unflinchingly in his face, though her stout heart was throbbing as she each moment more and more clearly saw her danger.

“Then I shall make you, by—!” And he swore a fearful oath, while a terrible frown settled on his face. “Since you will not walk, I shall bind you hand and foot and have you carried. Scream as loud as you like,” he added, grimly; “there is no one far or near to hear you.”

Holding her still with one hand, he began fumbling in his pockets, probably in search of something to bind her hands and feet. Pet cast a quick, sweeping glance around. Along the beach not a living soul was to be seen, and even the boats were now out of sight. They were close to the bowlder, around which the waves were now seething and dashing; and the tide was rapidly advancing to where they stood. Pet had her back to the bowlder, while he stood facing it, thus wedging her into a narrow prison, with the high, steep rocks on one side, and the dashing sea on the other, and preventing all hope of escaping by running along the beach.

His eye followed hers, and he said, with a triumphant chuckle:

“Caged, my bird of paradise! Snared, my mountain eaglet! Trapped, my forest fairy! Won, my dauntless lady-love! Ha! ha! ha! Your ever-triumphant star has set, at last, my beautiful, black-eyed bride.”

Standing between her and all hope of escape, he ventured to relax his grasp for a moment, to aid in the search for something to bind her with. In one second, like a bolt from a bird, she darted forward, and with one wild, flying leap, impossible to anything but desperation, she sprung sheer into the foaming waters and vanished!

Vanished but for an instant. Pet could swim like a fish, or a cork, or a mermaid, or anything else you please, while Mr. Rozzel Garnet had as intense an aversion to cold water as a sufferer from hydrophobia. As quickly as she had

disappeared did her black curls glitter above the white foam again, as she dauntlessly struck out for the shore.

She had not far to swim, and she buffeted the waves like a sea-goddess; so, while Mr. Rozzel Garnet stood stunned, speechless, paralyzed, she had gained the shore, fled as fast as her dripping clothes would permit her along the beach, rushed up the path, then back again on the rocks up above, until she stood directly over the spot where the foiled villain still remained, as if rooted to the ground, unable to comprehend which end he was standing on, to use a strong figure of speech.

"Hallo, Mr. Garnet! how do you find yourself?" shouted Pet, from above. "Oh my! how beautifully you did it! My stars! you ought to have a leather medal presented to you for catching girls—you do it so cleverly."

He turned and looked up; and there, in the dusk, bright starlight, he saw Pet all dripping like a Naiad, and her black eyes almost out-flashing the stars themselves.

"Curses light on her!" he hissed between his teeth.

"Thank you, Mr Garnet! Curses, like chickens, come home to roost, you know. Ah, you did it—didn't you?" said Pet, provokingly. "Don't you wish you had me, though? It's slippery work holding eels, and dangerous to play with exploding bombshells, and stinging occupation pulling nettles; but the coat-sleeves that try to hold me will find a harder and more dangerous job than any of them. Good-night, Mr. Rozzel Garnet, and pleasant dreams; and remember, when you next try to captivate me, that earth, air, fire, and water were never made to hold me."

"Ah! you may triumph now—it is your turn," he said, looking up, livid with rage; "but mine will come yet! my time will come!"

"Well, it's consoling to hear. I hope you'll have a good time when it does come." And with a taunting laugh, Pet darted off.

Little did either of them dream how closely that time was at hand.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR LOVER.

"And yet this tough, impracticable heart
Is governed by a dainty-fingered girl."
—ROWE.

"There is a pleasure in being mad,
Which none but madmen know."
—DRYDEN.

Judge Lawless was pacing up and down the floor of his study with rapid, excited strides, his brows knit, his face flushed, his hands clenched, his teeth set, his whole look, attitude, and bearing, speaking of deepest, intensest excitement. When in profound or troubled thought, he had a habit (many have) of talking to himself unconsciously; and now he muttered, between his teeth:

"I am going mad—I am mad—bewitched—bewildered! To think that I, at my years, should fall in love like a boy of eighteen. I, who fancied I had outlived all such rubbish. But, oh that girl! that glorious girl! that angel of beauty! that transcendently radiant creature! that lovely, bewildering enchanting, intoxicating Erminie! Good heavens! how the very thought of her sets my head whirling! that electric Erminie! with her angel-smile and irradiated face! Who could help loving her? Not I, certainly, and yet it is only one short week since her return home. Oh, that I could win her to love me! Oh, to possess that love-angel! Oh, Erminie! Erminie!" And breathing out his very soul in the syllables of her name, he sunk into a chair, and leaned his throbbing head on his hand.

Judge Lawless had all his life computed himself as a grave, self-possessed, dignified gentleman; excessively proud,

excessively unbending, and so calm and unimpassioned that it seemed a matter of doubt whether he was made of common flesh and blood or cast-iron. But now, at the mature age of five-and-forty, all his pride and dignity blew away, like a whiff of down on a blast, at the first glimpse of Erminie Germaine's fair, sunshiny, blooming young face; and here he was, now, making a downright fool of himself—as many another old gentlemen has done, is doing, and will continue to do, while the world goes round. Forgetting that he was nearly treble her age, forgetting his high position in the world and her lowly one, forgetting he was far more likely to be some day her father-in-law than her husband, forgetting everything, in a word, but that her beauty had turned his brain, Judge Lawless sat down to reflect on the best course to pursue in the present somewhat unsatisfactory state of affairs.

Judge Lawless was, as I told you, a grave, calm-pulsed gentleman, who considered himself as good, not to say considerably better, than any other man in the world, and held in the profoundest contempt the little corner of the world in which he lived, and its quiet, hum-drum inhabitants. Therefore, he heard Pet boisterously relating the arrival of Mr. and Miss Germaine with the greatest indifference, and without the remotest idea of ever giving either of them another thought beyond a cool caution to Pet not to associate too freely with people of "that set"; but when, the next morning, riding past the Old Barrens Cottage on his way to Judestown, a vision met his eyes of such dazzling beauty that involuntarily he stood stock-still to gaze, Judge Lawless found that the only one in the world worth thinking of was one of "that set." There stood Erminie at the gate, in her trim, spotless muslin morning-dress, with her snowy linen collar and cuffs, looking as fresh, and pure, and fair, as the beautiful form they draped. The morning sunshine flashed in her shining, waving, thick, soft hair, gilded the roses on her cheeks, kindled a brighter light in the large, soft, violet eyes, and lay like a friend's kiss on the full and rounded lips. Judge Lawless was spellbound, enchanted, bewildered, bedeviled, to use his own phrase. In all his life he had never seen so dazzling a beauty—in all his life he had never expected to see anyone half so lovely again; and there he stood, gazing upon her like a man in a dream, quite unconscious that the young lady, whoever she was, might think this prolonged stare very strange, to say the least of it. But she did not think it very strange at all. She recognized him, of course; and thinking he was merely trying to identify her, she pushed open the gate, and came out to him with a blush and a smile, and, being always a little awed and afraid of his stately grandeur, held out her hand to him with a girlish timidity quite charming.

"I suppose you have forgotten me, sir," she said, lifting the irresistible violet eyes to his face. "I am Erminie Germaine."

"Little Erminie? Why, how pret—a—I mean, how well you are looking!" he said, taking the hand she offered, and holding it a much longer time than was strictly necessary. "Who would ever think! Why don't you come over to Heath Hill some time, Miss Germaine?"

"I have promised Miss Lawless to go and spend the day with her soon," said Erminie, embarrassed by his too-ardent gaze, and striving to withdraw her hand. "I hope she is well?"

"Who? Eh? Oh, yes! she's well. Come over to-morrow, Miss Germaine. I shall be very glad to see you."

"I thank you, sir; I shall be most happy to do so," replied Erminie, growing more and more embarrassed by his open, admiring gazes, and again trying to withdraw her hand.

But the judge, quite unconsciously, held the little snowflake fast, and seemed inclined to commit petty larceny by keeping it altogether, while he gazed and gazed in the sweet, blushing face, with its waving hair and drooping eyes, and fell desperately and more desperately in love every moment.

"Won't you come in, Judge Lawless?" said Erminie, at last, confused by her situation, fearing to offend him, yet wishing to get away.

"Come in? Oh, yes—to be sure!" exclaimed the judge, with alacrity. "I was just thinking—a—of going in to see your grandmother. I hope she is quite well."

And the judge, who had never entered the cottage before, nor dreamed in the most remote way of ever doing so, actually got off his horse, tied him to a stake, and followed the surprised Erminie into the house. And then, forgetting Ketura, and his business in Judestown, and all other sublunary things, in the presence of this enchanting maiden, there he remained for three mortal hours, until the unlooked-for entrance of Ray, who had been over the moor gunning, and now returned with a well-filled game-bag, looking happy, handsome, and with a powerful appetite. As his eye fell upon their strange guest, he started, colored slightly, and then bowed with cold hauteur. Judge Lawless returned it with one no less stiff; for though in love with the sister, it by no means followed he was very passionately enamored of the brother. And then discovering, to his horror, that the whole morning was gone, he rode off, followed by the haunting vision of a sweet young face, with waving, floating hair, and dark, lustrous, violet eyes.

And from that hour may be dated the "decline and fall" of Judge Lawless.

His business was given up for visits to the cottage; his family concerns were neglected for day-dreams that, however excusable in youths with faintly-sprouting mustaches, were quite absurd in a dark, dignified, "potent, grave, and reverend seigneur" like Judge Adolphus Lawless. But when love comes in at the door, sense flies out at the window, to change the adage a little, and especially where gentlemen on the disagreeable side of forty are concerned. So Judge Lawless was deaf, blind and dumb to that awful bugbear, "They say," and might have been seen at the cottage morning, noon, and night, to the utter amazement and complete astonishment of all who knew him, and to none more so than to his blue-eyed inflammation of the heart herself. Erminie was at a loss—completely at a loss, and so was Ray. Neither of them dreamed—no one dreamed—that the pompous, haughty Prince Grandison of a Judge Lawless could have fallen in love at all, much less with the little, obscure cottage-girl, Erminie Germaine—tainted, as she was, by that greatest of all crimes, poverty. Obscure, I said; let me retract that word. Erminie Germaine—beautiful Erminie—was known and celebrated far beyond Old Barrens Cottage for her beauty, and goodness, and gentleness, and all the other qualities that make some women a little lower than the angels. But no one thought that on a heart of flint like his—or, rather, no heart at all—the Venus de Medicis herself, should she step out alive from her pedestal, could make the slightest impression; and therefore, though our Erminie was every bit as good-looking as that scantily-draped lady of whom the world raves, though she had grown to be another Helen for whom another Troy might have been lost, no one set his visits to the cottage down to her, but rather to eccentricity, to some scheme, to some inexplicable notion, to anything at all but to the real cause.

And so Judge Lawless was in love, and unsuspected. And as he sat there in his library, with his head in his hand, thinking and pondering, and revolving, and wondering, on the best method of bringing matters to a crisis, and astonishing his friends, his intention was to raise Miss Germaine to the dignity of his wife. Judge Lawless was severely moral; but how to propose—that was the trying horn of the dilemma. Judge Lawless was not accustomed to proposing; he had not attempted it for the last five-and-twenty years, and then the lady had saved him the trouble. Mrs. Lawless had been a wild young heiress, who fell violently in love with the "sweet" curling hair and "divine" whiskers of the handsome young lawyer, and not being troubled with that disagreeable disease incident to most very young ladies, yclept bashfulness, had, like a girl of honor, come to the point at once, and, in a very composed, upright, and downright way, tendered him her hand and fortune. The ambitious young lawyer, nothing loth, took her at her word, and, one fine moonlight night, a fourth-story window was opened, a rope-ladder put in requisition; then a carriage; then a parson; then a ring, and "Adolphus Lawless, barrister at law," as his shingle then announced him, was wooed and won.

But this was quite another thing. He was in love now, which he hadn't been the first time; and love makes the boldest warrior that ever clove helmets and heads in battle as timid as a—I was going to say girl; but I won't, for in such a case, they are not timid at all—but as a newly-fledged gosling. Not that he feared a refusal. Judge Lawless drew himself up until his pantaloon-straps cracked, and looked indignantly in the glass at himself for entertaining such an idea an instant. But he didn't know the formula—that was it. Things had changed so since he was a *garçon*, and the manner of popping the question might have changed with the rest. It would never do to make himself ridiculous; though, as the thought crossed his mind, he drew himself up again to the full extent of his six feet, odd inches, and felt indignant at the notion of his being ridiculous under any circumstances whatever.

"Have her I must, come what will!" he said, getting up again, and resuming his 2:40 pace up and down the floor. "I am mad about that girl, I believe. The world may laugh and sneer at the idea of my marrying a—well, a pauper, in point of fact, when I could win, if I chose, the highest in the land. Well, let them. If Judge Lawless cannot do as he pleases, I should like to know who can. I have wealth enough to do us both; the old admiral will leave his estate and bank-stock to Ranty and Pet, and, h'm-m-m, ah!—Yes, have her I must—that's settled. And this very afternoon shall I ride over, and let her know the honor in store for her!"

And that very afternoon, true to his promise, Judge Lawless, arrayed in a somber, dignified suit of black, with his hair and whiskers oiled and scented to that extent that his fast mare, Wildfire, lifted up her head and looked at him in grave astonishment, and inwardly resolved to keep a wary eye on her master for the future, lest he should take to dandyism in his old age, made his way to Old Barrens Cottage.

Arriving at the cottage, he fastened his mare, and rapped at the cottage-door with his riding-whip, in a grand and important sort of way befitting the occasion. Erminie herself opened it; and, at sight of her beautiful, rounded form, the taper waist, the swelling bust, the white, rounded throat, on which the graceful little head was poised with the queenly air of a royal princess; the waving, sunshiny hair, the smiling lips, the soft tender, violet eyes, Judge Lawless was twice,

and thrice, as deeply, and irretrievably, and desperately in love as ever.

He came in. Erminie was alone. How he thanked the gods for that! took a seat, stood his cane in the corner, laid his hat on the table, drew out a snowy cambric handkerchief, redolent of musk, *eau de cologne*, ottar of roses, and bergamot, from one of those intensely mysterious pockets gentlemen, for some inscrutable reason, wear in their coat-tails, blew his nose, replaced his handkerchief, laid a hand on each knee, looked at Erminie, and prepared her for what was coming by a loud "ahem!"

Erminie, whose rosy fingers were flying, as if by stress, on some article of dress, did not look up; so all these significant preparations, proper to be done, and which are always done, I believe, whenever elderly men go to propose, were quite thrown away upon her.

"Ahem!" repeated the judge, with some severity, and yet looking with longing eyes at the graceful form and sweet drooping face before him, "Miss Erminie!"

She looked up inquiringly, with a smile.

"Ahem!" The stately judge was rather embarrassed. "Perhaps, Miss Germaine, you are not in utter ignorance of—ahem—of the object of my visits here. I have revolved the matter over in all its bearings, and have come to the conclusion that—ahem!—that I am at perfect liberty to please myself in this matter. The world may wonder—no doubt it will; but I trust I have wisdom enough to direct my own actions; and though it may stare, it cannot but admire the person I—ahem!—I have chosen!"

The judge made a dead halt, drew out his handkerchief again, until the air would have reminded you of "Ceylon's spicy breezes," and shifted his left leg over his right, and then his right one over his left. Erminie, not understanding one word of this valedictory, had dropped her work, and sat looking at him, with wide-open eyes.

"In short, therefore, Miss Germaine, we will, if you please, consider the matter settled; and you will greatly oblige me by naming the earliest possible day for the ceremony."

"The ceremony! What ceremony, sir?" said the puzzled Erminie, looking prettier than ever in her perplexity.

"Why, our marriage, to be sure!"

"Our marriage?"

"Certainly, my love. The earlier the day, the sooner my happiness will be complete!"

And the judge raised her hand to his lips, with the stately formality of five-and-twenty years before, fearing to venture any further; for there was a look in the sweet, wondering eyes that made him rather uneasy.

"Judge Lawless, excuse me. I do not know what you mean. I fear I have misunderstood you," said Erminie, more perplexed than she ever was before in the whole course of her life.

"Misunderstood me? Impossible, Miss Germaine! I have used the plainest possible language, I think, in asking you to be my wife!"

"Your wife?"

"Yes, my wife! Why this surprise, dear girl? Why, Erminie! Good heavens, Erminie! is it possible you really have not understood me all this time? Why, dearest, fairest girl, I love you—I wish you to be my wife! Do you understand now?"

He would have passed his arm around her waist; but, crimson with burning blushes, she sprung to her feet, a vivid light in her beautiful eyes, and raised her hand to wave him off.

"You are mocking me, Judge Lawless! If you have had your amusement, we will drop the subject."

"Mocking you, my beautiful Erminie! I swear to you I love you with all my heart and soul! Only make me happy, by saying you will be my wife!"

The conviction that he was really serious, now for the first time dawned upon Erminie's mind. The rosy tide flooded neck and brow again, and she dropped her flushed face in her hands, as she remembered he was Ranty's father.

"I am not surprised that you should wonder at my choice," said the judge, complacently. "Of course the world expects I should marry a woman of rank; but I like you, and am determined to please myself, let them wonder as they will!"

Erminie's hands dropped from her face, crimson now, but not with embarrassment; her eyes flashed with the fiery spirit

of the old De Courcys, as she drew herself up to her full height, and calmly said:

"I will spare you the humiliation, and your friends the trouble of wondering at your choice. For the honor you have done me, I thank you, even while I must decline it."

"Decline it!" The judge sat aghast.

Erminie compressed her lips, and silently bowed. She stood there like a young queen, her proud little head erect, her fair cheeks scarlet, her eyes darkening and darkening, until they seemed almost black.

"Decline it!" The judge, in his amazement, was a sight to see.

"Yes, sir."

"Miss Germaine, I—I'm thunderstruck! I—I'm confounded! I—I am *utterly* confounded! Miss Germaine, you do not mean it; you cannot mean it! it's impossible you can mean it! Refuse me! Oh, it is utterly impossible you can mean it!"

"On the contrary, wonderful as it seems, I must distinctly and unequivocally decline the honor." And Erminie's look of calm determination showed her resolution was not to be shaken. Judge Lawless rose to his feet and confronted her. Indignation, humiliation, anger, wounded pride, mortification, jealousy, and a dozen other disagreeable feelings, flushing his face until its reflection fairly imparted a rosy hue to his snow-white shirt bosom.

"Miss Germaine, am I to understand that you refuse to to marry me?"

"Decidedly, sir."

"May I ask your reason for this refusal, Miss Germaine?"

"I recognize no right by which you are privileged to question me, Judge Lawless, but because of the respect I own one so much my senior, I will say that, first, I do not love you; second, even if I did, I would not marry one who looks upon me as so far beneath him; and third—" She paused, caught his eye fixed upon her, and colored more vividly than before.

"Well, Miss Germaine, and *third*," he said, sarcastically.

"I will answer no more such questions, Judge Lawless," she said, with proud indignation; "and I repeat it once again, I cannot be your wife."

"That remains to be seen, Miss Germaine. There are more ways than one of winning a lady; I have tried one, and failed; now I shall have recourse to another."

"Judge Lawless, is that meant as a threat?" said Erminie, her proud De Courcy blood flushing in her cheeks and lighting up her eyes again.

He smiled slightly, but made no other reply, as he took his hat and cane and prepared to go.

"Once again, Miss Erminie, before I go, I ask you if your mind is fully made up to reject me?"

The darkening, streaming light of the violet eyes fixed full upon him was his only answer, as she stood drawn up to her full height.

"Good-morning, then," he said, with a courteous smile. "I do not despair, even yet. Time works wonders, you know, Miss Germaine. Give my best regards to your excellent grandmother." And with a stately bow, *a la* Grandison, the judge left the cottage, and the light of the dark, indignant, beautiful eyes.

But once on his horse, and galloping like mad over the heath, a change wonderful to see came over the bland face of the judge. Dark and darker it grew, thicker and thicker was his scowl, angrier and angrier became his eyes, until his face looked like a human thunder-cloud.

"The proud, conceited, impertinent minx!" he burst out, "to refuse me—me—me, Judge Lawless. Why, she must be mad! By heaven! she shall be mine yet, if only to teach her a lesson. Black Bart is in Judestown. I saw him yesterday; and he, with his fellow-smugglers, or pirates, or freebooters, or whatever they are, shall aid me in this. It does not sound well, to be sure, for a judge of the land to tacitly favor smuggling, but then those contraband wines and brandies would tempt St. Peter himself. They shall do a different kind of smuggling for me this time. In the Hidden Cave Madame Erminie will be safe enough, and that queen of the smugglers, or whatever she is, can take care of her. Refuse me! by the hosts above, that girl shall repent her temerity! This very day I will see Black Bart, and then—"

He compressed his lips tight, and his face assumed a look of dark, grim determination, that showed his resolution was unalterable.

And meanwhile Erminie, with her fair face bowed in her hands, was weeping the bitterest tears she had ever shed in her life.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. TOOSYPEGS IN DISTRESS AGAIN.

The time I've lost in wooing,
In watching and pursuing
The light that lies in woman's eyes,
Has been my heart's undoing.
Though wisdom oft has sought me,
I scorned the love she brought me;
My only books were woman's looks.
And folly's all they've taught me.
—MOORE.

Admiral Harry Havenful sat alone in the parlor of the White Squall, the heels of his boots elevated on the knobs of the andirons, his chair tipped back to that sublime angle which women admire, but men only understand. A long meerschaum, with an amber mouth-piece, protruded from his lips, while whiffs of blue, vapory smoke curled from the corner of his mouth; his hands stuck in his trousers pockets, and his eyes fixed admiringly on the pink and yellow ship-of-war on the mantel. Admiral Harry Havenful was enjoying life hugely on a small scale, when a dispirited knock, such as moneyless debtors give, was heard at the outer door.

"Tumble up, below there! tumble up, ahoy-y-y!" roared the admiral, taking the pipe from his mouth to summon the servants.

In compliance with this zephyr-like request, one of the darkeys "tumbled up," accordingly, and on opening the door, Mr. O. C. Toosypegs stalked in, and with the head of his cane in his mouth, entered the parlor and presented himself to the jolly little admiral.

"D'ye do, Orlando? give us your flipper," said the admiral, protruding one huge hand without rising, or even turning his head, merely casting a glance over his shoulder, and smoking on as placidly as before.

"I'm very well—that is, I ain't very well at all, Admiral Havenful, I'm very much obliged to you," said Mr. Toosypegs, grasping the huge hand and wriggling it faintly a second or two. "My health ain't so good as it might be, and I don't expect it ever will be again, but I'm resigned to that and everything else that may happen. It's nasty to be always complaining, you know, Admiral Havenful."

"That's so," growled the admiral, in a tone so deeply bass that it was quite startling.

"Therefore, Admiral Havenful, though I ain't so well as I might be, I'm very well indeed, I'm very much obliged to you. It must be nice to die and have no more bother—don't you think so, Admiral Havenful?" said Mr. Toosypegs, with a groan so deep that the admiral took his pipe from his mouth and stared at him.

"What now?" grunted the admiral, who foresaw something was coming; "heave to!"

"Admiral Havenful, would you be so good as not to say that? You mean well, I know, but you can't imagine the unpleasant sensations it causes—ugh!" said Mr. Toosypegs, with a wry face and a shudder. "You never were sea-sick, were you, Admiral Havenful? If you were, you don't require to be told the pang that hearing that inflicts upon me. Therefore, *please* don't say it again, for it gives me the most peculiar sensations that even was."

The admiral grunted, and began smoking away like an ill-repaired chimney. Mr. Toosypegs sat uneasily on the edge of

his chair, and continued to make a light and rather unsatisfactory repast off the head of his cane. Thus a mournful silence was continued for some fifteen or twenty minutes, and then the admiral took his pipe from his mouth, wiped it on the cuff of his sleeve, and without looking at Mr. Toosypegs, drew a long, placid breath, and held it out toward him with a laconic:

"Smoke?"

"Thankee, Admiral Havenful," said Mr. Toosypegs, mournfully, "I never do."

"More fool you, then," said the admiral, gruffly, putting it in his own mouth again.

"Admiral Havenful," said Mr. Toosypegs, in a large tone of voice, "I'm aware that I ain't so wise as some of my friends could wish me; but, at the same time let me assure you that I don't consider it a proof of wisdom to smoke at all. Smokers mean real well, I know, but it's unpleasant to others, besides setting the in'ards in a dingy state, blacking the teeth, adulterating the breath, and often producing spontaneous combustion. Which means, Admiral Havenful," said Mr. Toosypegs, elevating his cane to make the explanation, "getting worked up to a high degree of steam, and going off quite unexpected and promiscuous, some day, with a bang, and leaving nothing behind to tell the melancholy tale but a pinch of ashes, and that—"

"Oh, bother!" cut in the admiral, impatiently, "Belay your jawing tackle, young man, and let somebody else have sea-room. What port do you hail from last?"

"Admiral Havenful," said Mr. Toosypegs, in no way offended at this cavalier mode of treating his digression on the evils of smoking, "if you mean by that where I was all morning, I've just come from Dismal Hollow. Aunt Prisciller wasn't in—well, she wasn't in very good spirits—and so I got out of the back door and come away. I was going to Old Barrens Cottage, only I saw Judge Lawless' horse before the door, and so I came here."

"Always welcome, Orlando, boy—always welcome," said the admiral, briskly. "But hold on a minute! What the dickens brings that stiff bowspirit of a brother-in-law of mine so often to that cottage? Eh, Orlando?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, Admiral Havenful," said Mr. Toosypegs. "It's real singular, too, because he never used to go there at all, and now his horse is at the door every day."

"So's yours, for that matter. Hey, Orlando?"

Mr. Toosypegs blushed to the very roots of his hair, and shifted his feet uneasily over the floor, as though it burnt them.

"Orlando," said the admiral—holding his pipe between his finger and thumb, and regarding significantly these emotions —"Orlando, I see breakers ahead!"

"Admiral Havenful," said Mr. Toosypegs, in a tone of mingled uneasiness and anguish, "I dare say you do; but, my gracious! don't keep looking at a fellow so! I couldn't help it, you know; and I know it's all my own fault to be miserable for life. I don't blame anybody at all, and I rather like being miserable for life than otherwise. I know you mean well, but I'd rather you wouldn't keep looking at me so. I'm very much obliged to you."

"Orlando," solemnly began the admiral, without removing his eyes from the other's face, "you're steering out of your course altogether. Come to anchor! Now, then, what's to pay?"

The unexpected energy with which this last question was asked had such an effect on the nerves of Mr. O. C. Toosypegs, that he gave a sudden jump, suggestive of sitting down on an upturned pin cushion, and grasped his stick in wild alarm.

"Now, Orlando," repeated the admiral, with a wave of his pipe—"now, Orlando, the question is, what's to pay?"

"Admiral Havenful," said Mr. Toosypegs in terror, "there ain't nothing to pay; I don't owe a cent in the world, s'elp me Bob! I don't owe a single blamed brass farthing to a child unborn!"

"Pah!" said the admiral, with a look of intense disgust at his obtuseness, "I didn't mean that. I want to know what's up, where the wind sits; what you keep cruising off and on that cottage for all the time. Now, then, hold hard!"

"It's my intention to hold hard, Admiral Havenful," replied Mr. Toosypegs, blushing like a beet-root. "But I'd rather not mention what takes me there, if it's all the same to you. It's a secret, locked deep in the unfathomable recesses of this here bosom; and I never mean to reveal it to anybody till I'm a melancholy corpse in the skies. You'll excuse me, Admiral Havenful; a fellow can't always restrain his tears, you know; and I feel so miserable, thank you, of late, that it's a consolation even to cry," said Mr. Toosypegs, wiping his eye.

“Now, Orlando, you just hold on a minute—will you?” said the admiral, facing briskly round, with much the same air as an unfeeling dentist who determines to have your tooth out whether you will or not; “now, look here and let’s do things ship-shape. Has our Firefly got anything to do with it?”

“Admiral Havenful, I’m happy to say she has not. I felt pretty badly about Miss Pet, there, one time; but I have got nicely over that. It wasn’t near so dangerous as I expected it would be; but this—this is. The way I feel sometimes, Admiral Havenful, is awful to contemplate. I can’t sleep nor eat, and I don’t take no pleasure even in my new pantaloons with the blue stripe down the side. I often lie awake nights crying now, and I wish I had never been born! I do wish it!” said Mr. Toosypegs, with a sudden howl. “Where’s the good of it, if a fellow’s going to be made miserable this way, I want to know?”

“Orlando Toosypegs,” said the admiral, rising, sternly, “just look here, will you? I’m not going to stand this sort of talk, you know—this flying in the face of Providence”—here the admiral raised his glazed hat, and looked reverently at a blue-bottle fly on the ceiling—“because it’s not proper nor ship-shape, nohow you can fix it. Now, Orlando, I’ve advised you time and again—I’ve been a father to you before you was the size of a tar-bucket—I’ve turned you up and spanked you when you wasn’t big as a well-grown marlin-spike, and I’ve often given you a good kicking when you were older, for your shortcomings; I’ve talked to you, Orlando Toosypegs, for your good till all was blue—I’ve made myself as hoarse as a boatswain splashing showers of good advice on you; and now what’s my return? You say you don’t see no use in being born. Orlando, it grieves me—it makes me feel as bad as if I had drank a pail of bilge-water; but there is no help for it! I give you up to ruin—I’ve lost all faith in human morals—I wash my hands of you altogether!”

Here the admiral looked around for some water to literally fulfill his threat; but, seeing none, he wiped his hands on the table-cloth, and resumed his seat with the air a Spartan father may be supposed to have worn when condemning his own son to death.

So deeply affected was Mr. Toosypegs by this pathetic exhortation that he sobbed away like a hyena in his flaring bandanna, with a great noise and much wiping of eyes and nose, which showed he was not lost to all sense of human feeling.

“Yes, Orlando,” said the admiral, mournfully, “I repeat it, I’m determined to wash my hands of you. The basin ain’t here; but it’s no matter. Your father was a nice man, and I’m sorry his son ever come to this.”

“Admiral Havenful,” said Mr. Toosypegs, hiccoughing violently, “I’m ashamed of myself. I oughtn’t to have said it and I won’t do so no more at any price. I know—I know I oughtn’t mind being wretched, but somehow I do, and I can’t help it. If you’ll only forgive me, and not wash your hands of me, I’ll tell you what’s the matter and promise to try and do better for the time to come.”

“Well, heave ahead!” said the somewhat mollified mariner.

“Admiral Havenful!” exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, springing to his feet with such startling energy that the old sailor jumped up, too, and brandished his pipe, expecting a violent personal assault and battery—“will you be good enough not to say that? Oh, my gracious!” exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, in a wildly-distracted tone, “if it ain’t too darned bad. Ugh!”

And with a violent shudder and a sea-green visage, the unhappy young man sat down, with one hand on his mouth and the other on his dinner.

With a violent snort of unspeakable contempt, the admiral flung himself back in his chair, and turned up his Roman nose to the highest possible angle of scorn.

“Excuse me, Admiral Havenful,” said Mr. Toosypegs, at length, in a fainting voice, “I feel better, now. It was so—so sudden, and took me so unexpected, that—that it rather startled me; but I’m quite well now. I’m very much obliged to you. Ugh! The very mention of—you know what follows sea-sickness—turns my very skin to goose-flesh. We won’t speak of it any more, if it’s all the same to you, Admiral Havenful. I promised to tell you the cause of my misery—didn’t I? Yes? Well, it’s—it’s Miss Minnie.”

“Little Snowflake! hea—I mean go ahead.”

“I went and fell in love with her, Admiral Havenful,” said Mr. Toosypegs, looking around blushing.

“Stand from under!” growled the bewildered admiral.

“Admiral Havenful, it’s my intention to stand from under as much as possible. I’m very much obliged to you,” said Mr. Toosypegs, politely. “I dare say you’re surprised to hear it, but I really couldn’t help it. I assure you she was so—so

stunning, so as—I don't know what to call it; but it's enough to turn a fellow crazy, by granny! I know she don't care a pin for me. I know she don't, and nobody can tell the state it throws me into. I thought I felt dreadfully about Miss Pet's black eyes, and I did, too; but it ain't no circumstance to the state Miss Minnie's blue ones pitches me into. Admiral Havenful, I don't expect you've ever been in love, but it's the most awful state to be in ever was. It makes you feel worse than sitting down into a wasp's nest—it really does. In fact, I don't know anything, except, perhaps, sea-sickness, that's equal to it in unpleasantness."

So completely unexpected was this declaration, that the admiral so far forgot himself as to look appealingly at his pipe and growl out, "Heave ahead!"

The effect of this command on Mr. Toosypegs, in his present disordered state of mind was perfectly electrifying. Springing to his feet, he seized his hat and cane, clapped his bandanna to his mouth, and, with a look of intense anguish no pen can describe, made a rush from the door, fled from the house, and vanished for the remainder of that day from mortal eye.

CHAPTER XXX.

MISS LAWLESS IN DIFFICULTIES.

"The hypocrite had left his mask, and stood
In naked ugliness. He was a man
Who stole the livery of the court of Heaven
To serve the devil in."

—POLLOCK.

Three hours after his interview and rejection by Erminie, Judge Lawless alighted at the inn-door in Judestown. The obsequious landlord came out all bows and smiles to greet the grand seignor of this rustic town, and ushered him into the parlor with as much, and considerably more, respect than he would have shown to the king of England, had that gentleman condescended to visit the "Judestown House," as the flaming gilt sign-board announced it to be.

"Glass wine, sir? brandy water, sir? s'gar, sir? anything you want, sir?" insinuated mine host, all in a breath.

"No, my good man, I want nothing," said the judge, with a pompous wave of his jeweled hand; "I have come on important business this afternoon. Is there a somewhat dissipated character, a sailor, called Black—Black—really I—"

"Bart, sir? Yes, sir. Here five minutes 'go sir," breathlessly cut in the landlord.

"Ah!" said the judge, slowly, passing his hand over his mustache; "can you find him for me? I wish to see him. I have reason to believe he can give me some information concerning these smugglers who of late have alarmed the good people around here so much."

"Yes, sir, hunt him up five minutes sir." And off bustled the host of the Judestown House in search of Black Bart.

Judge Lawless arose with knit brows and began pacing excitedly up and down the room when alone. He knew this Black Bart well, knew all about the smugglers, too, as his well-stocked cellar could testify. Judge Lawless found them very useful in various ways and having a remarkably elastic conscience of his own was troubled with no scruples about cheating the revenue, so long as his wine-bin was well supplied. But this was abduction—something more dangerous, something that required all his wounded self-love, and disappointed passion, and intense mortification to give him courage for. But his plans were formed. For money he knew Black Bart and his comrades would do anything, and money Judge Lawless had in plenty.

Half an hour passed. The judge began to cast many an impatient glance toward the door, when a bold, vigorous knock was heard. Knocks are very expressive to those who understand them; they speak as plainly as words; and this one was given with a loud, surly independence, that said, just as plainly as lips could speak: "I am as good a man as you are, Judge Lawless, and I don't care a curse for you or all the revenue officers from here to Land's End." Judge Lawless

understood it, and throwing himself into a chair, he called out, blandly:

"Come in."

The door opened, and a short, thick-set, weather-beaten, grim-looking old sea-dog made his appearance, and giving his head a slight jerk to one side, by way of acknowledging the judge's presence, walked straight up to the fireplace, and deliberately spit a discharge of tobacco-juice right into the eyes of an unoffending cat, by way of commencing business. Then turning his back to the mantel, he put his hands behind him, crossed his feet, and stood ready to commence operations.

"Well, square, what's in the wind now?" demanded the new-comer, at length, seeing the judge did not seem inclined to speak.

"Bart," said the judge, in a low, cautious tone, "I have a job for you."

"All right—I'm there! what's it, square? Anything in the old line?"

"No; this is something quite different. How long do you remain here this time?"

"Can't say for certain, boss. The schooner's off a-repairin' and we're tryin' the land dodge till she's ready again! no telling though, yet, when that may be."

"Is that woman who accompanies you here likewise?"

"Cap'n's wife? Well, yes, square, I reckon she is. What do you want of her?"

"I want her to take charge of a young girl that you must carry off. Do you understand?"

"Forcible 'duction, 'saultin' and batterin.' Come, square, you're goin' it strong."

"Speak lower, for heaven's sake! Will you undertake to do this for me?"

"If you make it worth while! Fork over the needful, and I'm there!"

"Money you shall have; but do you think this woman will undertake to look after the girl?"

"See here, square; don't say 'this woman.' Call her the cap'n's lady—sounds better. Oh, she's got nothing to do with it; she's got to mind the cap'n. Who's the gal?"

"Sh-sh! not so loud, man! Do you know the cottage on the Barrens, between Dismal Hollow and Heath Hill?"

"Like a book. Why, square, it's not that beauty they talk about here: Miss—Miss—danged if I don't forget the name?"

"Never mind the name—it's of no consequence. She's the girl. Do you know her?"

"Hain't the honor; but one of our crew, a sort of dry-water sailor, knows her; I'll bring him along, and everything will go off like a new broom."

"You must be careful to not mention my name—not even to her; because it would be a dreadful thing for me if this were found out."

"Don't be scary, square, I'll be as close as a clam at high water. When do you want us to captivate the little dear?"

"To-night—any time—the sooner the better!"

"Will you be on hand yourself, square?"

"No! To avoid the faintest shadow of suspicion—though such is not likely to rest on me in any case—I will start for Baltimore immediately, within the very hour, and there remain till all the hubbub her disappearance causes has passed away. You will keep her securely in your hidden cave all the time; and when the excitement has died out I will come and relieve you of your charge."

"You're a brick, square—you are, by Lord Harry! What will be your next dodge, then?"

"That's as may be; most probably I shall take her with me to England. That's to be thought of yet, however; but I'll find a way, never fear."

"Square, they ought to 'lect you to the Senate—dang my buttons if they oughtn't! When I get unseaworthy I'm going to set up for myself; can lie and fight, and roar at 'tagonists like a brick; and got all the other qualifications, too numerous to

mention."

And with this slander on senators in general, Black Bart clapped half a plug of tobacco in the other cheek, and indulged in a quiet chuckle.

"Well, that's all, I believe," said the judge, rising. "You think you will know this girl when you see her?"

"I won't—t'other one will—trust me, square; I'll go off and see him now, and him and me will take a stroll round that way."

"If she could be inveigled from the house after night it would be the best time and way," said the judge, musingly.

"Leave all them particulars to me, square: I'll fix things up about the tallest. When's the needful to come?"

"When I return. You know me. Now, Bart, remember, to-night if you can; in three or four weeks at the furthest, I will return."

The judge turned and left the room, mounted his horse and rode off. Black Bart hitched up his pantaloons, and then fell back in a chair, snapping his fingers, flourishing his heels, and indulging in such tremendous roars of laughter that the landlord rushed in, in deadly alarm, to see what awful calamity had happened.

But still Black Bart gave vent to such appalling laughter-claps, without speaking, throwing himself back as if his spine was made of steel springs, and then jerking himself straight again, kicking his heels, snapping his finger and thumb, and indulging in such extraordinary antics of delight, that Boniface, completely at a loss, stood staring at him in silent wonder, thinking the judge's communication, whatever it might have been, had completely turned his brain.

"There, Bart, be quiet now," said the host, soothingly. "You're scaring the people in the shop out of their wits. What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"Nothing!" replied Black Bart, going off into another roar, more deafening, if possible, than the first.

"Well, I must say 'nothing' seems to be rather funny," said the puzzled landlord. "Was the judge pumping you about the smugglers?"

"Oh, Lord, don't!" shouted the sailor with such a yell of laughter, and putting himself into such frightful contortions of delight that the startled host stepped back and grasped the handle of the door with an alarmed glance toward his strange customer.

"I'm off now," said Bart at length, as soon as he had recovered from this last paroxysm; and wiping the tears from his eyes, he started at a Flora Temple pace down the street, pausing, however, now and then, as his lively sense of the ridiculous overcame him, to indulge in another terrifying peal of laughter, till affrighted pedestrians fled from him in horror, thinking a dangerous lunatic had somewhere broken loose.

He reached a low, smoky, obscure drinking den, near the end of the town, at last, and passing through the bar-room he entered another low, dirty, dingy apartment, where the first individual on whom his eyes rested, was our some-time friend, Mr. Rozzel Garnet.

"Well, Bart," asked that gentleman, eagerly, "what did Judge Lawless want of you in such haste?"

"Oh! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!" roared Black Bart, in a perfect agony of enjoyment. "If it isn't about the best fun I've ever heard tell on. Why, man alive, you'd never guess if you were to try from this to doomsday. Judge Lawless, the saint, the angel, the parson, has fell in love, and wants the girl carried off! Oh! ha! ha! ha! ha! I'll split my sides!"

Mr. Rozzel Garnet did not join in Black Bart's merriment. He opened his eyes to their widest extent, and indulged in a long, low whistle, expressive of any amount of astonishment.

"Who's the girl?" he asked, at length.

"That wonderful beauty at Old Barrens Cottage—nothing shorter. Everything arranged, and the square will come down like a prince—or if he doesn't, we'll make him. I don't know her; so you're to come with me, and together we'll carry off the girl the first chance. The judge has gone to Baltimore to keep out of harm's way, and won't be back for three or four weeks. Ain't it beautiful? The old judge in love! Ha! ha! ha!"

Like lightning there flashed a project of revenge across the mind of Rozzel Garnet. None of the smugglers knew either Erminie or Pet Lawless—why not carry off Pet instead of the other, and thus gratify his own passions, disappoint the

judge, and have revenge. The blood flashed fiercely and hotly to his face as he thought of it; and he rose and walked to the window to hide his emotion from the keen eyes of his fellow-smuggler—for Garnet had joined them in their roving life after leaving the judge's.

"Well, old fellow, what do you say to it?" asked Black Bart.

"I'm your man!" exclaimed Garnet, turning from the window, all his customary cool composure restored. "We will start immediately, and keep watch until night; it is more than probable we will see her before then, and, as the judge says, the sooner the better. Come along."

Had Petronilla's lucky star set? had her good angel deserted her? had Satan come to the assistance of his earthly myrmidons? had the Fates willed it, that her pony "Starlight" should on that eventful day cast a shoe, lame himself, and so be unfit to ride?

Pet rambled restlessly about the house, one minute terrifying rooks, and bats, and swallows from their homes in the eaves and chimneys, by banging away at some new polka on the piano; the next, seizing the bellows for a partner, and going waltzing round the room; the next, rushing like a mad thing as she was, up stairs, and then sliding down the banisters.

"For," said Pet, "exercise is good for the health; and as Aunt Deb won't let me ride the clothes-horse, I'm going to try this."

And try it she did, till she tore the dress nearly off her back; and then, getting tired of this, she determined to go over to the Old Barrens Cottage, and see Erminie.

The day was beautiful; so Pet determined to walk. Throwing a light muslin cape over her shoulders, and pulling a broad straw flat down over her eyes, the dark-eyed "heiress, beauty, and belle," set out, singing as she went.

Somehow, since the return of Ray, Pet had visited the cottage much less frequently than usual and in all probability would not have gone now, only she knew he had gone to Judestown that morning and was not expected back until the next day. Pet saw that he shunned and avoided her: and no matter how easy and natural he had been a moment before, the instant she entered he wrapped himself in his very coldest mantle of reserve, and looked more like a banished prince than common Christian. Pet saw this; and her own heart, as proud as his in another way, swelled with wounded feeling and indignation; and she inwardly vowed to let him see that she cared just as little for him as he could possibly care for her. Poor Pet! this conviction and resolution cost her the first bitter tears she had ever shed in her whole sunshiny life; but as she felt them falling warm and fast, she sprung quickly up, dashed them indignantly away, as if ashamed to own even to her own heart how much she cared for him.

"No; he shall never know that I cared two pins about him!" exclaimed Pet, with flashing eyes and flushing cheeks. "He dislikes me; I can see that plainly enough; and if he was a prince of the blood royal, I would not stoop to sue for his favor. I don't care for him; I won't care for him. I just hate him—a stiff, haughty, young Turk—there now!"

And then having relieved her mind by a "real good cry," Pet got up and whistled to her dogs, and set off for a scamper round the yard, to the great detriment of her gaiters, and the alarming increase of her appetite. Pet wasn't sentimental; so she neither took to sighing nor star-gazing, nor writing poetry; but pursued the even, or rather uneven, tenor of her way, and inwardly vowed that, "if nobody cared for her, she would care for nobody."

Little did Pet know the real cause of Ray's avoidance. High-spirited and proud, almost morbid in his pride at times, and loving this dazzling, sparkling vision of beauty and brightness more and more every time he saw her, he felt it his duty to shun her as much as possible. To know this star-eyed, dazzling, dancing fay without loving her was a simple impossibility; and Ray Germaine, with his passionate admiration of beauty, and fiery gipsy blood, loved her with an intensity that only hot, passionate, Southern natures like his can feel. And with this mad love was the certain conviction that he might as well love a "bright, particular star," and hope to win it, as the wealthy heiress of Judge Lawless, who was soon destined to make her *début* in the gilded *salons* of Washington city, where all the lions of the capital would soon be in adoration at her feet. And he—what was he? The grandson of a gipsy woman, educated by the bounty of a stranger. What was he that he should dare to lift his eyes to this peerless beauty and belle? Proud, as we have said he was, to excess, he shunned and avoided her for whom he would have given up the wide world and all it contained, has he possessed it, lest in some unguarded moment he should divulge the one secret of his fierce and daily increasing love.

And in this unpleasant way matters stood on the day when Pet set out from Heath Hill to Old Barrens Cottage. Pet was a good walker; but, owing to the intense heat, she was completely tired out by the time she reached the cottage. Erminie

alone was there, ready to welcome her friend with her own peculiar sunshiny smile.

It was very pleasant, that cool, breezy sitting-room, that scorchingly hot day, with its plain straw matting, its cool, green, Venetian blinds, its plump, tempting, cushioned rocking-chairs, and fragrant bouquets of flowers in glasses of pure, sparkling water. But the prettiest, pleasantest sight of all was its lovely young mistress in her simple, beautifully-fitting dress of blue gingham, with its snowy collar and little black silk apron boasting the cunningest pockets in the world; her shiny hair floating twined in broad damp braids round her superb little head; and where the sunshine lingered lovingly upon it, seeming like a shining glory over her smooth white brow. Yes, it was very pleasant—the pretty cottage-room; the lovely cottage maiden; and yet the dark, bright, dazzling brunette in her glancing shot silk, with her flashing jetty curls, her lustrous, splendid Syrian eyes, of midnight blackness; her whole vivacious, restless, glittering, entrancing face and form lost nothing by contrast with any one in the world.

"Well, I declare, Ermie, I don't know any place in the wide world half as cool and pleasant as this cottage of yours. Now, at Heath Hill it's enough to roast an African. Goodness! how hot I am!" said Pet, commencing to fan herself vigorously.

"The sea-breeze makes this cool," said Erminie; "that is the reason. I am so glad you came over this afternoon, for Ray, you know, is not coming home to-night. It is really too bad, I think, that he should leave us and go back again to that tiresome New York so soon."

"Ah! when is he going?" said Pet, still violently fanning herself, though her bright bloom of color was far less vivid then it had been a moment before.

"The day after to-morrow, he says; and not to return for perhaps a year. I will feel dreadfully lonesome, I know, and grandmother will miss him so much. But young men are so headstrong and self-willed that there is no doing anything with them—don't you think so, Pet?" said Erminie, smiling.

"Never thought on the subject as I know of; but I dare say they are. They're not to be blamed for it, though; it runs in man's wretched nature. Ah! I never was properly thankful for not being a man till one day I went and dressed myself in a suit of their clothes. Such wretchedly feeling things as they were, to be sure! I've never been in the stock, or the pillory, or stretched on a rack, or walking through a treadmill, or any of those other disagreeable things; but even since then I've a pretty good notion of what they must be like. It was a regular martyrdom while I had them on, and how the mischief anybody ever can survive in them is more than I know. Think of descending to posterity in a pair of pants!"

Erminie laughed, and Pet rattled on till tea was ready. Then they drank Lucy's fragrant black tea, and ate her delicate nice waffles, and praised her jam; and then, when the sun had long set, and the dark, cool, evening shadows began to fall, Pet got up, put on her hat, kissed Erminie, and set out on her return to Heath Hill.

"You ought to have told some of the servants to come for you," said Erminie. "It is rather far for you to go alone."

"Oh, there is no danger," said Pet; "on the forest road and the shore there may be; but here on the heath all is safe enough. Good night." And Pet started off at a brisk walk.

Two men, crouching behind a clump of stunted spruce bushes, were watching her with lynx eyes, as her slight, graceful form approached. It was not quite dark, but what the Scotch call "the gloaming," and the bright draped figure was plainly conspicuous on the brown, bare heath.

"There she comes at last," whispered the younger of the two, in a quick fierce tone, breathing hotly and quickly while he spoke; "I will spring out as she passes and throw this shawl over her head, while you tie her hands and feet."

"All right," said the other, in the same low tone. "Jupiter! how she goes it! Can't she walk Spanish, though! I tell you, Garnet, she's a regular stunner, and no mistake."

The other made no reply. His lurid, burning eyes were fixed on the dark, brilliant face of Petronilla.

All unconscious she passed on. Scarcely had she done so when, with the quick, noiseless spring of a panther, Garnet darted from behind the bushes, and flung a large plaid over the head of Pet, and grasped her firmly in his arms. With equal agility the other followed; and Pet was securely bound hand and foot before she had sufficiently recovered from her surprise to make the slightest struggle.

"Mine! Mine! at last!" whispered a voice she knew too well, as his arms enfolded her in a fierce embrace. "Beautiful eaglet, caged at last!"

In vain she struggled—in vain she strove to cry out for help. Feet and hands were securely bound; the heavy shawl was half-smothering her, and her captor's arms held her like a vise.

"Now for the cave! On! on! there's no time to lose!" cried Garnet, with fierce impatience, starting forward as though he were carrying an infant over the heath.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE OUTLAW'S WIFE.

For some moments Pet continued to struggle violently, but finding all her efforts vain—worse than vain—and being half-suffocated for want of air, she fell back in her captor's arms, and lay perfectly still and quiet.

In that dreadful moment, she lost not one particle of her customary self-possession. She realized all her danger and peril vividly. She knew she was completely in the power of her worst enemy, and beyond all hope of extricating herself. Her whole appalling danger burst upon her at once; and though for one instant her very heart seemed to cease its beating, she neither fainted nor gave herself up to useless tears or hysterics, according to the usual custom of young ladies, when in real or imaginary danger. Not she, indeed! Pet's thoughts as she lay quietly in her captive's arms, ran somewhat after the following fashion:

"Well, Pet, child, you've went and put your foot in it beautifully, haven't you? Ain't you ashamed of yourself, to let Rozzel Garnet catch you, and lug you along like this? I wonder where they're going to bring me to, anyway, and what they're going to do with me next? Oh! won't there be weeping and gnashing of teeth, and pulling off of wigs at home when they find I've gone, vanished, evaporated, made myself 'thin air,' and no clue to my whereabouts to be found? Phew! this *villainous* shawl is fairly smothering me. I wish I could slip it off for about five minutes; and the way I'd yell would slightly astonish Mr. Garnet. I suppose papa will have flaming posters stuck up all around Judestown, in every color of the rainbow. I fancy I'm reading one of them: 'Lost, strayed, stolen, or run off with some deluded young man, a small, brown, yellow and black girl, not quite right in her head, wearing a red-and-green silk dress, with black eyes, a pair of gaiter boots, and black hair. Any person or persons giving information concerning the above will be liberally rewarded with from five to ten cents, and possess the everlasting gratitude of the community generally.' That's it! I wonder where they're taking me to? We're down on the beach now, for I can hear the waves on the shore. Good gracious! If they should carry me off to sea, the matter would be *sea*rious. 'Pon my word and honor! if I ever get out of this scrape, if I don't make Mr. Rozzel Garnet mind what he's up to, then my name's not Pet—Ur-r-r! I'm strangling, I declare. Suffocation must be a pleasant death, if I may judge by this specimen!"

While Pet was thus cogitating, Rozzel Garnet and his companion were rapidly striding over the wet, slippery beach. A being more perfectly guileless than Pet, in some ways, never existed, and this may in some measure account for the light manner in which she treated her captivity. Saucy, spirited, daring, full of exuberant life, fun, freedom and frolic, she was; but, withal, in some matters her simplicity was perfectly wonderful. For instance, she knew now she was a prisoner; she fancied she might be taken off somewhere, or held captive for a while. But she had the most perfect faith in her own wit, cunning and courage to ultimately escape. She feared no worse fate; she knew of none; she never even dreamed of any. She knew Rozzel Garnet pretended to love her—might urge her again to marry him; but that gave her not the slightest uneasiness in the world. In fact, Pet's love of adventure made her almost like this scrape she had got into. It would be something to talk about for the rest of her life; it made her quite a heroine, this being carried off; it was really like something she had so often read of in novels, or like a tragedy in a play.

With these sentiments, Pet lay quite still, listening intently, and wondering what was to come next. It seemed to her they must have walked nearly half an hour, when they came to a dead halt, and she heard Rozzel Garnet say:

"Now, Bart, give the signal quick!"

A low, shrill, peculiar whistle followed; and then Pet, whose ears would have run themselves into points to hear the better, if she could, heard a rustling, as if of bushes pushed aside; a heavy sound, as if of rocks removing; and then Garnet, gathering her tighter in his hated embrace, stooped down, and passed through something which she knew must be

a narrow aperture, and thence, carefully guiding himself with one hand while he held her with the other, he descended a short flight of steps. Then he paused, and, to the great relief of our half-stifled heroine, removed the thick shawl in which he had enveloped her. Pet's first use of her breath was to burst out angrily with:

"Well, it's a wonder you took the blamed thing off until you choked me dead! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mr. Garnet, smothering a young lady this way, in a big blanket like that. I wish you'd let me go. I don't want to be carried like a baby any longer."

"Not so fast, pretty one," said Garnet, in a low tone of of mocking exultation. "Be in no haste to quit these arms, for they are to be your home for the future."

"Humph! a pretty home they would be!" said Pet, contemptuously. "You'll have to consult me about that, Mr. Rozzel Garnet. Let me go, I tell you! I want to walk. A body might as well let a bear carry them as you!"

"As you please, my pretty lady-love!" said Garnet. "I do not think you will escape so easily this time as you did the last! That was your hour of victory: this is mine. Then you said neither earth, air, fire, nor water could hold you. Perhaps stout walls of rock can?"

"Don't be too sure, Mr. Garnet. There is such a thing as blowing up rocks, or an earthquake might happen, or the sea might overflow, or you and all your brothers in villainy might get paralytic strokes, or Satan might come and carry off the whole of you bodily to your future home. I'm sure I wish he would. You'll be an ornament to it when you get there—a 'burning and shining light,' in every sense of the word! Ain't you proud of yourself to have carried off a little girl so beautifully? When you found you couldn't do it alone you got another to help you, and so you bravely won the battle. Two great, big men to carry off one little girl! What an achievement! What a victory! You ought to have a leather medal and a service of tin plate presented to each of you! Oh my!" said Pet, in tones of withering irony.

Had it not been pitch dark where they stood, Pet would have seen his sallow face blanch with anger; but subduing his rage in the comforting thought that this little double-refined essence of audacity was completely in his power, he smiled an evil and most sinister smile, and replied:

"Jet, flash, and sparkle, little grenade! Dart fire, little stiletto, but you can do no more! Snarl and show your white teeth, little kitten; but your claws are shielded—you cannot bite now. Expand your wings, my bright little humming-bird; but you will find them clipped. Try to soar to your native heaven, my dazzling, glorious bird of paradise; and your drooping plumes will fall, fluttering and earth-stained, to the dust."

"Well, that all sounds mighty fine, Mr. Garnet, and is a grand flourish of rhetoric on your part. I made no doubt but you'll excuse me if I don't understand a single blessed word of it. You're a schoolmaster, and, of course, ought to understand what's proper; but your grand tropes and figures of speech are all a waste of powder and shot when addressed to me. Just talk in plain English, and don't keep calling me names, and I'll feel greatly obliged. What a grenade and all them other things are I haven't the remotest idea; but I expect they're something dreadful bad, or you wouldn't keep calling me them. It's real impolite in you to talk so; and I wonder you ain't ashamed of yourself, Rozzel Garnet!"

"No, you don't understand, Miss Lawless," he said slowly, and with the same evil smile. "Shall I tell you in plainer words my meaning?"

"No, you needn't bother yourself," said Pet, shortly. "The less you say to me the better I'll like it. I'm not in the habit of talking to the offcasts of society, such as you are, Mr. Garnet; and, like frog-soup, though it does well enough for a time, one doesn't like it as a constant thing."

"Here, push on! push on!" said the gruff voice of Black Bart behind them. "No use standing palavering here all night. Get along, Rozzy, boy, and taking this little snapping-turtle along with you. Up with the glim, Jack, till ma'm'selle sees where she's going."

All this time they had been wrapped in the blackness of Tartarus, but now the two men descended the stone steps, and one of them, holding up a dark-lantern, let its rays stream round. Pet curiously cast her eyes about and saw she was in a narrow, rocky passage, with her head not more than an inch from the top. How far it led she could not tell, for the rays of light penetrated but a few feet, and beyond that stretched a black, yawning chasm that might have been the entrance into Pandemonium itself.

"Now, in we goes," said Black Bart, giving Pet a slight push forward. "Go first, Rozzy, lad, and show little mustard-seed, here, the way. Jack and I will keep in your wake."

"Mustard-seed and snapping-turtle," muttered Pet, as she prepared to follow Garnet. "Pet, my dear, you will have as many *aliases* before long as the most notorious blackleg from here to the Cannibal Islands. Well, if I'm not in a fix to-night! What will they say at home?"

As they went on the passage grew wider and broader, until at last Pet found herself in a spacious rock-bound apartment, well lighted, rudely furnished, and occupied by some half-dozen rough, hard-looking men in the garb of sailors. They were lying in various attitudes about the floor, with the exception of two, who sat at a rough deal-table playing cards.

They turned their eyes carelessly enough as Rozzel Garnet entered; but as their eyes fell upon Pet each man sprung to his feet, and stared at her in undisguised wonder.

There she stood, in the full glare of the light; her slender, girlish form drawn up to its full height; her brilliant silk dress flashing and glittering in the light; her short, dancing, flashing curls of jet falling around her crimson cheeks; her bright, undaunted black eyes wide open, and returning every stare as composedly as though she were sitting in her father's hall, and these men were her servants. Very much out of place looked Pet, in her rich, sheeny robes and dazzling beauty, amid those roughly-clad, savage-looking men, and in that dismal under-ground apartment.

"Where is she?" asked Rozzel Garnet, unheeding their blank stare of surprise.

"Who?—the missis?" asked one of the men, without removing his eyes from Pet.

"Yes—of course."

The man pointed to the remote end of the room; and Pet, turning her eyes in that direction saw a sort of opening in the wall, serving evidently for a door, and covered by a screen of thick, dark baize.

Garnet went toward it and called:

"Madame Marguerite."

"Well," said a woman's voice from within, with a strong foreign accent.

"Can I see you a moment, on business?"

"Yes—enter." And Pet saw a small, delicate-looking hand push aside the screen, and Garnet disappeared within.

"Here, little nettle, sit down," said Black Bart, pushing a stool toward Pet, gallantly, with his foot. "How do you like the looks of this here place, young woman?"

"Well," said Pet, "I should say there was no danger of thieves breaking in at night; and by the look of things, I don't expect they would find much for their pains, if they did break in. There's no danger of its blowing down windy nights—is there?"

"Well, no, I reckon there isn't," said Black Bart with a grin, "seeing it's right under a hill, and nothing but solid rocks above and below."

"A strong foundation," said Pet; "Like the true Church it's built on a rock. I should think it would be damp, though, when the tide rises and fills it; and I am subject to rheumatism—"

"No danger," said Bart. "I'll risk your drowning. There! Garnet's calling you. Go in there."

Pet arose, and Garnet, holding back the baize screen, motioned her to enter. She obeyed and looked curiously around.

The room was smaller than the one she had left and better furnished. The rocky floor was covered with India matting, and chairs, couches, and tables were strewn indiscriminately around. A bed with heavy curtains stood in one corner, and a stand containing books, writing materials, and drawing utensils stood opposite. Pet gave all these but a fleeting glance, and then her whole attention was caught and occupied by the person who stood between them, with one hand resting on the back of a chair, and her eyes fixed with a sort of stem, haughty scrutiny on Pet.

It was a woman of some five-and-thirty years of age, of middle size, and dressed in a solid and frayed black satin dress. Her face had evidently once been very handsome; for it still bore traces of former beauty; but now it was thin, sallow, and faded—looking still more faded in contrast with the unnaturally large, lustrous black eyes by which it was lit up. Her hair, thick and black, hung disordered and uncombed far over her shoulders, while jewels flashed from the pendants in her ears, and sparkled on the small, beautiful hands. Something in that face moved Pet as nothing had ever done before—there was such a look of proud, sullen despair in the wild, black eyes; a sort of fierce haughtiness in the dark, weird

face; a look of passionate impatience, hidden anguish, undying woe, in the slumbering depths of those gloomy, haunting eyes, that Pet wondered who she could be, or what great sorrow she had ever endured. There was an air of refinement about her, too—a lofty, commanding hauteur that showed she was queen and mistress here, and as far above the brutal men surrounding her as heaven is above the earth.

"This is the girl, Madame Marguerite," said Garnet, respectfully, "I entrust her to your care until the captain comes."

"She shall be cared for. That will do," said the woman, waving her hand until all its burning rubies and blazing diamonds seemed to encircle it with sparks of fire.

Garnet bowed low, cast a triumphant glance on Pet as he passed, and hissed softly in her ear: "Mine own—mine own, at last." And then he raised the screen and disappeared.

The cold, proud, black eyes were fixed piercingly on Pet; but that young lady bore it as she had done many another stare, without flinching.

"Sit down," said the woman, with her strong foreign intonation, pointing to a seat.

Pet obeyed, saying, as she did so:

"I may as well, I suppose. Am I expected to stay here all night?"

"Yes," said the woman, curtly, "and many more nights after that. You can occupy my bed; I will sleep on one of these lounges while you remain."

"Well," said Pet, "I would like to know what I am brought here for anyway. Some of Rozzel Garnet's capers, I suppose. He had better look out; for when I get free, if the gallows don't get their due it won't be my fault."

"Rozzel Garnet had nothing to do with it; he was but acting for another in bringing you here."

"For another?" said Pet, with the utmost surprise; "who the mischief is it?"

"That you are not to know at present. When the proper time comes, that, what many other things, will be revealed."

"So I'm like a bundle of goods, 'left till called for,'" said Pet; "now, who could have put themselves to so much unnecessary trouble to have me carried off, I want to know? I thought I hadn't an enemy in the world, but his excellency, the right worshipful Rozzel Garnet. It can't be Orlando Toosypegs, surely—hum-m-m. I do wonder who can it be," said Pet, musingly.

While Pet was holding converse with herself, the woman, Marguerite, had gone out. Pet waited for her return until, in spite of her strange situation, her eyes began to drop heavily. A little clock on a shelf struck the hour of midnight, and still she came not. Pet was sleepy, awfully sleepy; and, rubbing her eyes and yawning, she got up, and holding her eyes open with her fingers, knelt down and said her usual night-prayers, and then jumped into bed, and fell into a sound sleep, in which Rozzel Garnet, and Marguerite, and the under-ground cave, and her previous night's adventure, were one and all forgotten.

When Pet awoke she found herself alone, and the apartment lit up by a swinging-lamp, exactly as it had been the night before. She glanced at the clock and saw the hands pointed to half-past ten. A little round stand had been placed close to her bed, on which all the paraphernalia of a breakfast for one was placed. On a chair at the foot of the bed was a basin and ewer, with water, combs, brushes, and a small looking-glass.

Pet, with an appetite not at all diminished, sprung out of bed, hastily washed her face and hands, brushed out her silken curls, said her morning-prayers, and then, sitting down at the table, fell to with a zest and eagerness that would have horrified Miss Priscilla Toosypegs. The coffee was excellent, the rolls incomparable, the eggs cooked to a turn, and Miss Pet did ample justice to all.

As she completed her meal, the screen was pushed aside, and the woman Marguerite entered.

"Good-morning," said Pet.

The woman bent her head in a slight acknowledgment.

"I suppose it's daylight outside by this time?" said Pet.

"Yes, it was daylight five hours ago," was the reply.

"Well, it's pleasant to know even that. What am I to do for the rest of the day, I want to know?"

“Whatever you please.”

“A wide margin; the only thing I would please to do, if I could, would be to go out and walk home. That, I suppose, is against the rules?”

“Yes; but there are books and drawing materials; you can amuse yourself with them.”

“Thankee; poor amusement, but better than none, I expect Who is commander here, the captain I heard them speak of?”

“My husband,” said the woman, proudly.

“And where is he now? I should like to have a talk with him, and have things straightened out a little if possible.”

“He is absent, and will not be back for some days.”

“Hum! this is, then, the hiding-place of the smugglers they make such a fuss about—eh?” said Pet.

“Yes, they are smugglers—worse, perhaps,” said the woman, sullenly.

“There! I knew I’d find it; I always said so!” exclaimed Pet, exultantly. “Oh, if I could only get out! See here, I wish you would let me escape!”

The woman looked at her with her wild, black eyes for a moment, and then went on with her occupation of cleaning off the table, as if she had not heard her.

“Because,” persisted Pet, “I’m of no use to any one here, and they’ll be anxious about me up home. They don’t know I’m out, you know.”

The woman went calmly on with her work without replying, and Pet, seeing it was all a waste of breath, pleading, got up and went over to the shelf where the books were, in search of something to read. A number of pencil-drawings lay scattered about. Pet took them, and little as she knew of art, she saw they had been sketched by a master-hand.

“Oh, how pretty!” she exclaimed; “was it you drew these?”

“No; my husband,” answered the woman. “They are all fancy sketches, he says.”

There was a sort of bitterness in the last words, unnoticed by Pet, who was eagerly and admiringly examining the drawings. One, in particular, struck her; it represented a large, shadowy church, buried in mingled lights and shades, that gave a gloomy, spectral, weird appearance to the scene. At the upper end, near the grand altar, stood a youth and a maiden, while near a white-robed clergyman, book in hand. A dying bird seemed fluttering over their heads, and ready to drop at their feet. The face of the youth could not be seen, but the lovely, childlike face of the girl was the chief attraction of the drawing. Its look of unutterable love, mingled with a strange, nameless terror; its rare loveliness, and the passionate worship in the eyes upturned to him who stood beside her, sent a strange thrill to the very heart of Pet. A vague idea that she had seen a face bearing a shadowy resemblance to the beautiful one in the picture somewhere before, struck her. The face was familiar, just as those we see in dreams are; but whether she had dreamed of one like this, or had really seen it, she could not tell. She gazed and gazed; and the longer she gazed, the surer she was that she had really and certainly seen, if not that face, some one very like it, before.

“Can you tell me if this is a fancy sketch?” said Pet, holding it up.

“My husband says so. Why?” asked the woman, fixing her eyes, with a keen, suspicious glance, on Pet.

“Oh, nothing; only it seems to me as if I had seen that face before. It is very strange; I cannot recollect when or where; but I know I have seen it.”

“You only imagine so.”

“No, I don’t. I never imagine anything. Oh, here’s another; what a pretty child! why—why, she looks like you!”

It represented a beautiful, dark little girl, a mere infant, but resplendently beautiful.

“She was my child,” said the woman, in a low, hard, despairing voice, as she looked straight before her.

“And where is she?” asked Pet, softly.

“I don’t know—dead, I expect,” said the woman, in that same tone of deep, steady despair, far sadder than any tears or wild sobs could have been.

Pet's eyes softened with deep sympathy; and coming over, she said, earnestly: "I am so sorry for you. How long is it since she died?"

"It is seven years since we lost her; she was two years old then. I do not know whether she is living or dead. Oh, Rita! Rita!" cried the woman, passionately, while her whole frame shook with the violence of emotion.

No tear fell, no sob shook her breast, but words can never describe the utter agony of that despairing cry.

There were tears in Pet's eyes now—in those flashing, mocking, defying eyes; and in silent sympathy she took the woman's hand in her own little brown fingers, and softly began caressing it.

"It was in London we lost her—in the great, vast city of London. I was out with her, one day, and seeing a vast crowd at the corner of the street, I went over, holding my little Marguerite by the hand, to see what was the matter. The crowd increased; we were wedged in, and could not extricate ourselves. Suddenly some one gave her a pull; her little hand relaxed its hold; I heard her cry out; and shrieking madly, I burst from the crowd in search of her; but she was gone. I rushed shrieking through the streets until they arrested me as a lunatic, and carried me off. For a long, long time after, I remember nothing. My husband found me out, and took charge of me; but we never heard of our child after that. I nearly went mad. I was mad for a time; but it has passed. Since that day, we never heard of Rita. I heard them say she was stolen for her extraordinary beauty; but, living or dead, I feel she is forever lost to me—forever lost—forever lost!"

She struck her bosom with her hand, and rocked back and forward, while her wild, black eyes gazed steadily before her with that same rigid look of changeless despair.

"I loved her better than anything in earth or heaven, except her father—my heart was wrapped up in hers—she was the dearest part of myself; and, since I lost her, life has been a mockery—worse than a mockery to me. Girl!" she said, looking up suddenly and fiercely, "never love! Try to escape woman's doom of loving and losing, and of living on, when death is the greatest blessing God can send you. Never love! Tear your heart out and throw it in the flames sooner than love and live to know your golden idol is an image of worthless clay. Girl, remember!" and she sprung to her feet, her eyes blazing with a maniac light, and grasped Pet so fiercely by the arm that she was forced to stifle a cry of pain, "never love—never love! Take a dagger and send your soul to eternity sooner!"

She flung Pet from her with a violence that sent her reeling against the wall, and darted from the room.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE OUTLAW.

"He knew himself a villain, but he deemed
The rest no better than the thing he seemed;
And scorned the best as hypocrites, who hid,
Those deeds the bolder spirit plainly did.
He knew himself detested, but he knew
The hearts that loathed him crouched and dreaded, too.
Lone, wild and strange he stood, alike exempt
From all affection and from all contempt."

—Byron.

That first day of her imprisonment seemed endless to Pet. She yawned over her books, and dozed over the drawings, and fell asleep, wondering what they were doing at home, and when they would come in search of her; and dreamed she was creeping through some hole in the wall, making her escape, and awoke to find herself crawling on all fours between the legs of the table. It was the longest, dreariest day Pet had ever known. The woman Marguerite did not make her appearance again, and Pet's meals were served by a bright, bold-eyed lad, whom she plied with some fifty questions or so in a breath; but as the boy was a Spaniard, and did not speak nor understand a word of English, Miss Lawless did not gain much by this. As there was no means of telling day from night, Pet would have thought a week had elapsed but for

the little clock that so slowly and provokingly pointed out the lagging hours.

"This being taken captive and carried off to a romantic dungeon by a lot of bearded outlaws is not what it's cracked up to be, after all," said Pet, gaping fit to strain her jaws. "It's all very nice to read about in story books, and see at the theater; but in real life, come to look at it, it's the most horridly-slow affair ever was. Now, when I used to read about the lovely princess being carried off by the fiery dragon (by the way, I'd like to see a fiery dragon—I never *did* see one yet), I used to wish I had been in her place; but I know better now. She must have had a horrid stupid time of it in that enchanted castle, until that nice young man, the prince, came, and carried her off. Heigho! What a pity I have no prince to come for *me*! Wonder if Ray Germaine's gone yet—but, there! I don't care whether he is or not. He does not care two pins whether he ever sees me again or not. Nobody cares about me, and I'm nothing but a poor, abused, diabolical little wretch. Oh, yaw-w-w! Lor'! how sleepy I am! I do wish somebody would come and talk to me, even Rozzel Garnet, or that man with all the black whiskers, who was impolite enough to call me names, or that wild, odd-looking outlaw queen—anybody would be better than none. I'll blue-mould—I'll run to seed—I'll turn to dust and ashes, if I'm kept here much longer; I know I will!"

And, yawning repeatedly, Pet pitched her book impatiently across the room, and, stretching herself on a lounge, in five minutes was sound asleep.

The clock, striking ten, awoke her. She rubbed her eyes and looked drowsily up, and the first object on which her eyes rested was the motionless form of Rozzel Garnet, as he stood near, with folded arms, gazing down upon her, with his usual sinister smile.

"Oh! you're here—are you?" said Pet, composedly, after her first prolonged stare. "I must say, it shows a great deal of delicacy and politeness on your part to enter a young lady's sleeping-apartment after this fashion. What new mischief has your patron saint with the cloven foot put you up to now?"

"Saucy as ever, little wasp! You should be careful how you talk now, knowing you are in my power."

"Should I, indeed? Don't you think you see me afraid of you, Mr. Garnet? Just fancy me, with my finger in my mouth and my eyes cast down, trembling before any man, much less you! Ha, ha, ha! don't you hope you may live to see it?"

"It is in my power to make you afraid of me! You are here a captive, beyond all hope of escape—mind, beyond the power of heaven and earth to free you. Say, then, beautiful dragon-fly, radiant little fay, how are you to defy me? Your hour of triumph has passed, though you seem not to know it. You have queened it right royally long enough. My turn has come at last. I have conquered the conqueress, caged the eaglet, tamed the wild queen of the kelpies, won the most beautiful, enchanting, intoxicating fairy that ever inflamed the heart or set on fire the brain of man."

"Yes—boast!" said Pet, getting up and composedly beginning to twine her curls over her fingers. "But self-praise is no recommendation. If by all those names you mean me, let me tell you not to be too sure even yet. It's not right to cheer until you are out of the woods, you know, Mr. Garnet; and, really, you're not such a lady-killer, after all, as you think yourself. You can't hold fire without burning your fingers, Mr. Garnet, as you'll find, if you attempt any nonsense with me. So, your honor's worship, the best thing you can do is, to go off to your boon companions, and mind your own business for the future, and leave me to finish my nap."

"Sorry to refuse your polite request, Miss Lawless," he said, with a sneer; "but, really, I cannot leave you to solitude and loneliness, this way. As I have a number of things to talk over with you, and as you have forgotten to ask me to sit down, I think I will just avail myself of a friend's privilege, and take a seat myself."

And very nonchalantly the gentleman seated himself beside her on the lounge. Pet sprung up with a rebound, as if she were a ball of India-rubber, or had steel springs in her feet, and confronted him with blazing cheeks and flashing eyes.

"You hateful, disagreeable, yellow old ogre," she burst out with; "keep the seat to yourself, then, if you want it, but don't dare to come near me again! Don't dare, I say!" And she stamped her foot, passionately, like the little tempest that she was. "It's dangerous work playing with chain-lightning, Mr. Rozzel Garnet; so be warned in time. I vow to Sam! if I had a broomstick handy, I'd let you know what it is to put a respectable young woman in a rage. You sit beside me, indeed! Faugh! there is pollution in the very air you breathe!"

He turned for an instant, livid with anger; but to lose his temper was not his *rôle* now, and so gulping down the little draught of her irritating words as best he might, he said:

"Ay! rave, and storm, and flash fire, my little tornado; but it will avail you nothing. You but beat the air with your breath,

though, really, I do not know as it is useless, either, for you look so dazzlingly beautiful in your roused wrath, my dear inflammation of the heart, that you make me love you twice as much as ever."

"You love me indeed!" said Pet, contemptuously; "I don't see what awful crime any of my forefathers have ever done, that I'm compelled to stand up here, like patience on a monument, and listen to such stuff as that. I won't listen to it! I'll go and call that woman, I declare I will, and make her pack you off with a flea in your ear."

"Not so fast, my pretty one," said Garnet, with his usual cold smile, as he put out his long arms and caught hold of Pet; "Madame Marguerite has gone away, and may not be back to-night. The men have all gone, too, but one, and he is lying under the table out there, dead drunk. How now, my little flame of fire? Does this damp your courage any?"

For the first time, the conviction that she was completely in his power thrilled through the heart of Pet, making her, for one moment, almost dizzy with nameless apprehension. But the mocking, exulting eyes of his everywhere bent tauntingly upon her, and the high spirit of the brave girl flashed indignantly up; and, fixing her flashing black eyes full on his face, she answered, boldly:

"No, it doesn't! Damp my courage, forsooth! Do you really suppose I am afraid of you, Rozzel Garnet? of you, the most arrant, white-livered coward God ever afflicted the earth with! Ha! ha! why, if you think so, you are a greater fool than even I ever took you to be."

His teeth closed with a spasmodic snap; he half rose, in his fierce rage, to his feet, as he hissed:

"Girl, take care! tempt me not too far, lest I make you feel what it is to taunt me beyond endurance!"

"Barking dogs seldom bite, Mr. Garnet; little snarling curs, never."

"By heaven, girl, I will strangle you if you do not stop!" he shouted, springing fiercely to his feet.

She took one step back, laid her hand on a carving-knife that had been on the table since dinner-time, and looked up in his face with a deriding smile.

In spite of himself, her dauntless spirit and bold daring struck him with admiration. He looked at her for a moment, inwardly wondering that so brave and fierce a spirit could exist in a form so slight and frail, and then, with a long breath, he sunk back into his seat.

"That's right, Mr. Garnet: I see you have not lost all your reason yet," said Pet, quietly; "if you value a whole skin, it will be wise for you to keep the length of the room between us. I don't threaten much, but I'm apt to act when aroused."

"Miss Lawless, forgive my hasty temper. I did not come to threaten you, to-night, but to set you at liberty," said Garnet, looking penitent.

"Humph! set me at liberty! I have my doubts about that," said Pet, transfixing him with a long, unwinking stare.

"Nevertheless, it is true. To-night they are all gone—we are all alone; say but the word, and in ten minutes you will be as free as the winds of heaven."

"Worse and worse! Mr. Garnet, just look me in the eye, will you, and see if you can discover any small mill-stones there? Do you really think I'm green enough to believe you, now?"

"Miss Lawless, I swear to you I speak the truth. In ten minutes you may leave this, free and unfettered, if you will."

"Well, I declare! Just let me catch my breath after that, will you? Mr. Garnet, I have heard of Satan turning saint, but I never experienced it before. So you'll set me free, will you? Well, I'm sure I feel dreadfully obliged to you, though I don't know as I need to, since but only for you I wouldn't be here at all. I'm quite willing to go, though, and am ready to start at any moment."

"Wait one instant, Miss Petronilla. I will set you free, but on one condition."

"Ah! I thought so! I was just thinking so, all along! And what might that condition be, if a body may ask?" inquired Pet.

"That you become my wife!"

"Phew-w-w! Great guns and little ones! bombshells and hurricanes! Fire, murder, and perdition generally! Your wife! Oh, ye gods and little fishes! Hold me, somebody, or I'll go into the high-strikes."

"Girl, do you mock me?" passionately exclaimed Garnet, springing to his feet.

"Mr. Garnet, my *dear* sir, take things easy. It's the worst thing in the world, for the constitution and by-laws, flaring up in this manner. It might produce a rush of brains to the head, that would be the death of you, if from nothing but the very novelty of having them there. 'Sh—sh! now; I see you are going to burst out with something naughty; but don't—you really mus'n't speak of your kind friend and patron with the tail and horns, to ears polite. Mock you! St. Judas Iscariot forbid! I trust I have too much respect for your high and mighty majesty, to do anything so impolite. Sit down, Mr. Garnet, and make your unhappy soul as miserable as circumstances will allow. No, now that I've eased my mind, I'd rather not get married just at present, thank you. I intend to take the black veil some of these long-come-shorts, if I may be allowed so strong an expression, and second-hand nuns are not so nice as they might be. No, Mr. Garnet, I'm exceedingly obliged for your very flattering offer; but I really must decline the high honor of sharing your hand, heart, and tooth brush," said Pet, courtseying.

"And by all the fiends in flames, minion, you shall not decline it!" shouted Garnet, maddened by her indescribably taunting tone. "By the heaven above us you shall either be my wife or—"

"Well," said Pet, sitting down at the table, resting her elbows upon it, dropping her chin in her hands, and staring at him as only she could stare; "what? Why don't you go on? I never like to have a burst of eloquence like that snapped short off in the middle like the stem of a pipe; it spoils the effect!"

"Then, mad girl, you shall either be my wife, or share a worse fate."

"Well, Mr. Garnet, I don't like to contradict you; but if there can be a worse fate than to have anything to do with you, I'd like to know it—that's all.

"Then you will not consent!" he said, glaring on her like a tiger.

"Mr. Garnet, for goodness' sake don't make such an old goose of yourself, asking silly questions!" said Pet, yawning. "I wish you would go! I'm sleepy, and you look just now so much like a shanghai rooster with the jaundice, that you'll give me the nightmare if you don't clear out. Mr. Garnet, I don't want to be personal, but even the nicest young men get tiresome after a while."

"Petronilla Lawless, take care! Have you no fear?"

"Well, no, I can't say that I have; at least, I don't stand very much in awe of you, you know. I expect I ought to, but I don't. It's not my fault, for I can't help it."

"Then, since fair means will not do, something else must!" exclaimed Garnet, making a spring toward her, while his eyes were blazing with a terrible light. But Pet was as quick as himself and seizing her formidable weapon she darted back, and flourished it triumphantly, exclaiming:

"Now for a game of hide-and-go-seek. Catch me if you can, Mr. Garnet; but if you have any consideration for this clean floor, keep a respectful distance. Blood-stains are not the easiest removed in the world, especially such bad blood as yours; and this long knife and a willing hand can make an ugly wound."

She had him at bay again. There was a fierce, red, dangerous light in her flaming eyes, now; and a look of deep, steady determination in the dark, wild little face. Rozzel Garnet perceptibly cooled down for a moment; but then, as if maddened by her taunting, deriding smile, he bounded toward her with the fearful spring of a wild beast, and had her in his arms before she could elude his grasp.

But the bright-winged little wasp had its sting yet. Up flew the blue, glittering knife, down it descended with all the force of her small arm; but her aim was not sure, and it lodged in his shoulder.

With an awful oath, he seized her hands in his vise-like grip, and with his other pulled out the knife. The wound was not deep, yet the blood spurted up as he pulled it out, in his very face.

The sight seemed to rouse him to madness; and Pet writhed with pain in his fierce grasp. She felt herself fainting. A dreadful weakness was stealing through her frame; when as if sent by Heaven, a quick, heavy step was heard without, and then a commanding voice calling:

"Hallo, Garnet! where are you?"

With a fierce imprecation of rage, the baffled villain hurled the nearly swooning girl from him, and turned to leave the room, hissing in her ear:

"Foiled again! But you are still in my power. By Heaven and all its hosts, I will yet have my revenge!"

Pet dropped into a seat, and, feeling sick and giddy, bowed her head on her hands. Never in her life before had she fully realized her own weakness. What would all her boasted strength have availed her but for that heavenly interposition? A moment ago, and she was as a child in the grasp of a giant. What an escape she had had! How she blessed, in her heart, he, whoever it might have been, who had saved her!

Pet's emotions, no matter of what nature, never lasted long. Ten minutes now sufficed to make "Richard himself again;" and with a short but fervent prayer of thanksgiving, she sat up, drew a long breath of unspeakable relief, and began looking ruefully at her wrists, all black and blue from his iron pressure.

"Natural bracelets!" said Pet, with a slight grimace of pain. "Jet and azure. I can't say I approve of such violent love-making; it's unpleasant and excites one—rather! However, 'the course of true love never did run smooth,'#8217; according to that nice man, Mr. Shakespeare; though I hope it isn't always as rough as the severe course I underwent just now. Good gracious! What a tiger I have raised in that quondam tutor of mine! Pretty instructor he was for youth, to be sure! But lo! the curtain rises! What is to be the next scene, I wonder?"

As she spoke, the curtain was pushed aside, and a new actor appeared. He walked over to the opposite side of the room, and leaning his elbow on a sort of mantel, gazed with a look of careless curiosity on Pet.

From the moment that young lady laid her black eyes upon him, she gave a violent start, and looked at him in utter amaze. For, save the disparity in their years, and a certain devil-may-care recklessness that this man had, she saw before her the living image of Ray Germaine!

The new-comer was a man apparently about forty years of age, with the bold, handsome features, the flashing black eyes, and raven hair of Ray Germaine. His face was bronzed by sun and wind many shades darker than that of his young prototype; and in his coarse sailor's garb he looked the very beau ideal of a bold, reckless buccaneer. And yet, withal, he bore about him the same air of refinement Pet had noticed in the woman Marguerite, as if both had originally belonged to a far different grade of society than the branded outlaws to whom they now were joined.

But that likeness—that wonderful resemblance to Ray Germaine—it completely upset Miss Lawless' nonchalance, as nothing in the world had ever done before. There she sat and stared, unable to remove her eyes from the dark, browned, handsome face that was turned toward her with a look half-careless, half-admiring, and wholly amused.

The man was the first to break the silence.

"You are the young lady they brought here last night, I presume?" he said, watching her curiously.

His voice, too, was like Ray's, and bespoke him, even if nothing else had done so, above his calling—being those low, modulated tones that can only be educated into a man.

Pet did not reply. She did not hear him; in fact, being still lost in digesting her surprise at this astounding resemblance. He watched her for a moment as if waiting for an answer, and then a smile broke over his face. Pushing back his thick, clustering, raven hair, he said:

"Yes, look at me well, young lady. I presume you never saw an outlaw with a price upon his head before. Is it to curiosity alone, or is it to some concealed deformity, that I am indebted for that piercing scrutiny?"

Pet was aroused now, and reddened slightly at his words and look. Then her old impudence came back, and she answered quietly:

"No, you're not the only outlaw with a price upon his head I have ever seen. I have just had the honor of holding an interview with one; though, really, I don't think his head is worth a price above ten cents, if that. I suppose I have the sublime happiness of beholding his mightiness, the commander-in-chief of all the smugglers?"

"Even so! I have returned, you perceive, sooner than was expected; in fact, solely upon your account. I heard you were here, and came to see you."

"Indeed! Well, I hope you like me?" said Pet, pertly.

"Most decidedly," said the outlaw, passing his hand caressingly over his whiskers; "so much, in fact, that if I were not a married man I should be tempted to fall deplorably in love with you on the spot."

"Well, you'll greatly oblige me by doing nothing of the sort," said Pet. "I have had enough of love to last me for one while. Love's not the pleasantest thing in the world, judging by what I've seen of the article; and with the blessing of Providence, I'm going to have nothing whatever to do with it. May I ask the name of the gentleman whose prisoner I have

the unspeakable happiness of being?"

"Certainly. I am called, for want of a better, Captain Reginald."

"Captain Reginald what? That's not a whole name."

His brow darkened for a moment at some passing thought, then he replied:

"Never mind; it serves the purpose, and it's the only one I believe I ever had a right to. I am afraid you find the solitude here rather irksome—do you not?"

"Well, Captain Reginald, to be candid with you, it's not to say a place where a body would like to spend their lives. There's no danger of one's growing dissipated here, or anything that way, you know—which is, of course, an advantage. And now, might I ask who the gentleman is who has put himself to the very unnecessary trouble of having me carried off? All the rest seem to be dumb on the subject, from some cause."

"I fear I will have to be dumb, too, my dear young lady; the gentleman who has shown his good taste by falling in love with you does not wish to be known at present. Can you not guess yourself?"

"Haven't the remotest idea, unless it be Rozzel Garnet, or Orlando Toosypegs?"

"No—neither! Garnet, of course, brought you here, but he was paid to do it by another—we outlaws do anything, from murder down, for money. As for Toosypegs, or whatever the name may be, I haven't the pleasure of knowing him; but I can assure you it is not he."

"Well, then, I give it up. I never was good at guessing, so I'll not bother my brain about it. Is it high treason to ask how long I am to be cooped up here in this under-ground hole?"

"Perhaps a fortnight, perhaps longer."

"Vipers and rattlesnakes!—two whole blessed weeks!—whew! Well, Mr. Captain, all I have to say is that I'll be a melancholy case of 'accidental death' before half the time, and then I wish your patron, whoever he may be, joy of his bargain."

"We will hope for better things, my dear young lady. By the way, I have not heard your name yet—what is it?"

"Pet Lawless—better known to her unhappy friends as 'Imp, Elf, Firefly, Nettle, Pepperpod,' and many other equally proper, appropriate and suggestive names. 'Queen regent and mistress imperial to all the witches and warlocks that ever rode on broomsticks,' and leaves a large and disagreeable circle of friends to mourn her untimely loss. *Requiescat in pace.*"

All this Pet brought out at a breath, and so rapidly that the smuggler-captain looked completely bewildered.

"Lawless!" he exclaimed. "I did not think—do you know Judge Lawless of Heath Hill?" he asked abruptly.

"Slightly acquainted. They say I'm a daughter of his," said Pet, composedly.

"His daughter? Young lady, are you jesting?"

"Well, I may be—quite unintentional on my part, though; if it sounds funny, you're perfectly welcome to laugh at it till you're black in the face. What was it?"

"You Judge Lawless's daughter?" said the astonished captain.

"Nothing is certain in this uncertain world, Captain Reginald. I've always labored under that impression; if you know anything to the contrary, I am quite willing to be convinced."

"Young lady, I wish you would be serious for one moment," said the smuggler, knitting his dark brows. "If you are his daughter, there has been a terrible mistake here. Did not Rozzel Garnet live at Heath Hill for some years as the tutor of Miss Lawless?"

"Yes, sir, and he was sent about his business for wishing to teach her some things not laid down in the books."

"Then he would know you at once. Oh! it's impossible you can be Miss Lawless."

"Very well, if it affords you any consolation to think so, you are perfectly welcome to your own opinion. Who am I then?"

"You were mistaken for, or rather you ought to be, a young lady, a celebrated beauty who lives in a cottage somewhere on the heath."

"What! Erminie?"

"I really do not know the name. Is it possible you are not the one?"

"Well no, I rather think not. Though I may not be Pet Lawless; and as you say I'm not, I won't dispute it—but I most decidedly am not Erminie Germaine."

"Erminie who?" cried the outlaw, with a violent start.

"Germaine. Perhaps you object to that, too."

"Pardon me; the name is—" He paused and shaded his fine eyes for a moment with his hand, then looking up, he added: "She was the one who was to be brought here; if you are really Miss Lawless, then there has been a tremendous mistake."

"Humph! it seems to me to have been a mistake all through. I shouldn't wonder the least if it turns out to be some of Master Garnet's handiwork. So they wanted to carry off Erminie? Now, I'm real glad I was taken, if it had saved Minnie. It appears to have been a pretty piece of business, from beginning to end."

"I shall put an end to this mystery," said the captain, starting up and going to the door. "Marguerite," he said, lifting the screen, "send Rozzel Garnet here."

"He has gone," replied the voice of the woman. "He went away the moment you entered the room."

"Sold!" cried Pet, jumping up, and whirling round like a top in her delight. "He has taken you all in—made April-fools of every mother's son of you! Carried off me, Pet Lawless, for Erminie Germaine! He knew he would be discovered, and now he has fled; and when you see last night's wind again, you will see him. Oh! I declare if it's not the best joke I have heard this month of Sundays!"

And overcome by the (to her) irresistibly ludicrous discovery, of how the smugglers had been "sold" by one of themselves, Pet fell back, laughing uproariously.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOME FROM SEA.

"The dark-blue jacket that enfolds the sailor's manly breast
Bears more of real honor than the star and ermine vest;
The tithe of folly in his head may wake the landsman's mirth,
But Nature proudly owns him as her child of sterling worth."
—Eliza Cook.

"Clear the track! off we go! whip up old lazybones there, and don't let him crawl on at that snail's pace! That's more like; now for it, at five knots an hour! It's pleasant to see the old familiar faces again, after knocking about in strange ports for half a dozen years—don't you think so, messmate?" and the speaker, a dashing, handsome, good-humored-looking young fellow, with the unmistakable air of a sailor about him, gave his fellow-passenger, an elderly, cross-looking old gentleman, who sat beside him on the roof of the stage-coach, a confidential dig with his elbow, that nearly pushed him, head-first, out of his seat.

"Lord bless my soul! young man, there's no necessity for breaking a man's ribs about it—is there?" said the old gentleman, snappishly. "I dare say, it's all very nice, but you needn't dislocate your neighbor's bones about it. Do you belong to this place?" asked the old man, after a short pause, during which his companion had politely apologized for the unnecessary force of the blow in the ribs.

"Yes, sir," said the young man, with emphasis, "that I do! and in all my rambles round the world, I never saw a place I

liked better! No place like home, you know. Hurrah! for good old Judestown!"

"I wonder you go to sea, then," said the old man, crossly; "you're a fool to do it, getting drowned fifty times a day. I warrant you, you are always on the spree whenever you get on shore, like the rest of them, spending all your money instead of putting it in the savings bank, as you ought to do, as a provision for your old age."

"Me get on the spree?" said the sailor, drawing himself up; "no, sir-ee. All my money goes to provide bread and molasses for my wife and family."

"Why, bless my soul and body!" exclaimed the old gentleman, surveying his young companion through his spectacles in utter surprise, "you're surely not married yet, youngster."

"Yes, I regret to say I am," said the youngster in question in a passive tone, "and got a large family with large appetites to support. It's melancholy to reflect upon, but it's true. My wife keeps a billiard-saloon, and the children keep apple-stands at the corner of the streets, except my oldest daughter, and she's at service. Fine family, sir! Halloa! here we are, at the Judestown House, and there's my old friend, Mrs. Gudge."

"Humph!" grunted the old gentleman, doubtfully; "where are you from last, young man?"

"Liverpool—ship 'Sea Nymph;' master, Burleigh; first mate, Randolph Lawless, Esq., late of Heath Hill. Had some distinguished passengers out with us, too," said the young man, tightening his belt.

"Humph!" again grunted the old man. "Who were they, may I ask?"

"Certainly, you may ask, and I have great pleasure in answering, the Earl and Countess De Courcy, and their daughter, Lady Rita—perhaps you're acquainted with them already," said the young man, with a wicked look in his knowing eyes.

"No, sir, I'm not," snapped the old man, "and, what's more, I don't want to be, either, whether you believe it or not."

"Well, it's their loss then; that's all I have to say about it. Here we are at anchor, at last. Halloa, Mrs. Gudge! don't you know me?" exclaimed the young man, springing lightly from his lofty perch and alighting like a cat on his feet.

"Why, Master Ranty! is this yourself?" cried Mrs. Gudge, clasping her fat hands and going off into a transport of delight, wonderful to behold. "Dearie me! how glad I am! how tall you are, and how brown, and handsomer than ever, I declare!"

Our old friend, Ranty, laughed, and dashed back his sun-browned locks off his happy, thoughtless face, as he answered:

"I believe you, Mrs. Gudge; so handsome, in fact, that they wanted to take away the Apollo Belvidere—a gentleman you are not acquainted with, Mrs. Gudge—and put me in his place. My modesty, of which I have at least the full of a tar-bucket, would not permit me to listen to such a proposal a moment. And now, my dear madam, how are all my friends at Heath Hill and Old Barrens?"

"First-rate!" replied Mrs. Gudge; "the judge was here, not ten minutes ago, with that big, rough fellow, with all the hair about his face; Black Bart they call him."

"One of those notorious smugglers! whew! I hope my excellent father is not taking to contraband courses in his latter days. What, in the name of Amphitrite, could he want of Black Bart?"

"Well, he said he wanted information about the smugglers, and he sent my old man to look for Bart."

"Humph! Set a fox to catch a fox! I wonder how he succeeded. Seen our Pet, lately?"

"No, not since one day she dressed herself in my Bobby's clothes, and drove young Mr. Germaine and Miss Erminie over to the cottage," said Mrs. Gudge, laughing.

"Dressed herself in Bob's clothes! what the dickens did she do that for?"

"For fun, she said; none of us knew them that day except her, and she drove them over without their ever finding her out. Miss Pet always is doing something out of the way, you know, Master Ranty."

"And how is Mr. Germaine and Miss Erminie, Mrs. Gudge?"

"Very well, indeed! Lor' bless me! you would hardly know Mr. Ray; he's shot up like a Maypole, and got one of them nasty mustarches onto his upper lip. Of all the ugly things they beats all. It actually makes my flesh creep to see them eating or drinking with them on. I'm glad you don't wear one, Master Ranty, for of all the disgraceful things—" Mrs. Gudge paused, and rolled her eyes as in intense disgust, by way of filling up the hiatus.

“It’s no merit of mine, I am afraid,” said Ranty, passing his hand over his lip; “I’ve been mowing away for the last three years; but owing to some mysterious dispensation of Providence, or the barrenness of the soil, or some other inscrutable reason, nothing can be induced to sprout. I feel myself put upon by Fate, I do so, Mrs. Gudge! There’s Ray, now with whiskers, flourishing, no doubt, like a green bay tree; and here am I, a young man twice as deserving, with a face as smooth as a sheet of foolscap. It’s a darned shame, and I won’t put up with it, hanged if I do! Mrs. Gudge, let me have a horse and wagon, or a superannuated gander, or a go-cart, or some other quadruped to take me home. Since I must tear myself away, I may as well do it first as last.”

Mrs. Gudge opened the door, and called to Bobby to bring round a horse; and soon after that hopeful made his appearance, leading the animal by the bridle. Ranty waved a good-by to Mrs. Gudge, flung a handful of coppers to her son, jumped into the saddle, and was off, as Bob Gudge afterward expressed it “like Old Nick in a gale of wind.”

Ranty’s eyes lit up with pleasure as the old, familiar scenes came once more in view. There was the forest road, bringing back the memory of the dangerous, practical joke they had played on Pet. There was Dismal Hollow, silent, grim gloomy, and lonely—a fit habitation for Miss Priscilla Toosypegs. There was the Barrens; there was the little, white, vine-shaded cottage; and yonder in the distance, dazzling in its spotless paint, was the staring, garish White Squall. There, too, was the brown-scorched road leading through the purple bloom of the heath to his own ancestral home of Heath Hill.

“Now to give them a surprise,” said Ranty, as he alighted at the little cottage-gate and approached the door; “wonder if Minnie will know me; I hope she is in.”

The parlor-door lay wide open, and he looked in unobserved. It was the day on which Judge Lawless had proposed, a few hours later; and Erminie, whose gentle nature had not quite recovered from the wound his threats and harsh words had given her, sat alone with the evening shadows falling around her—her head resting on her hand, and her large, soft blue eyes dark with unshed tears. Pet had just departed; and the quietness and reaction following the luster of her exciting presence made the silence and loneliness more dreary still.

Ranty’s first impulse had been to rush in, catch her in his arms, and give her a rousing salute; but the moment he saw her sweet, pale face and drooping figure, a feeling more nearly approaching to timidity than anything our impudent young sailor had ever felt before, held him back. Somehow he had expected to see a slender, delicate little girl, such as he had last beheld her; but she had passed away forever, and here in her place sat a tall, elegant girl, with a face as lovely as the hazel-haired Madonna’s that had smiled upon him in the dim, old cathedral-aisles of glorious Italy. He took one step forward; she lifted her head with a startled look; her eyes met his, and she started impetuously to her feet.

“Erminie!”

“Ranty! Oh, Ranty! I am so glad!”

She caught his hand in both hers, while her face, a moment before so pale, flushed with delight, and the violet eyes were fairly radiant with joy.

“Oh, Ranty, I am so glad! When did you come?”

“Got to Baltimore day before yesterday. I suppose you hardly expected to see me to-night, Erminie?”

“No, indeed! And it is the most delightful surprise!" exclaimed Erminie, her beautiful face irradiated with joy, and forgetting she was no longer speaking to the boy Ranty. But when she caught his eyes fixed upon her with a look the boy had never worn, the flush rose painfully even to her very forehead. She dropped his hand, while her eyes fell, and she said, in a less assured tone:

“Sit down; you must be tired after your journey. I am very sorry Ray is not at home to meet you.”

“Never mind; I will see him to-morrow. And all my friends have been quite well since I left, Erminie?”

“Yes, all. If you had arrived ten minutes sooner, you would have seen Pet. She has just gone.”

“Well, I will shortly have that pleasure. How tall you have grown, and how you have changed since I saw you last, Erminie!”

He meant more the emphatic but undefinable change from childhood to womanhood, than that of her looks. Perhaps Erminie understood him, for she said, laughing:

“Not for the worse, I hope. You, too, have changed, Master Ranty.”

“Well, not much, I think; I have grown five or six feet taller, and my complexion has become a genteel brown; but, otherwise, I am the same Ranty Lawless I went away.”

“A little quieter, I should hope, for the peace and well-being of the community at large. Do you still retain the high opinion you had of yourself before you left?”

“Yes, slightly increased,” said Ranty, who had now recovered all his customary nonchalance of manner. “There was a little lady out with us from England whose precious life I had the pleasure of saving; and with whose raven eyes and coal-black hair I would have fallen in love, but for the thought of a dear little blue-eyed fairy at home, who promised to wait for me until I could come back. Do you remember that promise, Erminie?”

“I only remember you were very absurd,” said Erminie, laughing and blushing. “Don’t talk nonsense; but tell me how you were so fortunate as to save the lady’s life?”

“Well, one windy evening, a little before dark, this little Lady Rita, who by the way, though the haughtiest, sauciest young damsel I ever encountered, was quite courageous, came upon deck, and insisted on remaining there, in spite of all expostulations to the contrary. She was leaning over the side, and I was standing near, watching her, for want of something better to do, when the vessel gave a sudden lurch round. I heard a scream, and beheld the place where her little ladyship had lately stood vacant. I caught sight of her the next moment struggling in the waves; and, in a twinkling, I was in after her. Lady Rita, who had hitherto looked down upon me and all the rest of us with sublimest hauteur and vestal prudery, made not the slightest objection to be caught in my arms now; on the contrary, she held on with an energy that nearly strangled me. A boat was lowered, and we were fished up, clinging to each other, as if bound to hold on to the last gasp. Lady Rita, according to the incomprehensible custom of the female sex in general, fainted stone dead the moment she found herself in safety. It’s interesting to faint, and I was looking round for a nice place to follow her example; but upon second thoughts I concluded I wouldn’t. There were no nice young ladies round who understood my case; and to be tickled with burnt feathers, and be drenched with cold water by a lot of sailors, was not to be thought of. Lady Rita was carried to the cabin; and a great fuss and commotion reigned there for the next two or three hours, while I was taking life easy, smoking a cigar on deck. Then the earl, her ‘parient,’ made his appearance, and completely deluged me with gratitude and thanks, which I stood like a hero, until the countess also came. Her tears and protestations of everlasting gratitude were a little too much, and I fled. I blush to say it, but I beat an inglorious retreat, for thanks are things one easily gets a surfeit of.”

“Why, Ranty, you have sailed in high company lately,” said Erminie; “earl and countess—dear me! I begin to feel quite an awe of you.”

“So you ought; and I hope you’ll continue to cherish the feeling. But, Erminie, do you know—though, as you have never seen him, it’s likely you don’t—but you have the most wonderful resemblance to Lord De Courcy I ever beheld in my life.”

“Lord De Courcy!” exclaimed Erminie, growing pale as she remembered Ketura’s fearful denunciations against all who bore that name.

“Yes, Lord and Lady De Courcy are at present in Washington City. The earl says he always felt a desire to visit this country; but, hitherto, circumstances prevented him. The countess is a lovely woman—one of the most beautiful, I think, I ever saw; and as good as she is beautiful, every one says.”

“I have heard of her before,” said Erminie, in a low, subdued tone. “Mr. Toosypegs saw her many years ago, when he was in England. At least, I imagine it was her; for she was the wife of the old earl’s son, and Mr. Toosypegs says that since the death of his father he has been Lord De Courcy.”

“Yes, so he has,” said Ranty; “he was then Lord Villiers; but really, Minnie, your likeness to him is quite wonderful.”

“Well, it is not unusual for strangers to resemble one another; though I suppose I ought to feel flattered by looking in the remotest degree like one so great and distinguished. How much I should like to see them both!” said Erminie, musingly. “I have heard so much about them from Mr. Toosypegs, and—another, that my curiosity is quite excited. And their daughter—this Lady Rita—was that what you called her? By the way, Ranty, I never heard they had a daughter.”

“Yes, they had two; the oldest died, I believe, when a child; and Lady Rita—well, some say she is not their daughter, but an adopted child. I don’t know how that may be; though, certain it is, she does not look like either of them—not half so

much as you do, Erminie. Both of them have very fair complexions, while Lady Rita is as dark as a creole. The countess, to be sure, has dark hair and eyes; but still her haughty little daughter does not resemble her in the least."

"Do they remain here long?" said Erminie, half musingly. "Oh, Ranty, how much I should like to see them!"

"Well, perhaps you may; in the overflowing of their gratitude, they made me promise to visit them *en famille*, while they remained; and if you'll only consent to keep your promise, and become Mrs. Lawless, why, you can come with me, and I know they will be delighted to welcome my wife."

"Nonsense, Ranty," said Erminie, a little impatiently, "how absurd you are! I am not to be accountable for your silly talk when we parted, I hope?"

"Well, all I have to say about it is, that there will be a case of 'breach of promise' up before the court one of these days, if you attempt to back out. Are you prepared to pay me five or six thousand dollars damages, as a plaster for my wounded feelings, may I ask, Miss Germaine?"

"As if your affections were worth one-tenth that sum, Mr. Lawless! Now, do be sensible, if you can, and tell me how long you are going to stay home."

"As to being sensible, Miss Germaine, I flatter myself I am that now; and my stay, or departure, must depend in a great measure on you."

"Now, Ranty, I shall get angry if you don't stop being so nonsensical!" said Erminie, flushing slightly. "I did hope going to sea would have put a little sense into your head; but I perceive it has had quite a contrary effect. I wish you could see Ray. These six years have made him as grave and thoughtful as a judge. I expect he will be quite famous in his profession yet."

"Well, I wish him joy of it," said Ranty. "But how any man can reconcile it to his conscience to be a lawyer, while honest, straight-forward piracy is flourishing in the South Seas, and old-fashioned, upright brigands infest the Pyrenees, is beyond my comprehension! However, every one to their taste; and, luckily, this is a free country. Good-by, now, Miss Germaine. Fate and the approach of night compels me to be off; but you may look out for me an hour or so before day-dawn to-morrow."

And Ranty got up, shook hands with Erminie, mounted his horse, and rode off.

"Now Ranty Lawless," said that gentleman to himself, when fairly on the road, "it's my private belief and impression that you are falling in love, young man! What a sweet, artless, lovely face the girl has got, any way! And those eyes—those wistful, tender, violet eyes—how they do go through a fellow's vest-pattern, though! Ranty, my son, take care! Have you escaped the witchery of dark-eyed Spanish donas; the melting glances of Italia's raven-haired daughters; the enchantment of the little knobby-footed, suffron-skinned ladies of the Celestial Empire; the bedevilment of the free-and-easy mesdames of free-and-easy France, to be hooked the moment you land, by the blue eyes, golden hair, pearly skin, and pink cheeks of this little cottage-girl, Erminie? What will the governor say, I want to know? Well, it's time enough to think of that yet. No use worrying till the time comes. 'Care killed a cat,' they say; so, lest I should share in that unfortunate quadruped's fate, I shall take things easy. There's the White Squall. I think I shall go over and see my worthy uncle, the admiral."

So saying, Ranty rode rapidly in the direction of the flaring white mansion, and entered, without ceremony. The admiral, as usual, was alone in the parlor, and gave his nephew a boisterous welcome, shaking his hand as if he had hold of the handle of a pump, until Ranty winced and jerked it away. Then, having replied to the avalanche of questions with which the ancient mariner overwhelmed him, Ranty rose, and rode homeward, to surprise the household there.

Surprise the household he did—at least all of them to be found—which were only the servants. The judge was gone, and so was Pet.

"Why, Aunt Deb, Pet started for home nearly an hour ago," said Ranty, somewhat alarmed. "What can have become of her?"

"Lors! Mars'r Ranty, how de debbil I know?" said Aunt Deb, who was given to profanity now and then. "Dar ain't nebber no tellin' whar dat ar little limb pokes herself. She might be at dem old Bar'ns, or she might be at Dismal Holler, or she might be gone to old Harry—"

"Old Harry!" interrupted Ranty, angrily. "What do you mean?"

“Why, ole Mars’r Harry Hateful; dar ain’t no tellin’ whar she is!”

“Well, that’s true enough. I wish she were here, however. Perhaps she won’t be back to-night,” said Ranty, walking up and down the room, and whistling a sea air.

Aunt Deb bustled out to prepare supper, to which meal our young sailor sat down alone, wondering, alternately, where Pet could be, and thinking of the witching, violet eyes of Erminie. Then, when it was over, he took up a book, to beguile time, hoping still to see Pet; but when eleven o’clock struck, he gave up the idea of seeing her that night, and retired to bed, to dream of Erminie.

As he had partaken of the evening meal alone the evening before, so was he forced to sit *solo* at breakfast. Neither Pet nor the judge had returned, nor were any tidings to be obtained of their whereabouts; and, after breakfast, Ranty immediately rode over to the Barrens.

In the cottage he found Ray, who had just returned, who was receiving an account of Ranty’s arrival from the lips of Erminie, when the entrance of that young gentleman himself cut it short. Warm and hearty was the greeting between the two friends; for never brothers loved each other better than did they.

“I suppose Pet was in perfect ecstasies of delight at your unexpected return,” said Erminie, taking her work and sitting down on her low rocking-chair by the window.

“Pet! why the little gadabout never was at home at all last night; and where the deuce to find her, I don’t know.”

“Not at home!” said Erminie, in surprise. “Why, where can she be, then?”

“Well, Miss Germaine, that is just what I would feel very much obliged to you to tell me. It’s very like looking for a needle in a hay-stack, I’m inclined to think, to go hunting for her. The best way, is to take things easy, and let her come home when she likes.”

“Why, it is most singular,” said Erminie. “I know she started for home, and took the road leading to Heath Hill. Perhaps she changed her mind, and went to the White Squall.”

“No; that she didn’t,” said Ranty. “I was there last night after leaving here. The girl’s bewitched; and perhaps she rode off on some Quixotic expedition by herself.”

“She was on foot,” said Erminie, now really growing alarmed. “Starlight was lame or something; so she started to walk home. Oh, Ranty! I am afraid that something has happened to her,” she cried, looking up in terror.

“Oh, pooh, Ermie! What could happen to her between this and Heath Hill? Nonsense!” said Ranty, beginning to look uneasy.

“What hour did she leave here, Minnie?” asked Ray, his dark face paling slightly at the thought of danger to her.

“It was nearly dark, and she had to walk all alone over that lonesome heath. Oh, Ray! something must have happened to her!” cried Erminie, growing white with vague alarm.

“Why, what in Heaven’s name could have happened to her?” asked Ranty, catching the infection of Erminie’s fears. “No one has ever been molested on the heath.”

“Those lawless smugglers are continually prowling around now; and it is very unsafe for a young girl to venture in such a lonely place, unprotected, after night. Good heavens! if she should have fallen into their hands!” cried Ray starting up, in consternation.

“Oh, Ray! I hope not. Oh, Ray! do you really think she has?” exclaimed Erminie, clasping her hands in mortal terror.

“There is no telling. Some of that lawless gang are continually prowling about the woods, and shore, and heath, and if they saw Pet—Miss Lawless,” he added, checking himself, and biting his lip—“they would have made her a prisoner at once. There is no deed of violence too dark or dreadful for them to do. They are something worse than smugglers, I more than suspect. This smuggling, I fancy, serves but as a cloak for the far worse crime of piracy. I have heard that their leader—Captain Reginald, they call him—is one of the most reckless and daring desperadoes that ever made general war under the black flag; and those of his crew that I have seen roving about here, look to be cut-throats, savage enough for anything, from wholesale murder downward. Great Heaven! if Petronilla should have fallen into their hands!” said Ray, pacing up and down in much agitation.

“But it cannot be, Ray; it is impossible, absurd, I tell you. Why, man, what could these buccaneers possibly want with

Pet? A nice prize she would be for any one to take in tow!" said Ranty, getting alarmed in spite of himself.

"They might take her in the hope of obtaining a large ransom for her release, or they might—oh! the thought is too horrible to contemplate!" exclaimed Ray, almost fiercely. "Ranty, why are we losing time here, when your sister may be in such danger? This is no time for idle talking. About! mount! and off in search of her! I will instantly follow!"

"Well, but wait a minute, Ray, before starting on this wild-goose chase," said Ranty. "How do we know that she is not safely housed in Dismal Hollow, or somewhere in Judestown, all this time, while we are raving about pirates and abductors?"

"Oh, she is not! she is not!" cried Erminie, wringing her hands. "She started for Heath Hill, and had no intention of going anywhere else. Wild and daring as she is, she would not venture to walk alone through the forest after night. Oh, holy saints! what can have become of her?"

"We are losing time talking," said Ray, whose face was now perfectly colorless with contending emotions. "Mount, Ranty, and ride back to Heath Hill and the White Squall, and see if she has returned to either place since you left. I will go to Dismal Hollow and Judestown, and search for her there. If she is to be found in neither of these places, then it must be too true that she has fallen into the hands of the smugglers."

Ranty, alarmed, but still incredulous, sprung on his horse and galloped rapidly in the direction of the White Squall, while Ray, at an equally rapid and excited pace, took the opposite road leading to Dismal Hollow. And Erminie, white with vague, nameless, but terrible apprehension, remained behind, to pace up and down the floor, wring her hands and strain her eyes in anxious watching for their return.

Ranty was the first to return, with the alarming tidings that nothing had been heard of her at either place since. Nearly wild with terror now, Erminie continued her excited pace up and down the room, crying bitterly.

"Oh! I should not have let her go! I should not have let her go! I ought to have kept her all night. I knew it was dangerous crossing the heath, and I should not have let her attempt it alone. Oh, if Ray would only come!"

But another long, seemingly interminable hour passed before Ray made his appearance, and then he came dashing up, pale, wild and excited.

His eyes met Ranty's as he entered. That glance told all—both had failed.

"You have not found her?" said Ranty, hurriedly.

"No; but I heard enough to confirm my worst suspicions. Late yesterday afternoon, Orlando Toosypegs says he saw one of the gang, a fellow called Black Bart, accompanied by some one else, he could not discern who, but doubtless another of the outlaws, take the forest-road leading this way. Pet has been waylaid and entrapped by them, there can be no doubt; for neither of them have been seen since."

Erminie dropped, like one suddenly stricken, into a seat, and hid her face in her hands. Brother and lover looked in each other's pale faces with an unspoken: "What next?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FACE TO FACE.

—"Ah me!
The world is full of meetings such as this."
—WILLIS.

"What next?"

It was Ranty who spoke in a deep, excited voice. Ray, white and stone-like, stood with one arm resting on the mantel, his face shaded by his heavy, falling hair, his deep breathing painfully breaking the silence. Ah! in that moment how the gossamer wall of his sophistry was swept away! He had flattered himself his resolution was strong enough to keep him

from loving Pet; but now, now that she was gone, and perhaps forever, the truth stood glaring out in all its vividness, and he felt that he loved her with his whole heart and soul, as only a strong, fervid, passionate nature like his could love. His strong chest heaved with an emotion too deep and intense for words; and as he thought of her, alone and unprotected, in the power of those ruthless men, his very respiration stopped, until it became painful to listen for its return. Ranty's question roused him; and the necessity for immediate action restored, in some measure, his customary calmness and clear-headed energy.

"We ought instantly engage the services of the Judestown police, and begin a vigorous search, I think," said Ranty.

"Search! have not the police and the revenue officers searched for this infernal smugglers' den for the last six months without ceasing? and yet they were as near finding it the first day as they are now."

"Then what is to be done?" said Ranty. "We must try some means to find her, that is certain. Poor Pet! Oh! I always had a sort of presentiment that mad girl would get herself into some scrape of that kind, sooner or later. Hang the villains! I would like to swing every one of them to the yard-arm myself."

"Ought you not to send word to your father?" suggested Erminie whose face was perfectly colorless with fear for Pet.

"I suppose I ought; but where am I to find him? He has gone, as well as Pet, and no one seems to know in what direction he may be found. The smugglers can't surely have taken him, too."

"Though I know it will be fruitless, I see nothing for it but to follow your advice, and inform the Judestown authorities. The shore in every direction must be searched; for if heaven and earth has to be roused, we must find your sister!" exclaimed Ray.

"What if they have taken her off to sea?" suggested Ranty.

Ray started violently for a moment, at the terrible idea; the next, a contrary conviction settled in his mind and he said:

"I hardly think so; they would not be so precipitate. At all events, by commencing a thorough search immediately we may discover some clue to her whereabouts. We had best return immediately to Judestown, and enlist all we can in the search."

"We will have no difficulty in finding volunteers for the hunt," said Ranty. "Pet was always an immense favorite with every one, and the whole town, I believe, would rise in a body to look for her, did we wish it. I would not give much for Black Bart's life if he attempts to show himself to the mob after they hear this."

So saying, the two passed out, mounted their horses, and set off for Judestown.

If that morning had seemed long to Pet in her prison, doubly long did it appear to Erminie, who, too uneasy and restless either to sit still or work, paced up and down the room, or passed in and out of the cottage, straining her eyes to catch a glimpse of the first who would come with news of Pet. But the morning passed and no one came; and sick, weary, and worn out with anxiety and disappointment, she sunk down on a seat, and hid her face in her hands in a passionate burst of tears.

A heavy, plodding step coming up the graveled walk in front of the cottage roused her, at last. She sprung to her feet, and stood with cheeks flushed, lips parted, eyes dilated, and bosom heaving, with eager expectation.

But it was only the admiral, who came stumping in, looking more completely mystified and bewildered than any one had ever seen him before in their lives.

"Helm-a-lee!" roared the admiral, thrusting his huge head in the room. "What the dickens has little Firefly run afoul of now, or what's in the wind, anyway?"

"Oh, Admiral Havenful! Pet's lost! been carried off by those dreadful smugglers!" said Erminie, sinking back in a fresh burst of passionate grief.

"Stand from under!" exclaimed the old sailor, in a slow, bewildered tone, every reasoning faculty completely upset by this astounding intelligence.

"Oh, it was my fault! it was my fault!" cried Erminie, with bitter self-reproach. "I should not have allowed her to go last night at all. Oh, I will never, never forgive my self as long as I live," and another burst of tears followed the declaration.

"Stand from under!" reiterated the admiral, still "far wide"; "Firefly carried off by the smugglers! Good Lord! Keep her round a point or so."

“They will take her off to sea, and she will never come back again. Oh, Pet,” wept Erminie in a wild outburst of grief.

“Now, Snowdrop, just hold on a minute, will you?” said the admiral, facing briskly round. “Just stand by till we see how we’re coming. The question is, now, where’s Firefly? That’s the question, ain’t it, Snowdrop?”

Erminie’s sobs were her only answer.

“Just stand by a minute longer, will you?” said the admiral, lifting up the forefinger of his right hand, and aiming it at Erminie’s head. “Firefly’s gone—sunk—went to the bottom, and no one left to tell the tale—ain’t that it, Snowdrop?”

Erminie, knowing the admiral must be answered, made a motion of assent.

“Now the question is,” went on the admiral, bringing the finger down upon the palm of his other hand, and looking fixedly at them; “the question; what did Firefly run afoul of? She must have run afoul of something, mustn’t she, Snowdrop?”

“Y-e-s, I suppose so,” said Erminie, not very clearly understanding the admiral’s logic.

“And that something she run afoul of is supposed to be smugglers. Port your helm,” roared the admiral, on whose somewhat obtuse mind the whole affair was slowly beginning to dawn.

“Oh, Admiral Havenful! what do you think they will do with her? Surely they will not kill her!” exclaimed Erminie looking up imploringly.

“Just you hold on a minute longer, will you, Snowdrop?” said the admiral, looking fixedly at the fingers lying on his broad left palm, “and don’t you keep putting me out like this. Pet’s run afoul of smugglers; they have boarded her, and she’s knocked under and surrendered. Ain’t that it, Snowdrop?”

“They have carried her off—yes, sir,” wept Erminie.

“They have carried her off—yes, sir,” slowly repeated the admiral, in the same tone of intense thoughtfulness, “they have carried her off, but where to? There it is, Snowdrop, where to?”

“Oh, I wish I knew! I wish I knew! If we could only discern that, all would be well. Oh, dear, dear Pet!”

“Pet has run afoul of smugglers and been carried off, nobody knows where. Stand from under!” yelled the admiral, in a perfect paroxysm of grief and consternation, as the whole affair now burst in full force upon him.

There was no reply from Erminie, who still wept in silent grief.

“Main topsail haul!” shouted the old man, in mingled rage and grief, as it all dawned clearly upon his mind at last. “Pet’s gone! Been captivated; been boarded, scuttled, and sunk. Oh, perdition!” yelled the admiral, jumping up and stamping up and down, grasping his wig with both hands, in his tempest of grief. “Oh, Firefly, you dear, blessed little angel! You darned, diabolical little fool! Going and trusting your nose into every mischief that ever was invented. Oh, you darling, merry little whirligig! You confounded, blamed, young demon! To go and get yourself into such a scrape. Oh, if I only had hold of the villains! They ought to be hung to the yard-arm, every blessed one of them. Oh, Pet, my darling! By the body and bones of Paul Jones, you ought to be thrashed within an inch of your life. Oh, oh, oh, oh!” roared the admiral, in a final burst of grief, as he flung himself into his chair and began a fierce mopping of his inflamed face.

While thus engaged, another step resounded without—a slow, lingering, dejected step—and the next moment the pallid features, and mild blue eyes of Mr. Toosypegs beamed upon them from the door.

“Orlando,” shouted the afflicted admiral, “she’s went and did it! Firefly’s gone and did it! Yes, Orlando, she’s gone to Davy’s locker, I expect, before this, and the Lord have mercy on her soul!”

“Admiral Havenful, I’m really sorry to hear it, I really am,” said Mr. Toosypegs, wiping his eyes with the north-west corner of his yellow bandanna. “I never felt so bad about anything in my life. I never did, I assure you, Admiral Havenful. But why can’t they go to Davy’s locker after her? I should think they wouldn’t mind the expense in a case like this.”

“Orlando C. Toosypegs,” said the admiral, severely; “I hope you don’t mean to poke fun at people in grief; because if you do, it shows a very improper spirit on your part, and a total depravity I should be sorry to see, Orlando Toosypegs.”

“Why, my gracious!” said the astonished and aggrieved Mr. Toosypegs; “what have I said? I’m sure, Admiral Havenful, I hadn’t the remotest idea of being funny, that ever was; and if I said anything that wasn’t right, I beg your pardon for it,

and can assure you I never meant it."

"Well, then, enough said," testily interrupted the admiral. "Now, Snowdrop, look here; what are they going to do about Pet?"

"Ray and Ranty have gone to Judestown to get the people to search. They think she is somewhere along the beach, in some hidden cave the smugglers have there."

"U-m-m! very good," said the admiral, nodding his head approvingly; "perhaps they will find her yet. I'll go over to Judestown myself, and ship along with the rest. We'll scour the whole coast; so that if she's above water anywhere, we must find her."

"I'll go, too, Admiral Havenful," said Mr. Toosypegs, with more alacrity than he usually betrayed; "that is, if you think there is no danger with them smugglers. You don't think there is any danger, do you, Admiral Havenful?"

"Blame them—yes!" roared the admiral, fiercely. "I wish to the Lord Harry I could only come across some of them! I'll be blowed if I wouldn't give them the confoundedest keel-hauling they ever got in their lives! If you are afraid, Orlando Toosypegs," said the admiral, facing round with savage abruptness, "stay at home! Any man that wouldn't volunteer in a case like this, ought to be swung to the yard-arm and left to feed the crows. You would be a blue lookout for the commander of a privateer—wouldn't you?"

"Admiral Havenful," said Mr. Toosypegs, abashed and rather terrified by this outburst, "I beg your pardon, and I ain't the least afraid. I'll go with you, and do my best to help you to keel-haul the smugglers, whatever that may be. Miss Minnie, good-by. Don't take on about it, because we'll be sure to find Miss Pet and bring her home. I dare say the smugglers will give her up, if they're only asked politely."

The admiral heard this comforting assurance with a snort of unspeakable contempt, and then waddled out; and groaning bodily and mentally, mounted Ringbone, and accompanied by Mr. Toosypegs, set out at the rate of half a knot an hour to Judestown.

During the remainder of the day, Erminie was left alone, half wild with alternate hope, terror, anxiety, expectation. Her busy fingers, for a wonder, were idle now, as she passed continually in and out, watching, with feverish impatience, the forest road, in the hope of seeing some one who could give her some news of how the search progressed.

But night came, and no messenger had arrived to relieve her torturing anxiety.

It was a sultry, star-lit night. Not a breath of air stirred the motionless leaves of the forest trees, and the clear chirp of the katy-did and lonely cry of the whippoorwill alone broke the oppressive silence. Down on the shore below, she could faintly hear the dreary murmur of the waves as they sighed softly to the shore; and at long intervals the wild, piercing cry of some sea-bird would resound about all, as it skimmed wildly across the dark, restless deep. The wide, lonesome heath was as silent as the grave; and the long line of cherry-red light that usually shone over it from the parlor-windows of the White Squall was not visible to-night—the dreary darkness betokening its master was away. The forest lay wrapped in somber gloom, looming up, like some huge, dark shadow, in the light of the solemn, beautiful stars.

All within the cottage was silent, too. Ketura had long ago retired, and the negress, Lucy, was sleeping that deep, death-like sleep peculiar to her race.

Standing in the shadow of the vine-shaded porch, Erminie watched with restless impatience for the return of some one from Judestown—her whole thought of Pet and her probable fate. Unceasingly she reproached herself for having allowed her to depart at all that night; never pausing to reflect how little Pet would have minded her entreaties to stay when she took it into her willful little head to go.

The clock struck nine, and then ten; and still no one came.

Half-despairing of their return that night, Erminie was about to go in, when the thunder of horses' hoofs coming through the forest road arrested her steps.

The next moment horse and rider came dashing at a mad, excited gallop up to the gate, and Ray leaped off and approached.

"Oh, Ray, is there any news of her? Is she found?" eagerly exclaimed Erminie.

"No; nor is she likely to be as far as I can see," said Ray, gloomily. "Not the slightest trace of her has been found, though the whole beach has been searched, from one end to another. They have given it up now, and gone home for to-night.

Ranty and the admiral stay in Judestown all night, and the hunt is to be resumed to-morrow, with the same success, I suppose. They are mad—worse than mad—to think they will ever see her again."

He flung himself into a chair, and leaned his head on his hand, while his thick, jet-black hair fell heavily over his face.

Something in his look, tone, and attitude awed and stilled Erminie into silence. Though her own gentle heart seemed bursting with grief, there was a depth of passionate despair in his that repressed all outward sobs and tears. In silence they remained for a while, she silently watching him, and trying to choke back her sobs; and then, going over, she touched him gently on the arm, and said:

"Dear Ray, let me get you some supper; you have tasted nothing since early this morning."

"Supper! Do you think I could eat, now?" he cried, with fierce impatience. "I do not want any. Go!"

"Dear Ray, do not look and speak so strangely. Perhaps you will find her to-morrow."

"Perhaps—perhaps! When a man has lost all he loves in the world, there is a great consolation in a cool 'perhaps he may find it again.' Do you think those hell-hounds would spare her a moment, once they got her in their power! Oh, Petronilla—bright, beautiful Petronilla! lost, lost, forever!"

"Ray, Ray!" exclaimed Erminie, in low, terrified tones, as a new light broke upon her, "did you love Petronilla?"

"Love?" he cried, with passionate fierceness, starting up and shaking back his thick, dark hair. "Yes; I loved her with a love that you with your gentle nature and calmly-beating heart can never dream of. I loved her as only those can love whose veins, like mine, run fire instead of blood. Now that she is forever lost to me, I may confess; what no living mortal would ever have discovered else. Yes; I loved her! What do you think of my presumption, little sister? I, the beggared grandson of a despised gipsy, educated by the bounty of her uncle, dared to lift my eyes to this heiress, beauty and belle—this proud daughter of a prouder father. Loved her? Yes; beyond the power of words to tell!"

One white arm was around his neck, and Erminie's soft, pitying lips were pressed to his forehead of flame. She did not speak—no words were needed; that silent caress bespoke her deep sympathy.

He sat still and silent for a moment; and then he started up and seized his hat to go.

"Are you going out again, Ray?" asked Erminie, surprised and uneasy.

"Yes; for an hour or so. I cannot stay here, with this fever fire in heart and brain."

He walked rapidly away from the cottage, and, as if involuntarily, his steps turned in the direction of the shore. Right over the shore, in one place, the rocks projected in a sort of shelf not more than five feet from the ground. Underneath they went in abruptly, and thus a sort of natural roof was formed; and the sheltered place below had been the favorite play-ground of his boyhood.

Up and down this ledge he paced, now, absorbed in his own bitter thoughts, and totally unheeding the flight of time. One hour, two, three passed; and still he remained, thinking of the lost one.

Suddenly he paused. Did his ears deceive him, or did he hear voices underneath. His own steps were muffled by the velvety carpet of moss and grass that covered the place, and he walked to the outer edge and listened intently. Yes; there were voices underneath, talking in low, cautious tones. His heart gave a great throb, and he got down on his hands and knees and peered for one moment over the cliff. Right beneath were some half-dozen rough, uncouth-looking fellows, in the garb of sailors, and one of them, Black Bart, he remembered to have often seen in Judestown. Had he discovered the smugglers' haunt at last?

Laying his head close to the ground, he could catch, at intervals, this conversation:

"Yes; he's gone for good; cleared out when he found he must be discovered. What a pretty mess you made out of it, Bart, taking the wrong gal, after all," said one of them.

"Well, it wasn't my fault," growled Black Bart. "How was I to know one from t'other? Serves the old sinner right, too, to get taken in. Curse Garnet! This comes of trusting these infernal land-sharks."

"What a beautiful hunt they had over the beach to-day!" said another, with a low chuckle. "They'll be at it to-morrow, too, and have their labor for their pains. Well, cap'n, does the gal still stick to her story that she ain't the one she ought to be?"

The reply to this was given in so low a tone that Ray could not hear it, and in his intense eagerness he leaned further over to listen. But, as he did so, he lost his balance. He strove to save himself, but in vain; over he must go; and seeing there was no help for it, he took a flying leap, and landed right in the midst of the astounded freebooters!

With interjections of surprise and alarm, half a dozen bright blades instantly flashed in the moonlight; but ere any violence could be offered, the tall form of the outlaw chief interposed between them, and father and son stood face to face!

CHAPTER XXXV.

FATHER AND SON.

"When lovers meet in adverse hour,
'Tis like a sun-glimpse through a shower—
A watery ray, an instant seen,
Then darkly-closing clouds between."
—SCOTT.

Silently they confronted each other—those two, so nearly connected—so long separated—so strangely encountered now. Did no "still, small," inward voice whisper to each that they were father and son? Was the voice of Nature silent, that they should gaze upon each other as strangers gaze?

Yes, even so; for although the outlaw chief started for a moment to see before him the living embodiment of himself at the same age, the emotion passed in a moment, and the strange resemblance was set down to one of those accidental likenesses that so often surprise us, and which cannot be accounted for. Ray, too, fancied this dark, daring, reckless-looking chieftain resembled himself somewhat; but the passing thought had even less effect upon him than it had on the other.

The men, still grasping their swords, had encircled Ray, and were glaring upon him with darkly-threatening eyes, as he stood boldly erect, and undauntedly confronting the smuggler-chief.

"Well," said that personage, at last, breaking the silence, and calmly surveying the intruder from head to foot, "who the foul fiend are you, young man, that you come tumbling from the clouds among us in this fashion?"

"He is a revenue spy. Let us pitch him in the river, cap'n!" said Black Bart.

"Silence, sir! Come, my good youth, answer: What is your business here?"

"My business is, to discover the young lady you have so basely abducted. If you are the leader of this gang of cut-throats, I demand to be instantly informed where she is!" said Ray, determined to put a bold front on the matter since he was in for it.

"Whew-w!" whistled the captain, while the men set up an insolent laugh. "For coolness and effrontery, that modest demand cannot be easily beat. And what if we refuse, young sir?"

"Your refusal will not matter much, since to-morrow your retreat will assuredly be discovered, and then you will every one meet the doom your diabolical actions deserve!"

"And what may that be, most candid youth?" said the smuggler chief, with a sneer.

"Hanging!" said Ray, boldly; "a fate too good for villains base enough to forcibly carry off a helpless young girl!"

With low, but passionate imprecations of rage, the outlaws closed around Ray; and his mortal career might have ended then and there, but that the captain a second time interfered.

"Back, men!" he said, authoritatively. "Let there be no bloodshed to-night. Do you not know there are two places where a man ought to speak without interruption?—in the pulpit and on the gallows. This foolhardy fellow is as completely in our power as though he were swinging in mid-air, so he can speak with impunity. Pray proceed, my dear sir. Your

conversation is mighty edifying and interesting. So, hanging is too good for some of us, eh? Now, what would you recommend to be done with us supposing you were our judge?"

"Burning at the stake, perhaps!" suggested Black Bart; "and after that to be hung, drawn and quartered!"

"This is no time for fooling!" exclaimed Ray, impetuously. "I demand to be instantly led to Miss Lawless, wherever she may be!"

"A demand I am most happy to comply with," said Captain Reginald. "I always do like to oblige my guests when I can. This way, my young sir. But just keep your eye on him—will you?—and see that he does not give you the slip."

"Ay, ay, cap'n," said Bart. "Hadn't I better bind and blindfold him?"

"No, it will be needless, as in all probability he will never set foot on this shore again."

"I understand: 'Dead men tell no tales!' All right, cap'n," said Black Bart with a demoniacal laugh, as the whole party, with their prisoner in their midst, started along the beach after the captain.

The cheering assurance that his fate was sealed did not in the slightest degree intimidate Ray as he walked along, with his fine form erect, his princely head thrown back, his full, falcon eye, with its clear, steady gaze, making the insolent stare of the outlaws fall. One thought was uppermost in his heart, thrilling through every nerve, throbbing in every pulse; he was drawing near Petronilla—would soon meet her, speak to her, comfort her in her captivity. What pair of pantaloons over the innocent and unsusceptible age of seven has not felt a decidedly queer sensation under his left ribs when about to meet the woman he loves? And if he fancied her pining away in "durance vile," how much his eagerness to meet, to comfort, to console her would be increased! At least, it is to be hoped it would; and it had at least that effect on Ray Germaine, who, rapidly as they walked, in his burning impatience it seemed as though they were going at a snail's pace. Even before him he beheld Pet, locked up in some desolate prison, weeping as if her heart would break, and calling on her friends to save her. Little did he dream that at that very moment she was rolling over on the floor of her room, in convulsions of laughter at the mistake Black Bart had made, and the consequent rage its discovery had thrown that worthy into.

For upward of a quarter of a mile, they walked along the long, sandy, slippery beach, and then they suddenly diverged, and turning an abrupt angle among the rocks, they came to a part of the hill overgrown with stunted spruce and cedar bushes. It was a bleak, lonely place, little frequented and with no sign of anything like a hut, or cavern, or habitation, far or near. But here the whole party came to a simultaneous halt; and the smuggler-chief, putting his fingers to his lips, gave a long, loud, sharp whistle. While Ray watched these proceedings with intense interest, part of the thick underbrush seemed to move; a huge rock was violently dislodged from its place, and a narrow, low opening, that it seemed hardly possible to enter, save on one's hands and knees, was revealed. The narrow chasm had evidently, at some remote period, been made by a convulsion of Nature, but Art had since been employed to widen, enlarge, and conceal it. The huge rock was made to fit securely, and could only be opened from within, thus defying detection. Those in search of Pet that day had passed over the spot a dozen times, without dreaming in the most remote way that there could be an opening concealed among the apparently-solid rocks.

Captain Reginald turned to the utterly-astonished Raymond, and gazed at him for a moment, with a peculiar smile of sarcastic triumph. Then stooping his tall body, he passed through the opening, and disappeared in the seemingly interminable darkness beyond.

"You go next," said Black Bart, to Ray.

Without a moment's hesitation, the young man obeyed; and having entered the aperture, found himself in the same long, narrow, dark passage into which Garnet had borne Pet the evening before. Ray descended the narrow, steep steps, faintly illuminated by the dim rays of a dark-lantern held by the man who admitted them; and following the smuggler-captain through the long, rocky passage, entered, at last, the large outer-room—the rendezvous of the outlaws.

The roughly-dressed, rougher-looking men lay, or sat, scattered about in every direction, some asleep on the floor, some talking in low tones, and others amusing themselves as they pleased. In a remote corner sat the woman Marguerite, her arms dropped on a little table, her head lying on them, as if asleep. Her presence accounted for the unusual stillness of the men.

She was not asleep, however. As the new-comers entered, she lifted her head quickly, and after a fleeting glance at her husband, fixed her eyes steadfastly on the stranger. His strange resemblance to her husband was the first thing to strike

her. She half-started up, dashed back her wild, disheveled black hair, and gazed upon him with a sharp, suspicious look. The men, too, stopped in their customary avocations to look at the new-comer, and scan him from head to foot with inquiring eyes. Ray's dark, flashing eyes fearlessly encountered theirs, as he glanced vainly around the room in search of Pet.

"Another prisoner, my good lads," said Captain Reginald, as he entered.

"Who is he, captain? who is he?" chorused half a dozen voices together.

"His name I have not yet had the pleasure of hearing. Seeing us under the rocks, and being of an inquiring spirit, he leaped down among us, and without ceremony, presented himself. Wishing to indulge the said spirit of inquiry, I persuaded him to accompany me here, and have much pleasure in making you acquainted with him now. He is very urgent to find out what has become of Miss Lawless: and as he is evidently a friend, perhaps a lover of hers, I could do no less than promise to let him see and console her in her captivity."

This speech, which was delivered in his customary half-careless, half-mocking tone, was received with a cheer and a laugh by the men. Ray, flushed and irritated, turned to the speaker, and said, passionately:

"Let me see her, then! Where is she?"

"Easy, my dear young friend—easy! Getting excited and fierce never pays in this world. You will see the young lady time enough."

At this moment, the woman Marguerite approached, and laying her hand on her husband's arm, and fixing her sharp black eyes on his face, pointed to Ray, and said something in a low, rapid tone in French.

"Ya-as," drawled Captain Reginald, passing his hand carelessly over his thick, black whiskers, and looking indifferently at the young man. "It is rather strange. I noticed the resemblance myself. How is your captive?"

Before she could reply, the curtain was pushed aside; and with wide-open eyes, flushed cheeks, and wonder, delight and incredulity on every feature, Pet stood before them. Ray's voice had reached her ear, and half-inclined to doubt the evidence of her senses, she stood there, literally rooted to the ground. Yes, there he was—his own proud, fiery, handsome self, and forgetting everything in her delight, Pet uttered a cry of joy, and sprung toward him. He took a step forward, his face flushed with many feelings, and the next moment, for the first time, Pet was held clasped in his arms.

"Oh, Ray! dear Ray! I am so glad!" exclaimed Pet, scarcely knowing what she said, in her joy and amazement. "Dearest Ray—my gracious! I didn't mean that; but, oh, Ray! I am so glad to see you again!"

"My own Petronilla! my dearest love!" he passionately exclaimed, bending over her.

"How on earth did you ever find me out, Ray, stowed away here under the earth?" asked Pet, whose utter amazement at seeing him here completely overmastered every other feeling. "Who told you these fellows had carried me off to this black hole?"

"No one—we only suspected it."

"And you know, Ray, it was the greatest mistake all through. They meant to carry off Erminie—think of that!—and they took me in a mistake. I expect they are making an awful time about it up in the upper world—ain't they? I suppose papa's gone out of his head altogether."

"Your father is not at home, Petronilla. Ranty is nearly distracted."

"Ranty? Why, Ray—my goodness, Ray! is Ranty home?"

"Yes—arrived late last night."

"Did you ever! And they had to take and carry me off at such a contrary time, and I wanted to see him so much. Well, if it's not the funniest, most disagreeable affair, from beginning to end! I say, Ray, how did you find me out, though?"

"It was all an accident. I will tell you another time. What was the cause of your being abducted this way, Pet?"

"Why, if your coming was an accident, mine was a mistake—thought it was your Erminie, you know, because I look so much like her, I expect. And now, what's going to turn up next? Are you going to take me home?"

"Hardly, I fancy," said Captain Reginald, who, with the rest, had all this time been watching them and listening, half-curious, half-amused. "Mr. Ray, if that is his name, will hardly get back as easily as he come."

“Why, you hateful old brigand! You wouldn’t be so ugly as to keep him whether he wanted to or not?” said Pet, with flashing eyes.

“Sorry to disoblige a lady, but in this case, I fear I must,” he said bowing sarcastically.

Pet, having by this time got over the first shock of her surprise, like all the rest, was forcibly struck with the resemblance between the smuggler-captain and her handsome lover. Her bright eyes danced, for a few seconds, from one to another, and then she burst out with:

“Well, now, if you two don’t look as much alike as two strung mackerels, my name’s not Pet. I said all along, Ray, you were his very image, and I’ll leave it to everybody in general if you ain’t. If you were only twenty years older, and had whiskers sticking out from under your chin like a row of shaving-brushes, you would be as much alike as a couple of peas.”

“’Pon my soul, the likeness is stror’nary!” exclaimed Black Bart, looking from one to another. “You look enough alike to be his mother, cap’n.”

“Really, I feel flattered to resemble a young gentleman half so handsome,” said the captain, in his customary tone of careless mockery, “The resemblance must be very striking, since it attracts the notice of every one.”

“I declare, it’s real funny!” said Pet. “Maybe you will turn out to be relatives, by-and-by—who knows? It always ends so in plays and novels, where everybody discovers, at last, they are not themselves at all, but somebody else.”

“May I ask the name of the gentleman whom I have the honor to resemble? I hardly think, Miss Lawless, we will turn out to be relatives, as I have not one in the wide world,” said Captain Reginald, with something like a cloud settling on his dark face.

“My name is Raymond Germaine,” said Ray, coldly.

“Germaine!” exclaimed the smuggler, starting suddenly and paling slightly, “did you say Germaine?”

“Yes, sir; what is there extraordinary in that?” asked Ray, whose arm still encircled Pet.

Captain Reginald did not reply, but paced abruptly up and down the floor for a few moments. All were gazing at him in surprise; but there was fierce suspicion in the dusky depths of Marguerite’s black eyes.

He came back at last, and resuming his former posture, said, but no longer in his cold, sarcastic tone:

“I once knew a person of that name, and its utterance recalled strange memories. It is not a very common name here—may I ask if you belong to this place?”

“No; I am English by birth, but I have lived here since a child.”

“English!”

He started wildly again, and this time looked at the young man in a sort of terror.

“Yes—or rather, no; for though born in England, I am not English. I come of another race.”

The fixed glance of the smuggler’s eyes grew each moment more intense, his dark face paled and paled, until, contrasting with his jet-black hair and beard, it looked ghastly. His breath came quick and short as he almost gasped:

“And that race is—”

“The gipsy! Yes, I am of the degraded gipsy race,” exclaimed Ray, with a sort of fierce pride, as though he dared and defied the world to despise him for that.

The smuggler-captain reeled as though some one had struck him a blow, and grasping Ray by the arm, he exclaimed, in a low, husky whisper:

“Tell me who brought you here. You were a child, you say, when you left England—who had charge of you?”

“My grandmother—a gipsy! What in the name of heaven, sir, is all this to you?” exclaimed Ray, like the rest completely astounded by this strange emotion.

“Her name!” said the outlaw, hoarsely, unheeding his question and the wonder of the rest.

“Among her tribe she was known as the gipsy queen, Ketura.”

"Just God!" exclaimed the smuggler-chief, as his grasp relaxed and with a face perfectly colorless, he stood like one suddenly turned to stone.

"Sir, what under heaven is the meaning of this?" said the bewildered Ray, while the rest looked on almost speechless with astonishment.

There was no reply. The outlaw had leaned his arm on a sort of mantel, and, with his head dropped upon it, stood like one stunned by some mighty blow. All were white and mute with wonder.

He lifted his head at last, and they started to behold its dreadful ghastliness. His eyes for some moments were fixed in a long, inexplicable gaze on the surprised face of Ray, then, in the same low, hoarse tone, he asked:

"And she, your grandmother—does she still live?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In Old Barrens Cottage; but she is a helpless paralytic."

"So near, so near! and I never knew it. Great Heaven! how wonderful is thy dispensations!" he groaned.

"Is it possible you knew her?" asked the bewildered Ray.

"Yes, I knew her," he replied, slowly. "Tell me, did she ever speak to you of your father?"

Ray's brow darkened, and his eyes filled with a dusky fire.

"She did—often. My father was drowned! He was branded, tried, convicted, and condemned for the guilt of another. *His* day of retribution is to come yet! Enough of this—I cannot understand what possible interest all this can have for you."

"You will soon learn. Come with me; Miss Lawless, remain with my wife until my return. This way, young man," said the outlaw, turning to the inner apartment and motioning the other to precede him.

The astonished Ray did so, and the curtain fell between the wonder-struck assembly outside and the twain within.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE OUTLAW'S STORY.

"They did not know how hate can burn
In hearts once changed from soft to stern,
Nor all the false and fatal zeal
The convert of revenge can feel."
—BYRON.

"Be seated," said the outlaw, with a wave of his hand.

Silent and wondering, Ray obeyed.

His strange companion walked across the room, and for some moments stood with knit brows and downcast eyes, like one absorbed in painful thought. Then he began pacing up and down, while Ray watched him, inwardly wondering whether this half-smuggler, half-pirate captain was quite right in his mind.

He stopped, at last, in his quick, excited walk as rapidly as he had commenced, and facing round to where Ray sat, demanded:

"Why did my—this gipsy, Ketura, leave England?"

"I do not know—she never told me," replied Ray.

"Old Earl De Courcy died shortly after I, her son, left England—perhaps she was instrumental in his death and was

obliged to fly."

"Of that I know nothing," said Ray, impatiently. "What has all this to do with the revelations you are to make?"

"Not much, perhaps; but I wish my question answered. You say she resides in Old Barrens cottage?"

"Yes."

"You live there too, with her, of course?"

"Yes."

"If she is, as you say, a helpless paralytic, how has she contrived to support and educate you—for I perceive you are educated?"

"It was not she who did it. I am indebted for my education to the kindness of an old gentleman who resides near us," said Ray, flushing and biting his lip till it was bloodless.

"Who attends to her now, in her helplessness?"

"Erminie and her servant."

"Erminie who? Oh, I remember; Miss Lawless spoke of some Erminie Germaine, who was to have been brought here instead of her. Who is this Erminie?"

"I cannot tell. My grandmother brought us from England together—she was a mere infant, then."

"Perhaps she is your sister?"

"No; her very looks forbid such a supposition. That there is no gipsy blood in her veins, I am confident."

"And gipsy Ketura brought her from England? Strange—strange! Who can she be?" said the outlaw, musingly. "She has often spoken to you of the De Courcy family, no doubt!"

"Yes, often."

"Did she tell you Lord Ernest Villiers married Lady Maude Percy?"

"She did."

"Do you know if they had any children?"

"I do not know."

"She never told you?"

"Never," said Ray, wondering where this "Catechism of Perseverance" was to end.

"Strange, strange—very strange!" said the outlaw, pacing up and down, with brows knit in deep thought. "And so you are determined to avenge the wrongs of your father, young man?" he said, after a pause stopping before him again.

"Yes, Heaven helping me, I will!" exclaimed Ray, fiercely.

"Heaven?" said the outlaw, with his old sneer. "It is the first time I ever heard Heaven aided revenge; Satan helping you, you mean. And how is this revenge to be accomplished?"

"Time will tell," said Ray, impatiently. "It cannot concern you in anyway, Captain Reginald; and on this subject you need ask me no more questions, for I will not answer them."

"As you please," said he, with a strange smile. "You have inherited the fiery, passionate spirit of your race, I see. Your father is, you say, drowned?"

"Yes—yes! To what end are all these questions?"

"Patience, Mr. Germaine; I will come to that presently. Did your grandmother ever speak to you of your mother?"

"Very little," said Ray, in a softer tone. "She told me she never saw her, but that she was a lady of rank. That, however, I am inclined to doubt."

"And why?"

"Because my father was a gipsy. No lady of rank, knowing it, would have anything to do with one of his class. Proud

England's proud daughters would not mate with despised gipsies."

A streak of fiery red darted for a moment across the dark face of Captain Reginald, and then passed away, leaving it whiter than before.

"Love levels all distinctions, young sir," he said, haughtily. "If she loved him would not that be sufficient to break through all the cobweb barriers of rank? Have not all social ties been proven, thousands of times, to be more flimsy than paper walls before the irresistible whirlwind of human love and passion?"

Ray thought of Pet, and his dark cheek flushed slightly. What a convenient belief this would be, dared he adopt it. He loved her, and thrilling through his heart came the conviction that she loved him. Would she, too, break down these "paper walls" for his sake? Would she give up all the world for him, as thousands had done before, according to this strange man's story?

"Your mother was a lady of rank—is a lady of rank, for she still lives!" were the next words, spoken rapidly and excitedly, that aroused him from his dangerous reverie.

"My mother lives?" exclaimed Ray, springing to his feet.

"Yes."

"Great Heaven! Where?"

"In England, most probably."

"My mother lives? Can it be possible? Who is she? What is her name?" demanded Ray, like one beside himself.

"Lady Maude Villiers, Countess De Courcy!" exclaimed the outlaw, while his dark, fierce eyes blazed.

Ray stood for an instant paralyzed; then an expression of anger and utter incredulity flushed his face and flashed from his eyes.

"My mother the Countess De Courcy!" he said, scornfully. "Do you take me for a fool, Captain Reginald?"

"Young man, before high Heaven I swear I speak the truth!" said the outlaw, solemnly. "Did not Ketura tell you the manner in which your father's marriage was brought about?"

"That he inveigled my mother into it by some unlawful means? Yes; she told me that. But, good heavens! the idea of it being Lady Maude Percy! Oh, it is absurd, ridiculous, incredible, impossible!" exclaimed Ray, vehemently.

"It is the truth! Reginald Germaine, look me in the face, and see if I am not speaking the truth."

Yes; no one could look in those dark, solemn eyes and doubt his words.

Stunned, giddy, bewildered, Ray dropped into his seat, feeling as if the room was whirling round him.

"And you—who, in Heaven's name are you, that know all this?" he passionately asked.

"That I will tell you presently. Suffice it to say that I do know that I am speaking God's truth."

"Angels in heaven! the Countess De Courcy my mother! From whom did you learn this?"

"From your father."

"My father is dead."

"Your father is not."

"What?"

"Your father is not dead!"

"Sir, you are either mad or mocking me!" exclaimed Ray, springing fiercely to his feet.

"Young man, I am neither."

"My father was drowned on his way to Van Diemen's Land."

"Your father was not."

"Great heavens, am I sane or mad?" exclaimed Ray, in a loud, thrilling tone. "Man, demon, devil! whoever you are, was

not the transport wrecked on her way from England?"

"She was."

"And all on board lost?"

"No."

"No?"

"No; I repeat. All were lost but two—your father was one of these."

"Heaven of heavens! And where is my father now?"

"That, too, you will learn anon. If you please, we will take things in the order of their occurring. Listen, now. Sit down and be calm; getting excited will do no good and only retard matters. The transport struck a sunken reef and was wrecked one stormy night. Your father and one sailor clung to a spar until daylight. By that time all the rest had disappeared—were engulfed in the ocean and perished. Captain, sailors, convicts and all were equal, at last, in the boundless sea. Before noon the next day your father and the sailor were seen and picked up by a passing vessel."

"Were you that sailor?"

"Patience, my dear sir," said Captain Reginald, with a slight smile: "who I was does not matter just now. The ship was a merchantman, bound to a far-distant port. They took us with them, and over a year elapsed before our sails filled for 'Merrie England' again. We were in the South Seas—then, as now, infested with pirates; and we never reached our island-home. For one day we were chased, overtaken, attacked and defeated by a pirate, and more than half our number found graves in the wide ocean, where many a brave heart had grown cold before, and will while the great sea rolls."

"We?" broke in Ray at this point, fixing his eyes piercingly on the other's face—"we? Then you were the sailor saved with my father?"

Again that fleeting, quickly-fading, inexplicable smile flickered for an instant round the lips of the outlaw, as he said:

"Hasty and impatient yet. You must learn that great Christian virtue, patience, Mr. Germaine; one cannot well get through the world without it. Whether I was the sailor in question, or not, does not matter; suffice it to say, I was on board the ship when she was mastered by the pirates. They were short of hands, and the captain very graciously offered their lives to those that remained, on condition of their taking an oath of allegiance to him, and becoming rovers and free lords of the high seas. One or two honest souls preferred the red maws of hungry sharks who went swimming round the ships, casting longing eyes up at us, asking, as plainly as looks could speak, for another mouthful of an old salt. They were gratified, too; for three of as good, brave, warm-hearted fellows as ever climbed the rigging walked the plank that hour, and found their graves in the capacious stomachs of the ravenous devils of sharks. Poor fellows! if there is such a place as heaven they went there straight; for heaven is as easily reached by water as land. I suppose it doesn't matter whether people are conveyed to it in canvas shrouds or inside of sharks."

"Very true," said Ray; "and you joined the pirates to aid my father?"

"Yes, we joined them; I was reckless and so was he; we did not care a fillip whether we cruised under the black flag or the red cross of St. George. Life was not of much value to him for its own sake, but he had to live for sundry notions—revenge, I fancy, being the strongest. Then he had a child living—you, Master Raymond; and though considerable of a devil himself, he had some human feeling left, and the only white spot in his soul was his love for you, for his mother, and for Lady Maude Percy. For he loved her then, loves her still, and will while life remains for him."

"And yet she scorned him," said Ray, with flashing eyes and dilating nostrils.

"Yes, she scorned him," said the outlaw, "no one else could have done it and live. But he loved her, and though he had resolved never to see her more, yet her memory and that of her child were the only bright spots remaining in his darkened life.

"Well, Mr. Germaine, he sailed along with the pirates. They were a motley assembly, that crew—men from every nation, whom crime, wrong, revenge, hatred, or any other dark, dreadful cause had driven together here to wage eternal war against the world they hated, and find their only delight in scenes of blood, pillage and murder. There were French, Spanish, Italians, English, Corsicans, and Heaven knows what besides, all jabbering together there—raising the most infernal commotion sometimes, when they got drinking and fighting, that ever shamed Babel. The discipline was pretty strict, about as strict as it could by any possibility be among such a gang, but they would break out at times, and then the

diabolical regions themselves might have found it hard to raise such scenes as ensued. There were worse crimes than murder committed, sometimes, by these human fiends; your father never took part in them, though; the memory of the past kept him from that. Standing by myself, sometimes, after witnessing things that would make your blood curdle, I used to wonder if there was a deep enough pit in hell for these fellows. When I was young I used to believe in such a place. Mr. Germaine, no doubt you do now; but somehow I got over that and sundry other pleasant beliefs of late years. Though, whenever I think of what I saw and heard on board of that cursed floating pandemonium, I wish, from the bottom of my soul, there was one to grill them alive for their deeds in the flesh."

"Did my father ever take part in these horrible scenes?" asked Ray, with a slight shudder.

"No, never!" replied the outlaw, emphatically; "your father had been a gentleman once, and his whole nature revolted against this brutality. No, he never joined these fearful revels, but he fought like the very fiend himself in open warfare, especially against the English ships. When they were attacked he was worth the whole pirate crew together. He fought, and cut, and clove, and slashed them, like the devil and all his angels. Burning and smarting still under the sense of his mighty wrongs and degradations, he seemed determined to wipe out all his sufferings in their blood. Many an English heart grew cold in death to atone for the wrong one of their countrymen had done him. He had vowed vengeance against the whole nation, and I doubt whether St. Senanus himself kept a vow more religiously both in letter and spirit.

"Well, Mr. Germaine, we cruised along with these sea-wolves for some four or five months, and kept on at our old trade of throat-cutting, plank-walking, scuttling, sinking and burning ships. Sometimes, to vary the amusement, and breathe a spell, we used to go ashore and raise old Nick generally among the peaceable inhabitants of various sea-port towns and cities. These places very soon got too hot to hold us, and we never ventured back to the same place twice; for some of the men, getting tender-hearted at times, would take a fancy to the pretty wives and daughters of the good citizens, and carry off two or three of them for the benefit of sea-air. Of course there always was the devil to pay when these little *escapades* were found out, and it was like running our heads into a hornet's-nest to go back. Your father wished to go to England and see after you, I fancy, but there was no opportunity. He managed to make his escape, however, after a long time; gave the high sea-wolves leg-bail one moonlight night, and was off. He reached England in safety, and there, the first news he had was his own death, and the marriage of Lady Maude Percy to the son of his enemy, Lord Ernest Villiers.

"The news nearly drove him mad, for his love for that beautiful lady amounted to frenzy. His intentions had been to seek you out; but when he heard of that marriage he fled from England as if the old demon was after him, and never rested till he reached the place where he knew he was most likely to meet his old friends, the pirates, again.

"Well, he found them, gave some plausible reason for his absence, and was admitted among that happy band of Christian brothers once more. He reached them just in the nick of time, too; for their commander was dead, and the whole crew were plunged in deepest affliction about it, as they were never likely to find another who could kill, slay, burn, and murder all before him, and send insubordinate sailors to kingdom come, with a rap of a marlin-spike, as neatly as he could. Your father had, from the first, been an immense favorite with them, and had obtained that powerful ascendency over them that men of refined and strong minds always possess over coarse, brute natures; and besides, he had the amiable qualities of his lamented and accomplished predecessor in a very high degree. Therefore, no sooner did he arrive than he was unanimously and with one accord, elected to the vacant command, and stood in the shoes of the never-to-be-sufficiently-mourned-for Captain Diago who, having served his Satanic Majesty like a faithful servant for five-and-twenty years in this whirligig world, went to aid him in keeping the Kingdom Infernal in order, with five ounces of lead through his skull.

"Well, Mr. Germaine, under the command of your worthy father, who, by the way, dropped his *alias* of Germaine when he first joined the pirates, the 'Diable Rouge,' as we called, very appropriately, our ship, did a flourishing business, and sunk more goodly vessels belonging to their various Christian Majesties than all the other gay crafts sailing under the black flag at the time. He did some good, too, among his own crew—put a stop to all their not-easily-to-be-told excesses, of more kinds than one, and let them know they had found their master at last. They were inclined to rebel, and did rebel at first; but he very coolly took out a brace of pistols and shot two of the ringleaders of the mutiny dead; and then, in a speech much shorter than sweet, gave them to understand that every symptom of insubordination would, in the future, be put a stop to in the same gentle and fatherly way. Well, Mr. Germaine, would you believe it, instead of flying into a rage at this, and kicking up a rumpus, they immediately conceived an immense respect for him, and from that day no Caliph Haroun Alraschid ever reigned it more royally over his bastinadoed subjects than did Captain Re—your father, on board the 'Red Devil.' On board a French privateer, that we sent to Davy Jones' one night, we found a lot of

ladies; and after sending their masculine friends to another, and it is to be hoped a better world, we transferred the fair portion of the cargo to our own ship. It was nothing unusual for us to take ladies in this way; but since your father took command they were always well and respectfully treated, and landed at the first port we touched, well supplied with money, and left to make the best of their way home. Therefore, our having three or four of the dear creatures on board now would not have been worthy of notice, had not one of them, a most beautiful French girl, and a daughter of a great magnate of the land—a marquis de something—took it into her head to fall in love with our dare-devil of a captain; and when the ship arrived at the place where the rest were to be landed, mademoiselle absolutely 'put her foot down,' to use a common expression, and flatly refused to leave him. In vain he expostulated: told her he did not love her; that the life he led was too dangerous for her to think of sharing; that his life was never safe for two consecutive minutes; that she would be wretched with him, and so forth; in fact, he talked to her as if he had been the greatest old anchorite that ever looked upon the adorable sex as a special invention of Satan—the whole thing was the old story of St. Revere and Cathleen over again. Mademoiselle wouldn't listen to reason, and determined to have him at any price. Our moral young captain hesitated at first; but she was young, beautiful, 'rounded and ripe,' and he was only frail flesh and blood like the rest of us; and the result of all her tears and pleadings was, that one evening they both went on shore together, and perpetrated downright matrimony, in free and easy defiance of all the statutes and by-laws against bigamy that ever were made. Perhaps he thought he had made enough miserable for life, and that there might be some merit, after all, in making this infatuated young creature happy. It is really wonderful how girls, all the world over, will cling to the most undesirable set of men, black-legs, pugilists, loafers, all sorts of outlawed people, and give the cold shoulder to sensible, straight-forward, every-day Christians. You may talk to them till your tongue aches, and show them the evil of their ways in the most glaring colors, their reply will be: 'I love him,' and after that you might as well try to drain the Atlantic with a teaspoon as to make them give him up; they'll cling to him like a barnacle to the bottom of an old ship. But hold on! it won't do to indulge in a train of moral reflections; for if I begin I won't know when to stop.

"Well, our captain took his pretty wife to sea with him—for, though he offered to procure a home for her on any part of the globe, she would not hear of leaving him. He was totally unworthy of such strong, passionate love as she lavished upon him, but he did all he could under the circumstances to make her happy. He liked her, she was such a strong-loving, brave-hearted girl—but he did not, could not love her. It seemed as if all love had died out of his heart until the birth of his little daughter, and then some of the old slumbering affections awoke and centered in her.

"After her birth, his better nature, or what remained of it, seemed to awake, and he grew tired and sick of the evil life he led. He had glutted his vengeance sufficiently already: and she was continually urging him to give it up; and now that time had calmed his feelings concerning the marriage of Lady Maude, he wished to return to England and seek out his other child! Such was his continual resolve, but still nearly two years elapsed before he carried it into effect. At the end of that time he gave up his command of the 'Diable Rouge' to the chief mate, and with his wife and little dark-eyed daughter Rita, set out for England. No one knew him there; time and a tropical sun had changed him wonderfully, so he was free to pursue his investigations unmolested. He made every inquiry about his mother and son; but, of course, they were in vain, since long before, they had left for this place.

"But Fate, as if not tired of showering blows upon him, had still another in reserve for him. His little daughter Rita was lost one day in the great wilderness of London, and he never saw or heard of her after."

Captain Reginald paused for a moment and averted his face, while Ray continued to listen with breathless interest.

"His wife nearly went crazy," continued Captain Reginald at last, lifting his head and speaking very rapidly; "she was crazy for a time, and he—he grew desperate. He did not rejoin the pirates—his very soul loathed them—but he became a reckless man. He roamed the world over, smuggled, ran into danger, exposed himself to death every day—and lived through all. His wife accompanied him in every danger; she never left his side during all these long, long, sorrowful years. Fate, Providence—a superior power of some sort—drove him to this coast; he found this cave, made it one of his rendezvous, and often came here, without dreaming that his mother and son were within a stone's throw of him. Truly, as I said, this world is full of paper walls, when mother, and father, and son dwell so near, and never until now met."

He paused and came over to Ray. He started to his feet and confronted the strange narrator with wonder-wide eyes.

"Restored now!" he said, wildly. "And have they met at last?"

"They have," replied the outlaw, with a strange, sad smile.

"My father! my father! where is he?" cried Ray, half delirious with all these revelations.

"He stands beside you! I am your father!" was the thrilling answer.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE ATTACK.

"——Then more fierce
The conflict grew: the din of arms; the yell
Of savage rage; the shriek of agony;
The groans of death, commingled with one sound
Of undistinguished horrors."
—SOUTHEY.

Silent, motionless, speechless, with surprise and many contending emotions, Ray stood gazing on his new-found father, like one suddenly stricken dumb. And with one hand resting on the young man's shoulders, the outlaw stood before him, looking in his pale, wild, excited face, with a strange, sad smile.

"My father!" repeated Ray, like one in a dream.

"Yes, even so; you have little cause, I fear, to be proud of the relationship. In the branded outlaw, smuggler, and pirate, Captain Reginald, you behold him who was once known as the Count Germaine, the husband of the beautiful, high-born Lady Maude Percy, and your father. Strange, strange, that we should meet thus."

For some moments Ray paced up and down the floor rapidly and excitedly, with a face from which every trace of color had fled. His father stood watching him, one arm leaning on a sort of mantel, with a look half proud, half sad, half bitter, commingled on his still fine face.

"I see you are not disposed to acknowledge the relationship between us, sir," he said, almost haughtily. "Well, I own you are not to blame for that. Let us part as we met first, as strangers; you go your way and I will continue mine! The world need never know that you are aught to the outlawed rover-chief. You are free, sir; free to go, and to take Miss Lawless with you, if you choose. I did wish to see my poor old mother before I left, but, perhaps, it is better as it is. I will leave this part of the world altogether, and return no more; the son of Maude Percy, the one love of my crime-darkened life, will never be compromised by me."

There was something unspeakably sad in the proud, cold way this was said, compared with the deep melancholy, the bitter remorse in his dark eyes. There were tears that did honor to his manly heart in Ray's eyes, as he came over and held out his hand.

"My father, you wrong me," he said, earnestly; "it was from no such unworthy feeling I hesitated to reply. These revelations came so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that for the time being I was stunned, and unable to comprehend all clearly. Outlaw or not, you are my father still; and as such, we will leave the world and its scorn together. If your crimes have been great, so have your wrongs; and let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

The hands of father and son met in a strong, earnest clasp; but the outlaw's face was averted, and his strong chest rose and fell like the waves of a tempest-tossed sea.

At this moment the curtain was pushed aside, and the Frenchwoman Marguerite, stood before them.

"Well, Marguerite?" said the outlaw, looking up.

"Did you expect any of the men to return to-night?" she asked, looking with the same glance of sharp suspicion from one to the other.

"No. Why?"

"Some of them are without; they have given the signal."

"Oh, well, tell Bart to await them. I did not expect them, but something may have brought them back. Admit them at once."

The woman turned and left the room, and the outlaw, looking at Ray, said, with a sad smile:

“Poor Marguerite! she has been faithful through all, clinging to me with a love of which I am utterly unworthy. Poor Marguerite! she was deserving of a better fate.”

“I suppose she has now quite recovered from the loss of her child,” said Ray.

“Never! she has never been the same since. Dear Rita! sweet little angel! Oh! Raymond, I loved that child as—”

The sentence was interrupted in a blood-chilling manner enough.

From the distant entrance of the cave came a wild shout of alarm, then an exulting cheer, lost in the sharp report of firearms and the trampling of many feet.

“Ha! what means this?” exclaimed the outlaw, as he dashed the curtain aside, and, closely followed by Ray, stood in the outer apartment.

The men were already on their feet, gazing in alarm in each other’s faces, and involuntarily grasping their weapons. In the midst of them stood Pet and the Frenchwoman, listening in surprise and vague alarm.

Still the noise continued. Shouts, cheers, the trampling of feet, and the report of firearms, all commingling together. At the same instant Black Bart and two others rushed in, all covered with blood, and shouting:

“Betrayed! betrayed! that devil’s whelp, Rozzel Garnet, has betrayed us, and the revenue officers are upon us red hot. Here they come with that cursed white-livered dog among them,” yelled Black Bart, as he rushed in.

“Come with me, this is no place for us,” said the woman Marguerite, as she seized Pet by the arm, and dragged her into the inner apartment.

In rushed the officers of the law, some twenty in all, three times the number of the smugglers; and their leader, in a loud, authoritative voice, commanded them to lay down their arms and surrender in the name of the law.

“Go to the devil!” was Black Bart’s civil reply, as he took deliberate aim, and sent a bullet whistling through the heart of the unfortunate man.

A shout of rage arose from the officers at the fall of their leader, and they rushed precipitately upon the outlaws. But their welcome was a warm one; for the pirates, well-knowing what would be their fate if captured alive, fought like demons, and soon the uproar in the vaults grew fearful.

“On, my brave fellows, on!” shouted Captain Reginald; “death here, if we must die, sooner than on the gallows. Ha! there goes Rozzel Garnet, the cursed infernal villain. He at least shall not escape.”

He raised his pistol, a sharp report followed, and a shriek of mortal agony; Rozzel Garnet bounded up in the air, and then fell heavily, shot through the brain.

The conflict now waxed fast and furious; but desperate as the smugglers were, they could not long hold out against three times their number, men better armed and prepared than themselves. The revenue officers closed on them; and in an incredibly short space of time three of the smugglers were securely bound, while three more lay stark and dead on the bloodstained, slippery floor of the cave.

Three times during the conflict had the arm of Ray Germaine interposed to save his father’s life, as he fought with the desperation of madness. But his single arm was unavailing to turn the fortune of war, and he saw his men falling helpless on every side of him. Still, he fought on with such desperate fierceness, that the revenue officers at last closed on him and bore him bleeding and wounded to the ground.

The conflict was ended, the revenue officers were victorious; but the victory was dearly bought, for more than half their number lay wounded or dead on the floor. They paused now, drew a long breath, and wiped the perspiration off their heated and inflamed faces.

Wounded and bleeding, the outlaw-chief lay on the ground. Half delirious with conflicting feelings, Ray knelt beside him, and strove to staunch the flowing blood.

“It is useless,” he said, with a faint smile; “I have received my death-wound. Call Marguerite; I would see her before I die, and tell my mother, my poor mother—would to God I could see her, too, once more,” he said, while a look of bitter sorrow and remorse passed over his pale face.

“You shall not die here!” exclaimed Ray, impetuously, starting up; “and you shall see her, in spite of them all. Mr.

Chesny," he added, turning to the present leader of the revenue officers, "will you permit some of your men to bear Captain Reginald up to Old Barrens Cottage immediately?"

The gentleman addressed, who knew Ray intimately, turned round in surprise. In the heat of the conflict he had not perceived him, and now he looked his astonishment at the unexpected *rencontre*.

"You here, Mr. Germaine!" he exclaimed. "Why, how comes this?"

"I was brought here a prisoner—never mind that," said Ray, impatiently; "will you permit me to have this wounded man removed?"

"Impossible, my dear fellow. He is the notorious leader of this villainous gang—an outlaw with a price on his head. I am responsible for his safe delivery into the hands of justice."

"And those hands he will never reach! Do you not see he is dying?" said Ray, passionately. "Look at him, Chesny, do you think you could bring him to Judestown in that state? Do you think he would ever reach it alive?"

"Mr. Germaine, I should like to oblige you—"

"Do it, then. Let me take him to the cottage, and I will be responsible for his not escaping. Nonsense, Chesny! You see it is impossible for him to be taken further. You must have him taken there. Sure some of you may guard the house if you fear his escaping."

"Be it so, then. Come, boys, construct something to carry this wounded man to Old Barrens Cottage on. Hallo! Miss Lawless, by all that's glorious!" exclaimed the officers as Pet, with Marguerite, appeared from the inner room.

"How do you do, Mr. Chesny? Oh, what a dreadful night this has been!" said Pet, with a shudder. "Good Heavens! is Captain Reginald dead?" she exclaimed, in consternation.

"No; wounded only; he is to be conveyed to Old Barrens Cottage. How in the world did you get here, Miss Pet?"

"Oh, they carried me off. Rozzel Garnet did."

"Well, you are the last he will carry off, I fancy. Here he lies!" said the man, touching the stark, ghastly form slightly with his foot.

"Dead!" said Pet, turning pale.

"Yes; the smuggler-chief there sent a bullet through him the first thing; and served him right, too, for peaching as he did, the mean cuss! Hurry up, boys! Oh! you've got through, I see. Lift him on it, now—gently, gently, there; you have stopped the blood, I see, Germaine; that's right. Ha! whom have we here?" he exclaimed, as his eyes fell on the woman Marguerite, who, white and cold as he by whose side she knelt, held the head of the wounded chief on her breast, and gently wiped the cold sweat off his face. "Who is the woman?"

"His wife," said Ray, in a low tone. "Let her accompany him. Miss Lawless, will you accept my escort from this den of horrors?"

"Oh, Ray! what a night this has been! And oh, I am so sorry Captain Reginald is wounded. Do you know, I liked him real well!"

Ray made no reply. In silence he drew Pet's arm through his, and she looking at him was almost startled to see, his face so stern, so set, so fearfully white.

The men bearing the wounded form of Captain Reginald had already started from the cave. Marguerite, who had uttered but one passionate exclamation, followed, still and silent, and then came Ray and Pet, with a few of the revenue officers bringing up the rear. The melancholy procession passed from the gloomy cave, now indeed a cave of horrors, with its bloody and unburied dead; and Pet drew a long, deep breath of intense relief and thankfulness as she stood once more in the open air.

"Let me run on first and tell Erminie," said Pet. "It may startle her if she is not forewarned; and then, if you like, I will ride to Judestown for the doctor. There can be no danger now."

Ray, who would not leave his father, consented; and Pet darted off over the slippery shingle and up the rocks like a young mountain deer. The men proceeded slowly with their burden, who lay with his white face upturned in the sad, solemn starlight; and who may tell the bitter, bitter, remorseful thoughts of the dark, sorrowful past, swelling in his proud

heart there. Ray and Marguerite, one on each side, were mute, too. He, with his eyes alternately fixed on the ground, and on the wounded man's face, trying to realize the astounding revelations of the night; she looking straight before her into the darkness, with her customary look of fierce, sullen despair, looking what she was—a wretched, broken-hearted woman.

There were lights and a subdued bustle in the cottage when they reached it. Erminie, white and trembling, met them at the door. Pet had told her all so breathlessly, and then had mounted Ray's horse and darted off for Judestown so quickly, that Erminie even yet only half comprehended what had taken place.

There was no time now for explanation, however. The wounded man was laid on the large, soft lounge in the parlor; and then Chesny, leaving one of his men as guard, more for form's sake than anything else, took his departure.

"Where is my grandmother, Erminie?" asked Ray, whose white, stern face, had terrified her from the first.

"In bed."

"Then go up and waken her."

"Waken her at this hour! Why, Ray!"

"Yes; you must, I tell you. Go at once."

Ray's fiercely-impatient manner and strange excitement terrified Erminie more and more; but still she ventured to lift up her voice in feeble expostulation.

"What good will it do to arouse her? She can be of no service here."

"Erminie, I tell you, you must!" passionately exclaimed Ray; "else I will go myself. Of no service here! Yonder dying man is her son—her long-lost son—supposed to have been drowned. Will you go, now?"

One moment's astounded pause, and then Erminie flew up-stairs, and entered the aged gipsy's room.

She was lying asleep, but she never slept soundly, and she opened her eyes and looked up as Erminie entered.

"Well, what is the matter?" she said, curtly.

"Oh, grandmother! you must get up!" cried Erminie, in strong agitation. "There is a man down-stairs wishes to see you."

"A man wishing to see me? What do you mean?" asked the gipsy, knitting her dark brows.

"Oh, grandmother! there is news of—of—your son."

"My son! are you going mad, girl?" cried Ketura, getting up on her elbows unassisted, for the first time in years; and glaring upon her with her hollow, lurid eyes.

"Oh, grandmother! grandmother! we were deceived—you were deceived—Ray says he was not drowned."

"Not drowned!" She passed her hand over her face with a bewildered look.

"No; it was a false report. He lives!"

With a sharp, wild cry—a strange, eerie cry, breaking the dead silence of the night, the woman Ketura strove to rise. The effort was a failure. She fell back, while every feature was distorted with wildest agony.

"Girl! girl! what have you said?" she cried out. "Did you say my son—my Reginald—lives?"

"He does! he lives! He is here to see you once more before he dies," said Ray, entering abruptly. "Hasten, Erminie! there is no time to lose."

He quitted the room as abruptly as he had entered it, and Erminie approached the bed to assist Ketura to dress. The gipsy lay like one stunned, her wild, hollow eyes rolling vacantly, her hands so tightly clenched that the nails sunk into the skin. It was evident she could not yet fully realize or comprehend what she had heard; the words had stunned her, numbing all sense and feeling.

Erminie lost no time in talking. Swiftly she proceeded to array the gipsy in a large, wadded gown, something like a gentleman's *robe de chambre*, of dark, soft woolen stuff. Ketura quietly submitted, breathing hard and fast, and glaring with her wild, unearthly eyes round the room, trying still to realize what she had heard—that her son still lived. This done, Erminie ran down-stairs and apprised Ray.

“Now, how is she to be taken down-stairs?” she asked. “Remember, she has not left her room for years.”

Ray was walking rapidly up and down the room, but paused when the low, sweet voice of Erminie fell on his ear. The Frenchwoman, Marguerite, who was kneeling beside her husband, gazing fixedly upon him, looked up for an instant, and then resumed her unwavering gaze as before.

“I will place her in her chair and carry her down,” said Ray, as he took the staircase almost at a bound.

There was little difficulty in doing this; for the gaunt, powerful frame of the once majestic gipsy queen, wasted and worn by illness and old age, was light and easily lifted, now. Ray took her in his strong arms and placed her gently in her large elbow-chair, and then proceeded to convey her below.

She laid her hand on his arm, and looked up in his face with a piteous look.

“Oh, Ray! what have you told me? Is Reginald living still?”

It was so strange and so sad to hear her—that haughty, fierce, passionate woman—speak in a tone like that, quick tears rushed to the gentle eyes of Erminie.

“Yes, he is living—he is down-stairs; but he has only come here to die!” answered Ray, hurriedly.

“Oh, Reginald! Reginald! Oh, my son! thank God for this!” she passionately cried out.

For many and many a year that sacred name had never crossed her lips. It sent a thrill, now, through the heart of Ray, as he bore her into the room where the wounded man lay.

Who shall describe that meeting? Long, long years of darkest crime and wildest woe had intervened since that lowering, lamentable day on which they had parted last. Years full of change, and sorrow, and sin, and remorse—years that had changed the powerful, passionate, majestic gipsy queen into the helpless, powerless paralytic she was now—years that had changed the handsome, high-spirited, gallant youth into the bronzed, hardened, guilty man lying there dying—passing slowly out into the dread unknown. Yet, despite time, and change, and years, they knew each other at the first glance.

“Mother,” said the smuggler, with a faint, strange smile.

“Oh, my son! my son! Oh, my Reginald! my only son!” was her passionate cry. “Has the great sea given up its dead, that I see you again?”

“You with all the world were deceived, mother. When I am gone, you will learn all. Mother, I have only come here to die.”

Her feeble arms were clasped around him; she did not seem to heed his words, as her devouring eyes were riveted on his face. He lay breathing quickly and laboriously, his face full of bitter sadness as he saw the wreck of what had once been his mother. The woman Marguerite had drawn back, and stood gazing on Ketura with a sort of still amaze. Ray was leaning against the mantel, his elbow resting on it, and his face shaded by his dark, falling hair; and Erminie, crouched on a low seat, white and trembling, sat watching all. So they remained for a long time, the dull, heavy ticking of the clock and a death watch on the wall alone breaking the dreamy silence. It was an eerie scene and an eerie hour, and a feeling of strange awe made Erminie hold her very breath, wondering how this strange, unnatural silence was to end.

The quick, sharp gallop of horses’ feet broke it, at last; and the next instant, Pet, flushed and excited, burst in, followed by the doctor and by Ranty. All paused in the door-way, and stood regarding with silent wonder, the scene before them.

Ray lifted his head, and going over, touched Ketura on the arm, saying, in a low voice:

“Leave him for a moment; here is the doctor come to examine his wounds.”

Her weak arms were easily unclasped, and she permitted herself to be borne away. Of all the strange things that had occurred that night none seemed stranger to Ray than this sudden and wonderful quietude that had come over his fierce, passionate grandmother.

The doctor approached his patient to examine his wounds, and Pet, going over, began conversing in a low tone with Erminie, telling her how she had encountered Ranty. Ray stood watching the doctor, with interest and anxiety; and as, after a prolonged examination, he arose, he approached him and said, hurriedly:

“Well, doctor?”

The doctor shook his head.

“He may linger two, three days, perhaps, but certainly not longer. Nothing can save him.”

Ray’s very breath seemed to stop as he listened, till it became painful for those around to listen for its return. The wounded man himself looked up and beckoned Ray to approach.

“I knew I was done for,” he said, with a feeble smile. “I was surgeon enough to know it was a mortal wound. How long does he say I may live?”

“Two or three days,” said Ray, in a choking voice.

“So long?” said the smuggler, a dark shade passing over his face. “I did not think to cumber the earth such a length of time. How does she bear it?” pointing to his mother.

“She has not heard it yet; she seems to have fallen into a kind of unnatural apathy. The shock has been too much for her.”

“Poor mother!” he said, in that same tone of bitter remorse Ray had heard him use before; “her worst crime was loving me too well. Bring her here; I have something to say to her which may as well be said now.”

Ray carried over the almost motionless form of the aged gipsy. The stricken lioness was a pitiable sight in her aged helplessness.

“Mother,” said the smuggler, taking the withered, blackened hand in his, and looking sadly in the vacant face, that seemed striving to comprehend what had stunned her and bewildered her so strangely.

His voice recalled her again, and she turned her hollow eyes upon him. Awful eyes they were—like red-hot coals in a bleached skull.

“Mother, listen to me. I have but a short time to live, and I cannot die till I learn if you have kept your vow of vengeance, made long ago against Lord De Courcy.”

“I have! I have!” she exclaimed, rousing to something like her old fierceness. “Oh, Reginald! you have been avenged. I have wrung drops of blood from their hearts, even as they wrung them from mine. Yes, yes! I have avenged you! They, too, know what it is to lose a child!”

“Mother! mother! what have you done?”

“I stole their child! their infant daughter the heiress of all the De Courcys, the last of her line! Yes, I stole her!” She fairly shrieked now, with blazing eyes. “I vowed to bring her up in sin and pollution, and I would have done so, too, if I had not been stricken with a living death. Oh, Reginald! your mother avenged you! A child for a child! They banished you, and I stole their heir!”

“Oh, mother! mother! what is this you have done—where is that child now?”

“Yonder!” cried the gipsy, with a sort of fierce, passionate cry, pointing one shaking finger toward the terrified Erminie; “there she stands; Erminie Seyton, the heiress of the Earl and Countess De Courcy. The daughter of an earl has toiled like a menial for your mother, Reginald, all her life. There she stands the lost daughter and heiress of Lord De Courcy!”

An awful silence fell for a moment on all, broken first by the impetuous Ranty Lawless.

“Lord and Lady De Courcy! why, they are here in America—in Baltimore, now. Good heavens! can our Erminie be anything to them? Oh, I knew she was; I saw the likeness the very first moment we met.”

“Who says Lord and Lady De Courcy are here?” cried the smuggler, half-rising himself in his excitement.

“I do!” said Ranty, stepping forward; “they came out in our ship, and I was with them as far as Washington city. Last night, I learned that they had arrived at Baltimore, where a friend of Lady De Courcy’s, an Englishman, is residing.”

All he had heard, all that had passed before, nothing had affected him like that. His chest rose and fell with his long, hard, labored breathing and his face, white before, was livid now as that of the dead.

“So near! so near! Can it be that I will see her once more? And her child here, too, where is she? I must see her!”

Ray, who had listened like one transfixed to his grandmother’s revelations, made a motion to Erminie to approach. Unable to comprehend or realize what she heard, she came over and sunk down on her knees beside him.

He took her hand in his, and pushed back the pale golden hair off her brow, and gazed long and earnestly in her pale but wondrous lovely young face.

“Her father’s eyes and hair, and features; her mother’s form and expression; the noble brow and regal bearing of her father’s race spiritualized and softened. Yes, a true De Courcy, and yet like her mother, too. Ray come here.”

He went over and took his place by Erminie.

“Do you know she is your sister, your mother’s child?” asked the wounded man.

“I know it now; I did not before,” was the awe-struck answer.

“You have heard she is in Baltimore?”

“I have.”

“Then go there, immediately; ride as you never before in your life, and tell them all. Bring her here; I would see her again before I die.”

Ray started to his feet.

“Tell her who you are, yourself—her son; it will be better so. When they learn their long-lost daughter is here they will need no incentive to have them haste. One act of justice must be rendered before I die.”

“Let me accompany you,” said Ranty, as Ray started from the house. “I know exactly where to find them. Saints and angels! where will the revelations of this night end?”

There was no reply from Ray; he could make none; his brains were whirling as if mad. He sprung on his horse; Ranty followed, and in another instant they were flying on like the wind toward Judestown.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LADY MAUDE.

“——With wild surprise
As if to marble struck, devoid of sense,
A moment motionless she stood.”
—Thomson.

In an elegantly-furnished room, in a most elegant private mansion, a lady, still young and exceedingly beautiful, sat with her head leaning on her hand, her eyes fixed thoughtfully and somewhat sadly on the floor. A little paler the noble brow, and a little graver and sweeter the lovely face, and a little more passive and less proud the soft, dark eyes; but in all else Maude, Countess De Courcy, was unchanged. The rich, black hair, still fell in fleecy, silken ringlets round the sweet, moonlit face; the tender smile was as bright and beautiful, and the graceful form as superb and faultless as ever. There was a dreamy, far-off look in her dark, beautiful eyes, as she watched the setting sun—a look that seemed to say her thoughts were wandering in the far-off regions of the shadowy past.

The lady was not alone. Half-buried in the downy depths of a velvet-cushioned lounge reclined a proud, haughty, somewhat supercilious-looking young lady, most magnificently dressed. She was handsome, too—very handsome—despite her tossy, consequential air; but Lady Rita, only daughter and heiress of Lord De Courcy, might be pardoned for feeling herself somebody above the common. Her form was slight and girlish, but perfect in all its proportions, and displayed to the best advantage by her elegant robe; her complexion was dark as a Spaniard’s, but the large, black eyes and shining black hair, of purplish luster, were magnificent. Diamond pendants flashed and glittered in her small ears, glaring through the shadowy masses of rich, jetty hair, whenever she moved, like sparks of fire. In one hand she held a richly-inlaid fan, and with the other she languidly patted a beautiful little Blenheim spaniel that crouched at her feet and watched her with his soft, tender, brown eyes.

“Mamma,” said the young lady, looking up after a pause.

The countess gave a slight start, like one suddenly awakened from a reverie, drew a deep breath, and turned round.

“Well, my dear,” she said.

“What was that papa and Mr. Leicester were saying this morning about smugglers, or outlaws, or some other sort of horrors that were near here?”

“Oh, Mr. Leicester was only telling your papa that there were some of these people hidden down in a country town, but a considerable distance from this. It seems they forcibly abducted a young lady not long since; quite a celebrated beauty, too, and most respectable.”

“Dear me! what a dreadful place this must be, where such things are permitted,” said the young lady, shrugging her shoulders; “you don’t think there is any danger of their attacking us, mamma?”

“No, I think not,” said Lady Maude, smiling; “you need not alarm yourself, my dear; those desperate people are a long way off, and are probably arrested before this. You need not alarm yourself in the least.”

There was a tap at the door at this moment, and the next a servant entered to announce:

“Gentlemen down-stairs wishing to see Lady De Courcy.”

“Did they send up their names?” said the lady.

“No, my lady. One of them said he wanted to see you on most important business, but he did not send his name.”

“On important business? Who can it be?” said Lady Maude, somewhat surprised. “Very well, I will be down directly.”

Ten minutes after the drawing-room door opened, two gentlemen, both young, arose and returned her bow.

But why, after the first glance, does every trace of color fly from the face of Lady De Courcy? Why do her eyes dilate and dilate as they rest on the dark, handsome face of one of her visitors? Why does she reel as if struck a blow, and grasp a chair near for support. And why, standing there, and holding it tightly, does her eyes still remain riveted to his face, while her breath comes quick and hard?

Reader, she sees standing before her the living embodiment of her early girlhood—he whom she thinks buried far under the wild sea!

“Lady De Courcy, I believe?” said the young gentleman, his own face somewhat agitated.

His voice, too!

Lady Maude, feeling as though she should faint, sunk into a chair, and forced herself to say:

“Yes, sir. And yours—”

She paused.

“Is Raymond Germaine.”

Germaine, too—*his* name! What feeling was it that set her heart beating so wildly as she gazed on that dark, handsome face, and manly form.

He seemed moved, too, but in a less degree than the lady.

There was no time to lose, and he began, hurriedly:

“Madam, excuse my seeming presumption, but may I beg to ask: Were you not married before—before you became the wife of the present Earl De Courcy?”

The room seemed swimming around her. Had the sea given up its dead, that Reginald Germaine should thus stand before her? From her white, trembling lips, there dropped an almost inaudible.

“Yes!”

“And you had a child—a son—by that marriage?” went on Ray, who felt circumlocution, under the present circumstances, would be useless.

Another trembling “Yes!” from the pallid lips.

“You were told he died?”

She bent her head, silent and speechless.

“Madam—Lady De Courcy—they deceived you. That child did not die!”

White and tottering, she arose and stood on her feet.

“He did not die. Reginald Germaine told you so for his own ends. That child lived!”

Her lips parted, but no sound came forth; her eyes, wild now, were riveted to the face of the speaker.

“The child lived, grew up, was brought to America, and lives still.”

“Oh, saints in heaven! What do I hear? My son—my child lives still! Heaven of heavens! You wear the face and form of Reginald Germaine—can it be that you—”

“Even so, madam, Countess De Courcy, I am his son and yours!”

Was it his bold, open face, or her mother’s heart, that told Lady Maude he spoke the truth? With a mighty cry, she held out her arms, and the next moment he was clasped in a wild embrace.

The other young gentleman seemed suddenly to have found some very absorbing prospect out of the window that completely enchained his attention, and rendered the frequent use of his handkerchief necessary. He did not turn round for nearly fifteen minutes, and then the new-found mother and son were sitting together on the sofa, with their hands clasped, talking in a low tone, while her eyes never wandered from his face.

He was telling her the story of his father, of his escape, of his subsequent life, of their meeting, and of his confession and dying request.

Lady Maude’s face, as she listened, grew so white and fixed and rigid that you might have thought it marble, save for the horror unspeakable, the terrible look burning in the great, black eyes. No word fell from her lips; her very heart seemed congealing, petrifying; she sat like one transformed to stone.

“And now, my dearest mother,” said Ray, “I have another revelation to make to you—one that, I hope, will in some measure atone for the necessary pain the one I have just been making has caused you.”

She did not speak; she sat as cold and white as marble.

“You had another child—a daughter?” he began, hesitatingly.

“I had; she is lost!” said Lady Maude, in a tone so altered that even Ranty started.

“Did she die?” Ray asked, curiously.

“I do not know; she was stolen, I think.”

“Yes; she was stolen. My grandmother, Ketura, whom I have told you of—she stole her, and brought her here at the same time she brought me.”

There was a sort of gasp, and Lady Maude half-started to her feet.

“Oh, my God! Tell me—tell me—is she—is she—”

“She is alive and well, and knows all.”

“Thank God—oh, thank God for this!” she cried, as she sunk down and hid her face in her hands.

There was a long silence. Then Lady Maude, starting to her feet, cried out, passionately:

“Where is she?—where is she? Take me to her! My precious Erminie! my long-lost darling! Oh, Raymond, take me to Erminie!”

“Will you go now? Ought not Lord De Courcy—” began Ray, hesitatingly, when she interrupted him with:

“Oh, yes, yes! He must hear all, and come with us, too. Excuse me one moment. I think he must have come.”

She passed from the room, but oh, with a face so different from that she wore when entering! Then she had fancied herself childless, and now two had been given her, as if from the dead. And Reginald Germaine, too—he whom she thought lost at sea—was living yet, and she was to see him once more. She trembled so, as she thought of him, that she almost sunk down as she walked.

The two in the parlor saw a tall, distinguished-looking man pass in through the front-door, and the next moment a quick,

decided footstep in the hall, and then a clear, pleasant voice, saying:

"Got back, you see, Maude. Why, what's the matter?"

Her reply was too low to be heard, but both passed upstairs together.

"Lord De Courcy," said Ranty, listening.

"I thought you said her ladyship knew you?" said Ray. "She did not seem to do so while here."

"All your fault," said Ranty. "You didn't give her time to bless herself before you opened your broadside of knock-down facts; and after hearing all the astounding and unexpected things you had to tell her, of course it couldn't be expected she could think of a common, every-day mortal like me. Heigho! And so Erminie is a great lady now? I suppose I ought to be glad, Ray, but, if you'll believe it, upon my word and honor, I'm not. Of course, she'll have hundreds of suitors, now; and even if she loved me—which I don't suppose she did—that high and mighty seignior, her father, wouldn't let her have anything to do with a poor sailor. Ray, I tell you what, ever since I heard it I have been wishing, in the most diabolical manner, that it might turn out to be a false report. It may not sound friendly nor Christian-like to wish it, Ray, but I do wish it—I wish she had not a red cent in the world. I might have had some chance, then."

Ray, looking earnestly and thoughtfully at the flowers in the carpet, heard scarcely a word of this address. Ranty watched him for a short time, as if waiting for an answer; and then leaning back in his chair, began whistling softly, as if keeping up an accompaniment to his thoughts.

The moments passed on. Half an hour elapsed, then an hour—an age it seemed to the impatient Ray. In his restlessness, he paced rapidly up and down, with knit brows, casting quick, restless glances at the door.

It opened at last, and Lady Maude, dressed as if for a journey, entered, leaning on her husband's arm. Both were very pale; and Lady Maude's eyes looked as if she had been weeping. But she was more composed and natural-looking than when she had left the room.

Ray stopped in his walk, and met the eyes of Lord De Courcy.

"Mr. Germaine," he said, holding out his hand, "for your mother's sake, you must look upon me as a father!"

Ray bent over the hand he extended with a look of deep gratitude, such as no words could express.

"Lady Maude has told me all," continued his lordship. "And at the request of the unhappy man whom you say is dying, we will start with you immediately."

As Ray bowed, Ranty arose, and the earl caught sight of him.

"Mr. Lawless," he exclaimed, in pleased surprise; "I did not expect to meet you here. My dear, you remember the gallant preserver of Rita's life?"

Ranty actually blushed at the epithet, coming as it did from the father of Erminie.

"Would you wish to see Lady Rita? She is up-stairs."

"Thank you, my lord. Some other time I will have that pleasure," answered Ranty. "At present, we have no time to spare; every minute is precious."

Without further parley, the whole party left the house. A carriage and fast horses were in waiting; and a few moments after they were on their way.

During the journey, there was a chance to explain everything more fully than had yet been done, and Ray entered willingly into all particulars.

Lord and Lady De Courcy seemed never tired of asking questions concerning Erminie; and Ray expatiated on her goodness and beauty in a way to satisfy even the most exacting.

"Being so beautiful, of course she might have had many suitors?" said Lady Maude, somewhat anxiously.

"She might have had, my dear mother." She seemed so strongly attached to him already that it became quite natural to Ray to call her mother. "But she would listen to none of them."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Lady Maude, drawing a deep breath of relief. "Then her affections are still her own?"

"On that point I am not informed. Perhaps," said Ray, glancing at Ranty with a wicked look in his dark eyes, "Mr.

Lawless can throw a little light on the subject. He and Erminie are very confidential friends!"

Poor Ranty reddened to the very roots of his hair under the imputation, and the look that Lord and Lady De Courcy gave him.

"Never mind, my dear boy," said Lord De Courcy, kindly, as he saw his confusion. "Erminie herself shall tell us all about it when we see her."

The journey was a very sad and silent one, despite all. The thought of him who lay dying checked their joy at the approaching reunion; and the fear that he might be dead hung like a pall over the heart of Ray.

On arriving at Judestown, they procured a conveyance from Mr. Gudge, and started at a rapid pace for the Old Barrens Cottage.

It was nearly dark when they reached it, and all around was ominously silent and still. Ray's heart sunk as he pushed open the door and entered.

The first person he encountered was Pet Lawless, who uttered an exclamation of joy as she beheld him.

"Oh, Petronilla! is he alive yet?" he asked.

"Just alive, and no more. The doctor says he has only a few hours to live."

"Thank Heaven that we find him alive at all," said Ray.

Then motioning the others to follow, he passed into the sitting-room.

It was tenanted only by the dying man and his wife, Marguerite. She crouched beside him just as Ray had seen her last—just as if she had never risen a second since.

The earl and countess followed, Ranty coming last. Lady Maude trembled like an aspen, and clung to her husband's arm for support.

"Father!" said Ray, going over, and bending down.

He opened his eyes and looked up, vacantly at first, but with brighter light when he saw who it was.

"Back at last!" he exclaimed. "And her—have you seen her?"

"She is here beside you. Come, my dearest mother!"

He supported the trembling form of Lady Maude to the couch, and she sunk down beside it on her knees, and hid her face in her hands.

A light seemed to flash into the wan face, lighting up the sunken eyes of the dying man. He half-raised his hand, as if to take hers, and then it fell heavily on the quilt.

"Maude! Maude!" he cried out, "can you forgive me before I die?"

She looked up, lifted her pale, beautiful face to his, laid her hand on his pallid brow, and softly and sweetly murmured:

"Yes, as I hope to be forgiven. May God forgive you, Reginald, as I do."

His strong chest heaved, rose and fell, as if the spirit within were trying to burst its bonds before the time.

"You have heard all, Maude?"

"Yes; all—all."

"And you forgive me the great wrong I did you, Maude?"

"Freely and fully, from my heart and soul."

"And you will acknowledge our son when I am gone? Oh, Maude! I loved you through all. I was unworthy of you; but I loved you as none other loved before. Maude, where is he?"

"Who? Reginald?"

"Your—Lord De Courcy. Is he here?"

"Yes. My dear old friend, I am sorry for this," said the earl, stepping forward.

The dying rover held out his hand, and Lord De Courcy took it in his strong clasp.

“I am glad you have come—I am glad you are her protector through life. Do you remember our last parting, Lord Ernest?”

“That night? Yes.”

“Ah! that night—that night! What a different man I might have lived and died but for that dark, sorrowful night! What trouble and sorrow that night caused you, too! It turned my poor mother’s brain, Lord Ernest; and—she stole your child!”

“I know it.”

“Do you not want to see her!—have you seen her?”

“Not yet. I will see her soon.”

“Where is my daughter, Raymond?” asked Lady Maude, looking wistfully round.

“Up-stairs with her grandmother, madam,” said Pet, respectfully. “She does not know you are here. Shall I go and tell her.”

“Not just yet,” said Lord De Courcy. “My dearest love, subdue your impatience for a few moments—remember, you are in the presence of the dying. You have waited for her all these years—you can afford to wait a few moments longer now.”

“How is my grandmother?” asked Ray, in a low tone, of Pet.

“The same as you saw her last—in a sort of dull stupor all the time; neither sees, hears, nor feels, apparently. They brought her upstairs this morning, and Erminie has been with her since.”

“How does Erminie bear the news of her new-found parents?”

“Very quietly—with a sort of still, deep joy not to be expressed in words. She says she always knew that sweet, lovely lady with the soft, beautiful eyes was something to her, used to come to her in dreams, or something—odd, ain’t it? And she’s your mother, too, Ray! I declare, it’s all the strangest and most romantic thing I ever heard of!”

“We, too, have had our troubles,” said the dying man, making a faint motion toward Marguerite. “Perhaps it was a just retribution of heaven for what you were made to suffer. We, too lost a child; had she lived, even I might have been a different man to-day. She was lost, and all that was originally good in my nature went with her. My poor little Rita!”

“What did you say? Rita!” exclaimed Maude, as she and her husband gave a simultaneous start.

“Yes. Marguerite was her name; Rita we always called her—why?” he asked, in surprise.

“She was lost, did you say? How? did she die?” breathlessly demanded Lady Maude.

“No; she was carried off, perhaps by gipsies—she was kidnapped.”

“How old was she at the time?”

“About two years old—why?” for the first time spoke the woman Marguerite, starting up.

“Was she dark, with black hair and eyes.”

“Yes, yes, yes! *Oh, Mon Dieu!* why?”

“Did she wear a cross upon her neck bearing the initials ‘M. I. L.?’” wildly broke in Marguerite. “A little gold cross with these letters, which was mine when I was a girl, and stood for Marguerite Isabella Landry, my maiden name, was round her neck. Oh, madam! in heaven’s name, do you know anything of my child?”

“I do! I do! I found her, I brought her up as my own and she lives with me now. Just Heaven! how mysterious are thy ways!” exclaimed the awe-struck Lady Maude.

There was a wild cry, and the woman, Marguerite, fell fainting on the floor.

Ray bore her away in his arms, and Pet hastened out to attend her. At the same moment a change came over the face of the gipsy’s son—a dark shadow from an invisible wing—the herald of coming death.

Both held their breath. Great throes shook the strong form before them, and the deathdew stood in great drops on his

brow. Lady Maude wiped them off, pale with awe.

The mighty death agony ceased at last and there came a great calm. He opened his eyes and fixed them, with a look of unspeakable love, on the face bending over him.

“Maude,” he whispered, in a voice so low that it was scarcely audible, “say once more you forgive me.”

She took his cold hand in both hers, and bending down, touched her lips to his pale brow, while her tears fell fast on his face.

The hand she held grew stiff in her clasp; she lifted up her head and her heart for an instant, almost ceased to beat. Reginald Germaine, the wronged, the guilty, was dead!

“May God have mercy on his soul!” fervently exclaimed Lady Maude.

“Amen,” sadly and solemnly responded her husband.

Both arose. At the same moment the door opened and Ray appeared, holding the pale and agitated Erminie by the hand.

“Your father and mother, Erminie,” he briefly said, as he again went out and closed the door.

And in the dread, chilling presence of the dead, the long-divided parents and child were reunited at last!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE DAWN OF A BRIGHTER DAY.

“Thoughts that frown upon our mirth
  Will smile upon our sorrow;
And many dark fears of to-day
  May be bright hopes to-morrow.”
—Pinckney.

That same night, within that same hour, when her son lay cold and stark in the room below, the fierce, turbulent spirit of the gipsy queen passed away.

Death above, and death below—the cold, dread, invisible presence pervading the whole house with a chilling awe. Voices were hushed to lowest whispers, footfalls were muffled; the deep, fervent joy of the reunited held in check by its dread majesty.

There was a subdued luster through the house when morning broke. Pet and Erminie, very pale and very silent, had arrayed mother and son for the grave; and now, side by side, they lay, white and still, and rigid, in the pale, leaden dawn of the morning that dawned for them in vain. Stern, and still, and silent, Ray sat by the bedside, gazing in tearless grief on the lifeless forms before him. Near him sat Lord De Courcy, with a look of deep sadness, which not even the joy of meeting Erminie could totally efface from his fine features. Kneeling beside her dead husband, with her face hidden in her hands, was the woman Marguerite, swaying backward and forward in voiceless grief. Her first cry had been to be restored to her child, but Lady Maude had soothed her and prevailed upon her to wait until they could all return to the city together. Worn out and fatigued by her rapid journey, Lady Maude lay asleep in Erminie’s little bed; and Erminie, sitting beside her with her arms clasped round her neck, her beautiful head, with its wreath of golden hair lying on her breast, was asleep too. Ranty Lawless had ridden off to Judestown to prepare for the funeral, good-naturedly taking upon himself all the trouble in order to spare Ray. And lastly Petronilla, looking as still and serious as though a laugh had never dimpled her cherry lips, moved on tip-toe about the house, dressing everything in white, arranging flowers in vases, and imparting a softened beauty to the grim reality of death.

Early in the day the news spread abroad, and sympathizing neighbors began to drop in with offers of aid and assistance. Among them came the admiral, looking unspeakably doleful and lugubrious; and when Pet, in as few words as possible, related what had happened, the dear, crusty, soft-hearted old beau was so affected that he was obliged to rush from the

house and wipe his stormy old eyes, unseen, under the lee of Ringbone, which gaunt quadruped regarded him with displeased surprise. Then came Mr. Toosypegs and Miss Priscilla, whose sharp, cankerous face had grown ten degrees more unyieldingly sour and acid with every passing year. Poor Mr. Toosypegs was so sincerely grieved at the death of "Mrs. Ketura," that he took out his bandanna and relieved his mind, then and there, by a good hearty cry.

It was all like a dream to Erminie, a dream of mingled sorrow and joy. Her tears fell fast for her whom, deeply as she had wronged her, sternly as she had ever treated her, she still loved; but they fell on a mother's breast, and a father's hand rested on her bowed head. She could scarcely realize or believe all that had happened; and she watched the people come and go, and saw the lifeless forms closed from view beneath the coffin-lid, and saw the funeral-procession pass from the house, and felt the chilling sense of desolation that a funeral always brings. Then this, too, passed; and she saw the people disperse and go to their homes, and the white shrouding removed from the rooms, and the bright summer sunshine came warmly in, and then all began to be real—a glad, joyous reality at last.

"And now, what next?" said Ray, as they all gathered together in the little parlor of the cottage when all was over.

"We must all return to the city, next," said Lord De Courcy, "to Rita. You, of course, my dear boy, are one of the family, now."

"I thank you, my lord, but I have marked out my future course for myself. I have a name and a fortune yet to win."

"My dearest Ray, you would not leave me," said Lady Maude, reproachfully, laying her hand on his arm.

He touched his lips to the small, white hand, and said: "I cannot be a dependent on any one's bounty, not even yours, my dear mother. You would not have me fold my arms ignobly and become a worthless drone in the busy hive of this world. My path is already clear—an uphill one it may be—but the goal I aim at will be reached at last."

His eyes rested half-unconsciously on Pet, who was gazing very intently out of the window while he spoke. Lord De Courcy saw the direction of his glance, and smiled slightly to himself.

"But you, at least, will not think of leaving us so soon," pleaded Lady Maude; "consider how short a time since we have met, and how long we have been parted. Indeed, I will not hear of parting with you yet."

"Oh, pray, Ray, don't go," said Erminie, gently; "what could we all ever do without you? Do stay, like a dear, good boy."

"You must have a heart of flint if you can resist all these pleadings," said Lord De Courcy, drawing Erminie fondly toward him. "Come, Miss Lawless, will you not aid my little girl, here, in persuading this ungrateful scapegrace of ours from running away?"

"Oh, there is no use in me asking anybody to do anything," said Pet, coloring slightly, yet looking saucy still, "because they never do it; if Minnie—beg pardon, Lady Erminie, can't persuade him, then there is no use in my trying."

"Now, Pet," said Erminie, reproachfully, and blushing at her new-found title.

"Come, my dear boy, consent to stay with us for some weeks, at least," said Lady Maude, looking up, coaxingly, in his handsome face.

"Your ladyship's will is my law," said Ray, a smile breaking through the grave sadness of his face.

"That is right! when are we to start, my lord?"

"Early to-morrow, if you like. Mrs. Germaine," he said, glancing at Marguerite, "I know is impatient to embrace her daughter."

"I wish you were coming, too, Pet," said Erminie, going over and putting her arm around Pet's small waist.

"And why can she not?" said Lady Maude, looking kindly down in Pet's changing face; "we will be delighted to have her with us. Do come, my dear."

"I thank your ladyship, but I cannot."

"Now, Pet, why? You can come if you like," said Erminie.

"Indeed I can't, Erminie. I must stay and console uncle Harry for your loss. The man-of-war on the mantel-piece will be quite inadequate to the task, and there he will be in sackcloth and ashes, rending his garments and tearing his hair—"

"His wig, you mean," broke in Ranty.

“Ranty, be still. I should like to oblige you, Lady Erminie, but you perceive I can’t. It is one of the cardinal virtues consoling the afflicted, and I am trying to cultivate all the virtues preparatory to taking the black veil one of these days, and becoming a nun.”

“Not if I can help it,” said Ray, coming over.

“Well, but you can’t help it, you know,” said Pet, turning red, but flashing defiance in a way that made Lady Maude smile, and reminded Erminie of the Pet of other days; “and now I really must go before it gets any later. Erminie, I’ll come over early to-morrow and see you off, so I will not bid you good-by now. Ranty—”

“Oh, never mind Ranty,” interposed Ray; “let me be your escort home for once, Pet. Come, do not refuse me now. I have a great many things to say to you.”

Pet colored vividly, but she did not refuse, and nodding a good-by to the rest, they left the cottage together.

“Can we not prevail upon you at least to accompany us back to the city?” said Lord De Courcy to Ranty, when they were gone.

Ranty hesitated, and glanced at Erminie, who blushed, of course.

“Come, say yes, Mr. Lawless,” said Lord De Courcy, laying his hand on Ranty’s shoulder, in his kind, cordial manner. “Erminie must not part with all her old friends at once.”

“Besides, you have not seen Rita, you know, Mr. Lawless,” added Lady Maude, with her own peculiar winning smile; “and she will be exceedingly glad to meet you once more. You really must come now.”

Still Ranty hesitated, and looked unspeakable things at Erminie.

“I see how it is,” said the earl. “Mr. Lawless won’t consent unless Erminie seconds the invitation. Come, my love, tell him he must come.”

“I—I will be very glad to have Ranty with us,” said Erminie, blushing most becomingly.

“Very well, that settles the matter, I hope, my young friend.”

“My lord, I shall only be too happy to accept your kind invitation!” exclaimed Ranty, all in a glow of delight. “Nothing could give me more pleasure than to meet Lady Rita again.”

So it was arranged they should start the following morning. Pet rode over to see Erminie off, and tears stood in the dancing eyes of the elf as she bade her good-by. As for Erminie, she wept audibly as the carriage rolled away, and the home of her childhood was left far behind. She strained her eyes to catch a last glimpse of the pretty little vine-embowered cottage on the lonely bank, and watched the blinding top of the White Squall fading away in the distance as if it had been the face of an old friend. Then came Dismal Hollow, and at the verge of the wood they encountered Toosypegs, on horseback, waiting to bid Erminie farewell.

“Oh, Mr. Toosypegs, I’m so glad to see you,” said Erminie, putting her little snow-flake of a hand out of the window to greet him. “How do you do, and how is Miss Priscilla?”

“Thanky, Miss Minnie,” said Mr. Toosypegs, in a dejected tone. “I ain’t well at all. I’m very much obliged to you, and aunt Prisciller—well, the old gander broke his leg this morning, and she ain’t—well, she ain’t in as good spirits as she might be. Miss Minnie, you ain’t going to be long away, are you?”

“That does not depend on me now, Mr. Toosypegs,” said Erminie, smiling. “You know I have got a father and mother to take care of me now.”

“Yes, I know,” said Mr. Toosypegs, mournfully; “it’s going to be horrid lonesome when you are gone; I know it is. I wish I had never been born! I declare to goodness I do! People may say what they like, but I don’t see where’s the good of it,” said Mr. Toosypegs, with a subdued howl.

“Come, Horlander! take things easy,” suggested Ranty, poking his head out through the opposite window. “Care killed a cat.”

“It’s all very well to say, ‘take things easy,’ Master Ranty,” said Mr. Toosypegs, wiping his eyes with the cuff of his coat-sleeve; “but if you were in my place—in love—a—I mean going to part with Miss Minnie, and never see her again, I don’t see how you could take it easy either. I dare say you mean real well in telling me so, Master Ranty, but I can’t do

it at all. Good-by, Miss Minnie," said poor Mr. Toosypegs, sobbing outright. "I don't expect ever to see you again in this world—my feelings are in that state that I will soon be a melancholy corpse. I know very well I will."

"Oh, Mr. Toosypegs, I hope not; you only think so. Give my love to Miss Priscilla, and tell her I'll send her a new shawl from Baltimore. Good-by." And with a smile, Erminie fell back, and the carriage drove on, unhappy O. C. Toosypegs wiping his eyes, and snuffling, in the middle of the road.

Nothing of any importance occurred during the remainder of the journey. The whole party arrived safely in the city, and were domesticated with the friend in whose house the earl and countess were staying.

The duty of informing Rita of her new-found parentage devolved upon Lady Maude. In the gentlest and kindest manner possible, she performed her task; and great was the astonishment and greater the mortification of the supercilious little lady on learning who she really was. "Some natural tears she shed;" but when the countess informed her she was still to reside with them as before, and not being completely selfish after all, she consented at last to wipe them, and met her mother with quite a decent show of affection. Poor Marguerite! she clasped the little gilded, glittering butterfly to her breast, and wept over her with a passionate love that touched every heart. There was a perceptible coldness and jealousy in the dainty little lady's greeting of Erminie, whom she looked upon as a rival and natural enemy; but the gentleness and sweetness of the new-found heiress were not to be resisted; and before they all separated for the night Lady Rita made up her mind that matters were, after all, by no means so bad as she had at first supposed.

Ray passed a week with the family in Baltimore, and then returned to Judestown—on business, he said, but as more than one of the party shrewdly guessed, to see Pet. He found her worthy father at home, and unbounded was the astonishment of that most upright gentleman upon learning all that had transpired during his absence. Inwardly he rejoiced at the annihilation of the gang of smugglers, and fervently thanked his stars that his own connection with them had not been discovered.

But another surprise was in store for him when Ray appeared before him and formally solicited the hand of his daughter. Ray Germaine, the gipsy's grandson, and Ray Germaine, Lady De Courcy's son, were two very different personages; and his worship, the judge, was graciously pleased to give a prompt assent. The first would have been, in no very choice terms, shown the door; the latter was taken by the hand and cordially told, after the manner of fathers in the play, to "take her and be happy," which Pet assured him he would find some difficulty in being, once she was his wife.

And so our Pet was engaged at last; and Ray returned to Baltimore to inform his friends of his success and make arrangements for their marriage, which the judge, who thought it would be something added to his already overwhelming dignity to be father-in-law of the son of a peeress, desired might take place as soon as possible.

Erminie clapped her hands with delight when she heard of it, and Lady Maude, whose heart the wild elf had taken by storm, expressed her heartfelt pleasure.

"And you must return with us to England as soon as you are married," said Lord De Courcy, to the bridegroom-elect.

"And we will all live together. Oh, it will be so nice to be near Pet!" said Erminie delightedly.

Ray laughed and shook his head.

"We may accompany you to England, as both Pet and I desire to visit it, but our future home must be here."

"Why not in England as well as here?" asked his lordship.

"Oh, well, for many reasons. One is, Petronilla would never consent; another is that I am too much attached to this land of my adoption to wish to leave it for any other; and thirdly and lastly, I have already attained some slight degree of fame in my profession here, and I do not wish to lose it now by going to another land."

"But, my dearest boy, I do not like the idea of being so far separated from you," said Lady Maude, anxiously.

"Oh, to cross the Atlantic is a mere pleasure-trip now, my dear mother," laughed Ray; "so we will meet at intervals, after all. As I intend to be a great man one of these days—"

"You can be that, easily, by growing fat," interrupted Ranty. "You can't be reached now with anything less than a ten-foot pole; and if you only grow stout with years, I'll back you against any man in the community for greatness. You'll make Daniel Lambert himself look to his laurels."

"By the way, Erminie, I have a message for you from your old admirer, Mr. Toosypegs," said Ray. "He says he can't bear the idea of letting you go without seeing you again: so he is coming here, and the admiral with him."

“Miss Priscilla ought to come, too, and make the party complete,” said Ranty. “I wonder she is so imprudent as to let that innocent youth journey so far alone. There is no telling what may happen to him in a depraved place like this.”

“I am sure I shall be glad to see Mr. Toosypegs again, and the dear old admiral. Oh, I do love him,” exclaimed Erminie.

“I wish I could get you to say that about his nephew,” said Ranty, with an appealing look.

Lord De Courcy smiled encouragingly on the youth as, together with Lady Maude, he left the room.

CHAPTER XL.

CHIEFLY MATRIMONIAL.

“There is a love which, born
In early days, lives on through silent years.”

“Love is life’s end.”
—Spenser.

Erminie—Lady Erminie now—sat in an elegantly-furnished library, pulling a costly bouquet wantonly to pieces, and looking excessively lovely in her dress of pale-blue silk and white lace.

Pacing up and down the room, as if for a wager, was Master Ranty Lawless, with a look as nearly approaching the intensely gloomy as was possible for his handsome, happy face to wear.

“Why, Ranty, what in the world is the matter with you this morning?” said Erminie, at last, opening her sweet blue eyes very wide in innocent wonder.

“Lady Erminie, I’m going away, this very morning; and what’s more, I’m never going to come back! I’ll be swung to the yard-arm if I do!” was the unexpected answer, delivered with a savage, jerking abruptness that made Erminie drop her flowers and half rise from her seat in consternation.

“Why, Ranty—why, Ranty! How can you talk so? What has happened? What is the matter? Are you going crazy?”

“What’s happened? Everything’s happened, everything’s the matter, and I am going crazy, if it’s any consolation to you to learn it. Yes, you may look surprised, Lady Erminie Germaine, or De Courcy, or whatever your name may be, but you are the cause of it all; and you know it too, for all you sit up there looking as innocent and unconscious as it is possible for any young woman to look. Never mind though; I don’t care! Just go on, Lady Erminie! You’ll find what a nice young man you’ve lost, when it’s too late!” said Ranty, striding up and down, and looking ferociously at poor Erminie.

“Oh, Ranty! how can you go on so? What have I done?” said Erminie, twisting her fingers, and looking up with shining, tearful eyes, looking so pretty and innocent in her distress that Ranty’s better angel prompted him to go over and caress away her tears on the spot.

But Ranty was angry and didn’t do anything of the kind. On the contrary, he grew twice as fierce as before, and strode up and down twice as rapidly, bursting out with:

“What have you done? There’s a question! What haven’t you done, I want to know? You knew very well I loved you, and paid attention to you since you were the size of a well-grown doughnut, and when you hadn’t a cent to bless yourself with. You know I did, Lady Erminie, and you needn’t deny it. Well, your father and mother turn up, and you find yourself a fine lady, and after that you grow stiff and dignified, and keep me at a distance, as Paddy did the moon, and flirt with every bescented, behair-oiled jackanapes that squirms, and bows, and simpers, and makes fools of themselves, and talk with all sorts of soft nonsense to you! You know you do, Lady Erminie, and I repeat it, you needn’t deny it! Here was last night, at that concert, soiree, or tea-party, or whatever it was, didn’t you let that contemptible fool, the Honorable Augustus Ahringfeldt, make the strongest sort of love to you the whole blessed evening. Honorable, indeed! A pretty honorable, he is, all hair and conceit, like a scented orang-outang!” sneered Ranty, elevating his Roman nose to the

loftiest angle of scorn.

“Indeed—indeed, Ranty, I couldn’t help it! He talked to me, and I had to answer him, and you never came near me all the time,” said Erminie with tears of distress in her gentle blue eyes.

“No; the thumb-screws of the Holy Office wouldn’t have got a word out of me!” said Ranty, fiercely. “Do you think I was going to thrust myself forward where I wasn’t wanted? No, Lady Erminie De Courcy; though you may be above me in rank and wealth, I can have as much pride as you can yet; and if you think fit to cut my acquaintance, you are perfectly welcome to do it. I am going away this afternoon, and I am not likely to trouble you any more; but first I’ll punch the head of that sweet seraph, the Honorable Augustus—hanged if I don’t! Lady Erminie, good-by! I’m off for a voyage to Constantinople; and if you hear that the sultan has had me bow-strung, or bastinadoed, or pitched into the Bosphorus, or that I have committed suicide, or anything, I hope you’ll drop a tear to the memory of the little boy in roundabout-jackets who used to go sailing and making love with you at old Judestown.”

Here Ranty dropped his voice to the deeply-pathetic, and held out his hand mournfully to Erminie. But that young lady’s hands were up before her face, and she seemed in a fair way to comply with his request to drop a tear to his memory; for she was sobbing away convulsively.

“There, now! I’ve went and set you a-crying!” exclaimed Ranty, in a tone, or rather howl, of mingled remorse and distraction. “That’s always the way I go and put my foot in whatever I go to do! I am a brute! a crocodile! a sea-serpent! a monster! an unmitigated bear! and I deserve a sound flogging for speaking to you as I did. Erminie! dear Erminie! dearest Erminie! forgive me, like a good girl. It was all owing to that hairy-faced fool, Ahringfeldt—I swear it was! I was jealous of him! madly jealous! the effeminate little cream-candy puppy! Dear Erminie, forgive me! Dearest Erminie, look up and say I am forgiven, or I will go to the nearest apothecary’s, and put an end to my miserable existence with a gallon or two of Prussic acid. Dear, dearest, darling Erminie! only say you forgive me!” pleaded Ranty, kneeling before her, and gently withdrawing her hands from before her.

Erminie looked up imploringly through her tears.

“Oh, Ranty! how can you say such dreadful things? Oh, you frighten me to death! Promise me you will not kill yourself; it is so wicked, you know!”

“Beside being disagreeable to be sat on by a coroner and a dozen asses of jurymen. Well, I won’t, if you will promise me one thing.”

“Oh, Ranty! I will promise anything if you will not do it.”

“Will you, though? Oh, Erminie! you’re a nice young woman! Well, I want you to be my dear, little blue-eyed wife. Now, then, say yes.”

But Erminie, with a bright blush and a little surprised scream, threw up her hands and covered her face.

“Now, Erminie, that’s no answer at all,” said Ranty, taking down the hands. “You don’t know what a capital husband I’ll make. You can’t begin to have the remotest idea of it, you know. Come, Erminie, say yes—there’s a good girl.”

“Oh, Ranty!”

“Yes, I know; girls always look flustered in cases like this; but, somehow, they manage to say yes, after all. Now, Erminie, if you don’t say yes, I’ll go right straight off for the Prussic acid—mind that!”

“Well, yes, then,” said Erminie, blushing, and laughing, and hiding her face on his shoulder.

“Gloria in excelsis! alleluia! hurrah! Oh, Erminie! my own little darling! you have made me the happiest man from here to the antipodes. Oh, Erminie! I knew you would, all along! I always thought you had too much good sense to reject me for a puppy like the Honorable Augustus!” exclaimed Ranty, in a rapture. “Oh, Erminie! I’ll give you leave to cowhide me within an inch of my life if I ever give you a cross look or word again! Oh, Erminie—”

The sudden opening of the library-door cut short his interminable string of interjections in which Ranty would have indulged, and the next moment, Lord De Courcy stood looking with grave surprise on the two lovers.

“Ah! beg your pardon,” he said, blandly, as Ranty sprung to his feet. “I was not aware there was any one here. Excuse me for interrupting you.” And with a bow and an almost imperceptible smile, he was turning away, when Ranty stepped forward, and said:

“Hold on, my lord. There’s a little matter to be arranged here, which may as well be done now as any other time. I love your daughter and have told her so, and your daughter loves me, and has told me so; and all we want is your lordship’s consent to our union. I may not be quite her equal in wealth, and rank, and all that sort of thing, in your eyes; but as a free-born American citizen, and an independent ‘sovereign’ in my own right, and possessing a strong arm, a stout heart, and a clear conscience, I feel myself as good as the best lord, duke, or Sir Harry in all Great Britain; and so, my lord, if you will give me your daughter, I will try to prove myself worthy of the gift.”

This plain, straight-forward speech, delivered with head erect, shoulders thrown back, and Master Ranty drawn up to the full extent of his six feet odd inches, evidently did not displease the earl. He turned to Erminie, whose blushing face was hid again, and said, with a smile:

“And what says my little girl? Has she authorized her old friend to say all this?”

“Yes, father,” whispered Erminie, throwing her arms around his neck.

“Well, then, I suppose I shall have to consent,” said the earl, rising. “Right, my boy,” he said, slapping Ranty heartily on the shoulder; “you are as good as any man living, and I like your bold, independent spirit. And now, as I am *de trop* here, I shall go and tell her ladyship that she is about to lose her new-found daughter again,” said the earl, as he left the room.

And for the next hour, Ranty and Erminie were just as perfectly happy as it is possible for any two denizens of this rather unhappy world to be.

It was arranged that the marriage of Ranty and Erminie should take place on the same day as that of Ray and Pet, and that the whole party should sail for England together.

And three days after, came our whole party from Judestown in a body, consisting of the judge, pompous and important, but inwardly wincing a little at the thought of meeting Erminie; Ray, handsome, and happy, and quite unlike his usual haughty self; Pet, bright, defiant, saucy, and sparkling as ever; the admiral, in a high state of beatitude and a new frock-coat with eye-dazzling brass buttons; Mr. Toosypegs, arrayed in a complete new suit to do honor to the occasion, and looking mildly melancholy; and last, but by no means least, Miss Priscilla, as stiff, grim, sour, rigid and upright as a church steeple.

Erminie flew down to meet them, and rushed into the arms of Pet, who favored her with a crushing hug; and then she kissed Miss Priscilla, who gingerly presented her wrinkled cheek for that operation; and then she shook hands with Mr. Toosypegs, who repressed a groan of despair as she did so; and then she finished her greetings by throwing her arms around the admiral’s neck and kissing him too.

“Stand from under!” roared the admiral, with a tremendous burst of laughter. “So you’re going to get spliced to Ranty, Snowflake? Ho, ho, ho! Who’d ’a’ thought it? Lord! how pretty you are, anyway! And how’s your father and that nice-looking woman, your mother? I hope she’s pretty jolly,” said the admiral, politely.

Erminie laughed, and replied that she was as jolly as could be expected.

“And so you’re going to England, Miss Minnie, and never going to come back?” said Mr. Toosypegs, mournfully. “I’m real sorry—I’m dreadfully sorry, Miss Minnie. I do assure you I am. It’s awfully lonesome now, at the cottage. I can’t bear to go near it at all, it recalls the past so much. Miss Minnie, I don’t know what I shall ever do when you’re gone at all—I just don’t!”

“Horlando, hold your tongue!” snarled Miss Priscilla. And her dutiful nephew shut up like a jack-knife. “You’re foreverlastin’ a-talkin’; and a-talkin’ nonsense at that. Miss Minnie, I want to take hoff my things which is hinconvenient to wear in the ’ouse, besides wanting to be folded up and put away, to keep them from sp’lin’.”

Erminie smilingly rung the bell, and ordered the servant to show Miss Priscilla to her room; and, at the same moment, Lady Rita, impelled perhaps by curiosity, as much as anything else, to see those “rustics,” as she called them, swept majestically in, glittering in silk, and lace, and jewels, until she fairly dazzled the eyes.

Erminie rose, and presented her as her “sister, Lady Rita.” Her little ladyship curled her fastidious lip slightly, made a profoundly formal courtesy, and gracefully and superciliously sunk into the downy depths on a lounge, and thought inwardly what an “absurd set of the lowest people mamma was gathering about her!”

But from the moment Mr. Toosypegs set eyes on the bright little meteor, he was done for! Pet was forgotten; so was Erminie. Both, in his eyes, were eclipsed by this golden-winged, rainbow-tinted, little, sparkling vision. Poor Mr. Toosypegs, for the third time, was deeply and hopelessly in love!

Three days after, the double-marriage took place, privately, by the desire of all parties. None but the friends of the brides were present; and immediately after the ceremony the farewells were spoken, and the bridal cortege drove down to the steamer that was to convey them to the Old World.

Straining their eyes to catch a last glance of the shore they were leaving, our bridal-party stood on the steamer's deck, Erminie leaning on her husband's arm, and Pet leaning on hers, both with eyes full of tears. Near them stood Lady Maude and Lord De Courcy, both thinking of him who slept, "after life's fitful fever," in his lonely hillside grave. There, too, was Marguerite, calmer and less despairing-looking now, though her wild, dark eyes were deeply mournful still. By her side was her dainty, tossy, brightly-dressed little daughter, inwardly thanking her stars to get home once more. And thus they all stand before you now, dear reader, receding far down in the blue horizon. One more glimpse, and you will see them no more.

At the White Squall still lives Admiral Harry Havenful, who sits in his parlor, gazing on the pink-and-straw-colored man-of-war, and smokes his pipe placidly, as he walks down the serene pathway leading to old age. On fine days Mr. Toosypegs always comes to see him, and there dilates for hours on the manifold beauties and attractions of Lady Rita, to whom he intends to be faithful as long as he lives. Mr. Toosypegs never will get married. He says he intends consecrating his life to the memory of the sparkling little comet that once flashed across his sky, and then disappeared forever. Mr. O. C. Toosypegs' anguish and despair have subsided now to a calm, serene melancholy, seldom relieved by a smile, but by no means distressing to witness. He and the admiral continue to do good in their own simple, unobtrusive way, and find their chief delight in reading the letters they sometimes receive from Erminie and Pet. Judge Lawless lives in solitary grandeur at Heath Hill, the "Grand Seigneur" of Judestown still. Miss Priscilla resides in gloomy state at Dismal Hollow, and continues to murder the king's English and scold Orlando severely every day, which castigations he bears with evident meekness. Reader, to our friends in Judestown, you have bidden an eternal farewell. Ray Germaine has risen to rank and wealth in his profession, and his handsome wife is the leader of the *ton* in the city where she resides, and excites in turn the wonder and admiration and envy of every one who knows her. Marriage has subdued her wildness a little, but not eradicated it; and our Pet is the happiest little lady in existence. There is a miniature Pet there, too—a saucy little limb already, who promises to be a second edition of wild Pet Lawless, in deeds as well as in looks.

Lady Erminie and Mr. Lawless reside in England, for the Countess De Courcy will not part with her daughter.

Little Lady Rita has married a Spanish grandee—a Don John somebody, and gone to live in her own "castle in Spain." Marguerite has accompanied her to that sunny land.

The Earl and Countess De Courcy, loved and honored, pass happily through life together. Their latter days promise to be as bright with sunshine as their early ones were dark and troubled. Reader, to all these, too, and I fear not unreluctantly, you must bid farewell.

THE END.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES:

Missing punctuation has been added and obvious punctuation errors have been corrected.

Archaic, alternate and misspellings of words have been retained to match the original work with the exception of those listed below.

Page 10: "Hr." changed to "Mr." (and I do assure you, Mr. Harkins, I hadn't the faintest idea of hitting you that time.)

Page 22: "sudder" changed to "shudder" (she said, with a convulsive shudder.)

Page 61: "ad" changed to "and" (and he confessed he did that).

Page 77: "Jernygham" changed to "Jernyngham" (he was joined by Jernyngham and Howard).

Page 80: "Jernynham" changed to "Jernyngham" (Miss Clara Jernyngham had obtained the desire of her heart at last).

Page 92: duplicate word "and" removed (numbing the sense of pain, and leaving nothing).

Page 98: "these" changed to "there" (but her physician said there was no danger).

Page 103: "women" changed to "woman" (Oh, woman! if there be one spark of human nature).

Page 111: "catankerous" changed to "cantankerous" (and a cantankerous expression of countenance generally).

Page 119: "Toospyegs" changed to "Toosypegs" for spelling consistency.

Page 135: "yon" changed to "you" (let me tell you that!)

Page 147: "feeling" changed to "feelings" (Somehow, my feelings are always relieved when I'm with you, Miss Minnie.)
Page 163: "the" changed to "he" (as he held the candlestick aloft).
Page 168: "shufling" changed to "shuffling" (setting that ominously-named animal off at a shuffling dog-trot).
Page 174: "comet o" changed to "come to" (I hasn't lived forty odd years to come to dis in my old ages o' life.)
Page 197: "them" changed to "then" (Well, come along then; I'll tell her.)
Page 212: removed duplicate word "of" (Then the very demon of defiance sprung into the eyes of the elf).
Page 218: "loss" changed to "lose" (Since Heaven willed we should lose one angel it gave us).
Page 220: "befor" changed to "before" (it had made her gentle, tender, and more saintly then ever before.)
Page 236: "begining" changed to "beginning" (said her father, beginning to think there might be method in this madness.)
Page 238 and 240: "dispair" changed to "despair" (Reading no expression whatever in that "Book of Beauty" but the mildest sort of despair).
Page 245: "its" changed to "it's" (it's the most peculiar).
Page 245: "sunlght" changed to "sunlight" (the red rings of flame flashing out in the sunlight).
Page 245: "deepy" changed to "deeply" (and in that moment fell more deeply, deplorably, and helplessly in love than ever.)
Page 249: "microsope" changed to "microscope" (You may take a microscope and look from this until the week after next).
Page 276: "remainded" changed to "reminded" (until the air would have reminded you of "Ceylon's spicy breezes,").
Page 278: "hight" changed to "height" (as she drew herself up to her full height, and calmly said).
Page 279: "hight" changed to "height" (as she stood drawn up to her full height.)
Page 281: "gruffy" changed to "gruffly" (said the admiral, gruffly, putting it in his own mouth again.)
Page 330: "have" added for sentence continuity (they would have made her a prisoner at once.)
Page 339: "Day" changed to "Ray" (Dear Ray, do not look and speak so strangely.)
Page 346: "at" added for sentence continuity (And they had to take and carry me off at such a contrary time).
Page 348: "bread" changed to "beard" (contrasting with his jet-black hair and beard).
Page 372: "stands's" changed to "stands" (There she stands the lost daughter and heiress of Lord De Courcy!)
Page 372: "by" added for sentence continuity (He went over and took his place by Erminie.)
Page 381: "how" changed to "now" (you can afford to wait a few moments longer now.)
Page 382: "to" added for sentence continuity (with a sort of still, deep joy not to be expressed in words.)
Page 384: "parent" changed to "parents" (the long-divided parents and child were reunited at last).
Page 387: "Ermine" changed to "Erminie" ("Now, Pet, why? You can come if you like," said Erminie.)
Page 388: "Ermine" changed to "Erminie" (As for Erminie, she wept audibly as the carriage rolled away).

[The end of *The Gypsy Queen's Vow* by May Agnes Fleming]