Oliver Goldfinch; or, The Hypocrite

Emerson Bennett

Table of Contents

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CHAPTER I. THE HYPOCRITE UNMASKED.

It was a dark and stormy night in the month of November, 18—. To simply say it was dark and stormy, conveys but a faint idea of what the night was in reality. The clouds were pall black, and charged with a vapor which, freezing as it descended, spread an icy mantle over every thing exposed. The wind was easterly and fierce, and drove the sleety hail with a velocity that made it any thing but pleasant to be abroad. Signs creaked, windows rattled, lamps flickered and became dim, casting here and there long ghostly shadows, that seemed to dance fantastically to the music of the rushing winds, as they whistled through some crevice, moaned down some chimney, or howled along some deserted alley on their mad career. It was, take it all in all, a dismal night, and such an one as, with a comfortable shelter over our heads and a cheerful fire before us, is apt to make us thank God we are not forced to be abroad like the poor houseless wretches who have no place to lay their heads. It is too much the case at such times, that we congratule ourselves on being far better off than they, without taking into consideration it is our duty, as humane beings, to render them as comfortable as our circumstances will permit. But who thinks of the poor? God cares for them, say the rich, and that is enough.

But dark and disagreeable as was the night alluded to, there was one who strode rapidly through the almost deserted streets of New York, seemingly unmindful of the storm, and wholly occupied with thoughts of his own, whether bright and cheerful, or dark and gloomy as the storm itself, will presently be seen.

At the moment we have chosen to introduce him to the reader, he was picking his way along a narrow, dark and filthy street, which leads from the vicinity of Five Points to a more open thoroughfare, that, crossing it at right angles, traverses a great portion of the city between the North and East rivers. On reaching this latter, known as Grand street, he turned to the left, and in a few minutes was standing at its junction with the still larger and more fashionable thoroughfare of Broadway. Here he made a momentary pause, and cast his eyes to the right and left, while something like a heavy sigh escaped him. All was gloomy as before; for though an early hour in the evening, even Broadway was nearly deserted; and only a few stragglers, with here and there an omnibus or close shut hack rattling swiftly past, as if the drivers cared little to pause or seek for passengers, met his eager gaze. Turning to the right, our wayfarer pushed up Broadway with a quickened pace, as if reminded by some inward monitor he had been moving too tardily. Looking now neither to his right hand nor left, but with his head bowed on his bosom to avoid the peltings of the storm, he still pressed on for several squares, when he came to a beautiful street, made more retired than some of its neighbors by being composed of splendid private residences. Here again he paused for a few seconds, and looked wistfully down its now deserted walks, as if he felt a secret hesitation in going farther. Then, as if suddenly acted upon by another thought, he darted more rapidly than ever along the slippery pavement, and in less than five minutes stood before a splendid mansion—the secluded abode of wealth, ease and refinement. As he halted at the foot of the marble steps, and cast his eyes up to a window where a soft light faintly stole through a rich damask silk curtain, he sighed audibly, ran his hand quickly across his forehead, and seemed even then almost uncertain whether to advance or retire. But his decision was soon made, and springing up the steps in haste, he rang the bell with a hand made nervous by agitation.

In due time, a sleek, well−dressed, wellfed negro, some thirty years of age, whose general characteristics bespoke the darky dandy, cautiously opened the door, as if either fearful of the storm or the visiter; but no sooner was it open, than the young man−−for such the light of the hall revealed him to be—sprang inside, to the no little dismay and astonishment of the black, who was about to make some impertinent remark, but which the other perceiving, said hastily:

"Excuse me, Jeff; I have no time to stand on ceremonies. Is your master at home?"

It is impossible to portray the look of indignant scorn with which the negro heard and responded to this abrupt apology and interrogation. Drawing himself up with a proud air, he cast a supercilious glance over the person of the intruder, from head to foot and from foot to head, looking hard at his thread−bare garments, the remnants of better days, and then answered rather disdainfully:

"See here, Edgar Courtly, you fo'get you'sef. When I's wid my ekals, I's called Misser Jeffrey Pomfret, and none of dem familiar Jeff's, only by gemmen as is gemmen. And as to massa, I's hab you know as how dis child hab nothin to do wid dem vulgar names. I is free nigger now, and massa am done gone long time ago."

The pale features of the young man flushed, his dark eyes flashed, his hand opened and shut convulsively, as he heard these insulting words, and for a moment he seemed on the point of punishing the negro for his insolence; but then, remembering where he was, and the object he had in coming hither, he smothered his indignation and calmly replied:

"*Once*, Mr. Jeffrey Pomfret, as you are pleased to term yourself, such language from you to me would have cost you a severe chastisement; but things have altered since, and so let it pass. Is Mr. Goldfinch at home?"

"'Spose he am?" returned Jeff, doggedly.

"Then tell him I wish to speak with him without a moment's delay."

"You−you tink he see you?" asked Jeff, shaking his head.

"Do as you are bid," rejoined the young man, sharply, "or, be the consequences what they may, I will teach you a lesson you will not soon forget;" and clenching his hand, he took a step or two towards the negro, who, perceiving matters were approaching a crisis, slowly departed on his errand, muttering as he went something about the impertinence of poor relations, until his person had disappeared up the stairs leading from the hall to the chambers above.

As soon as he was out of sight, young Courtly folded his arms on his breast, and with brows rather closely knit, in silence awaited his return. In a short time the negro made his appearance, and in a rather pompous tone said:

"Misser Gol'finch says you please excuse him, case he am engaged."

"I will not excuse him," returned young Edgar, in a sharp tone of indignation, while his face reddened and his dark eyes flashed defiance. "I came here to see him, and I will *not* depart without. Tell him so!"

"No! no! I'll no goes near him wid dat message," returned Jeff, "case dis child's head would be done gone brokum."

"Then I will seek him where he is," rejoined Edgar Courtly. "Show me his apartment!"

"Bess not go, Misser Edgar!"

"Do as I bid you!"

"Well, den, fust room on de leff."

With this the young man advanced to the staircase, and ascended it with an unfaltering step. On reaching the floor above, he paused at the first door on the left and rapped. On hearing a voice say "Come in," he entered a splendidly furnished apartment, whose bright and cheerful appearance formed an imposing contrast to the howling, dismal night without. Every thing of refined comfort was here profusely displayed; but as all tastefully arranged apartments are much alike, it will be unnecessary for us to describe it minutely. A bright coal fire was burning in the grate, in front of which, at some little distance, stood an elegant marble center−table, strewn with books and papers, and supporting a large alabaster lamp, whence issued a flood of soft, bewitching light. By this table, on the entrance of Edgar Courtly, sat two persons—a lady just blooming into womanhood, and a gentleman some forty−five years of age−−the former engaged in reading a book, and the latter in perusing a newspaper. The eyes of both simultaneously rested upon the intruder, when the lady, rising from her seat, passed out of the room by a side door, leaving the gentlemen alone to themselves. With their eyes bent sternly on each other, and a frown gathering on the brow of each, for a short time the occupant of the apartment and his unwelcome guest remained silent—a period we will improve in describing their personal appearance.

We have said that the gentleman by the table was a man some forty−five years of age, and consequently scarcely turned the full vigor of intellectual manhood. His appearance, however, was, in some respects, in advance of his years; for his head was partially bald, and partially covered with thin, gray hairs. Whether this was the result of unassisted nature, or brought about by perplexity, fright, grief trouble, scheming or care, we shall not pause here to determine, but simply chronicle the fact. His features, generally, were regular, and of that peculiar cast which would make them prepossessing or otherwise, according to the mood or will of the owner. There was no lack of intellect in the prevailing expression of the countenance, and the forehead was high and broad. His eyes were of a clear, cold blue, that would not be likely to impress you favorably, unless rather softly twinkling under the veil of hypocrisy, which none could better and more readily assume than he. His mouth and chin were rather handsome, and the former well filled with white, regular teeth, visible at every smile, and which smile was often present to cover some hidden, devilish design. Take him all in all, Oliver Goldfinch was a character you would need to study long and well to properly understand; and even then, with a deep knowledge of human nature, and a keen, quick perception of the true state of the heart from outward signs, ten to one you would give him credit for

being a far better man than would his recording angel. But it is not our design to point out here his virtues, his faults, nor his characteristics. He must speak and act throughout our story in propria persona, and the reader can be his own judge in the end. With the additional statement that in person be was portly, and of an air to command respect among strangers, we turn to Edgar Courtly.

In stature the latter was slightly above medium, possessing a fine, manly form, and a dignified bearing that would have befitted one his senior by ten years. No one, not even the most casual observer, could ever mistake him for a common character— for one of that herd of human beings who are as much alike as the pebbles on the sea−washed beach. His featurer were pale and haggard, as if from some corroding, inward struggle−−a painful, constant labor of the mind, which bears the body on to premature decay. Yet this appearance did not set ill upon him, but rather increased that look of lofty, noble intellectuality, which lighted his countenance and shone in his dark, eloquent, hazel eye. His forehead was broad and massive, and though not remarkably high, was expressive of brilliant and vigorous thought. As he stood before the other, his eye fixed intently on him, there was a slight contraction of his handsome brows, and a compression of his thin, bloodless lips, expressive of a determination to push to the end the task he had imposed upon himself in thus coming unannounced into the presence of one, who, if not an absolute foe, could by no means be regarded as a friend. And as the two stood and stared upon each other, the selfish, scheming look of the worldly man found as great a contrast in the bold, noble, open, yet passionate countenance of the youth, as did his elegant broadcloth, starched linen, and white, systematically−tied neckcloth, in the negligent, threadbare, faded garments of the other.

"Well, sir?" said Mr. Goldfinch at length, throwing down his paper with an angry gesture, and pausing as if for the other to state his business. "Well, sir," he resumed in a sharper tone, as the young man, dropping his eyes to the floor, did not seem in haste to reply, "to what am I indebted for this intrusion of Edgar Courtly?"

"Pardon me!" answered the young man, in a subdued tone, closing the door and taking a few steps forward, but still with his eyes cast down. "I am sorry, sir, that circumstances have forced me to intrude myself in this manner, but—"

"Stop!" interrupted the other, bluntly; "you make use of wrong phrases. There are *no* circumstances, young man, let me tell you, which can *force* a person, well brought up, beyond the rules of good breeding. No man of honor, sir, with a spark of the *gentleman* in him, could by any means be induced to intrude himself on another, when previously informed of that other's desire not to be disturbed."

"Well, sir, as you will—but at present I have more urgent matters than a disputation on a trifling point of etiquette. I came here, to this house, sir, to see you, sent a message to you to that effect, and not succeeding by that means in bringing you to me, have taken the liberty of calling on you in your own apartment."

"At the risk of being kicked down stairs for your trouble," retorted the other, flushing with anger.

"No, I do not think I ran any such risk," rejoined Edgar, giving the other such a firm, cool, determined look, that he moved uneasily in his seat, let his eyes sink to the floor, and slightly coughed, by way of filling up the unpleasant interval and reassuring himself. "I hardly think I ran any such risk," pursued the young man, approaching the table, and even bending over toward the other, as he added the sarcastic interrogation: "Do *you*, Mr. Goldfinch?"

"Ahem!" growled the other, "ahe−e−m! Come, come—what does all this mean?— What is it you want here with me at this time of night, Edgar Courtly?"

"Justice," answered young Edgar, promptly.

"How, sir? in what way? what do you mean?"

"My mother, sir, I fear is dying."

"Well?" was the cold response.

"Well, say you!" cried the other, with a burst of indignation. "Well, say you! By heavens, sir, it is not well, but most wofully ill! My mother, I say, I fear is dying, and without the comforts of life, without medicine, without proper food, and without fire. Think of that on such a night as this!"

"Well?" was the rejoinder again.

"I came here for money, sir—the filthy dross of the earth, which, by its potent charm, can command all mortal aid."

"And why here? why came you to me? Have I not forbid you my house?"

"And why to you?" repeated the other. indignantly, taking no heed of the last insult; "because, unfortunately,

the blood of my mother runs in your veins. She is your sister."

"'Tis false!" cried the man of wealth; "false as a two−faced evil spirit. She is not my sister: I have disowned her: I did so on the day she threw herself away upon your father."

The young man reddened at this, bit his lips, and for a few minutes seemed almost vainly struggling to command his temper. He succeeded, however, at last, and then said in a low tone, with forced calmness:

"Ay, you did disown her, as you say; and well for her and all others concerned had you stopped there, and not carried your dark, double−dealing villiany any farther. You disowned her for a time, played the villian openly, and afterwards acted the still more villainous part of a hypocrite. You disowned your sister because she had married a poor man; but when you found, by good fortune, energy and perseverance, my father was in a fair way to amass a handsome competence, you thought it wise to play the fawning sycophant, that you might ingratiate yourself into his favor, and rob him of his honest earnings. You played the penitent—said you had been hasty—that you regretted what you had done, and hoped all would be overlooked. In short, you worked upon the noble nature of my father, until he was led to think you a conscientious, honest man, and took you into his confidence, only to be stung at last, as when one clasps a serpent to his bosom. Yes, sir, my father was wealthy, as you know, and as you alone know to what extent. Reposing at last every confidence in you, he left you in charge of all his affairs and went abroad on business. The vessel he sailed in was lost, and all perished; and when this news reached you, then it was you showed your cloven foot; then it was you threw off in part the mask, and in part revealed yourself a devil incarnate. Suddenly then you discovered my father had left a will, by which, after a small pittance to my mother, sister and myself, you became sole heir to his vast possessions. You grieved sorely about his death, as every one could see by your solemn, pale face and sable robes, and by the punctilious manner in which you administered on his last will and testament, claiming to a cent every thing to which you had now a legal right, even to the mansion my nearly distracted mother then inhabited. All this you did with a smooth, oily tongue, but wobegone countenance, saying it was not for the property you sought— that you cared nothing about that—but that all you did was simply done to carry out the desires of your dearly adored, but unfortunate brother; that when every thing should have become satisfactorily settled, you would present your sister the estate, and every thing should go on as smoothly as before. Did you do this? Ask your own self−condemning conscience, if you have one. Did you do this? Let the widow's prayers and orphans' tears answer. Did you do this? Turn to the great Register of Heaven, on which all good and evil deeds are written, and see if you can trace aught there commendable. Did you do this? No, base hypocrite! as I now tell you to your teeth you are, you did no such thing. On one pretence and another you disposed of the property and removed to this city, where you have been, and are still, living on your ill−gotten gains; and where you promised, if my mother would follow, you would support her handsomely. Thinking you might have a particle of humanity in your composition, and would restore her in part what was rightfully her own, she sold her effects and came hither, only to find herself and children beggars, and wholly disowned by a miscreant brother."

The young man was still on the point of proceeding farther, when the other, unable to endure more, sprang from his seat, and with demoniac rage depicted on his countenance, exclaimed:

"Hold, rash boy! or, by the living powers, I'll have you ejected from my presence as I would an assassin!"

"Nay," returned Edgar, coolly, "do not get in a passion, Mr. Goldfinch—uncle I will not call you, since you deny relationship,— do not be uneasy, sir, but sit down and hear me out, for the worst is still to come. Nay, no frowns, for they will not intimidate me in the least, and can therefore do you no service. Nay, furthermore, do not attempt to leave the room, nor to call assistance here, or I will not be answerable for the consequences—and just now I am somewhat of a desperate individual, Mr. Goldfinch. There, that is right," he added, as, after some hesitation, the other at length resumed his seat; "now I will proceed in brief:

"I have said, Mr. Goldfinch, that so soon as it was ascertained my father was dead, you somehow mysteriously discovered a will, which made you principal heir to his possessions. Now, although this was found in due form, bearing his signature and that of several witnesses, and although in turning to the court register it was found entered the day previous to his setting sail for the continent, still, good Mr. Goldfinch, since I must speak the truth, I grieve to say there were not wanting those base enough to insinuate to my mother and myself, that Ethan Courtly, my sainted father, never had the honor of reading a line of it, or in fact of knowing he had set his hand to any such document."

"But—but," gasped the other, turning pale with excitement, "you—you—"

"Pray do not get in a passion," pursued Edgar. "Keep cool, Mr. Goldfinch, keep cool. I know you would ask if I believe any such base insinuations. The fact is, you see, just now it is perfectly immaterial what I believe. I have no time to say farther, than that I came here for money, and money I *must* have—or, mark me, Mr. Goldfinch, the most heavy of consequences shall rest on your head. If you ever did any wrong in your life—mind, now, I say if—(and the dark hazle eye of young Edgar was fixed piercingly upon the other, as if to read his very soul,) you doubtless had some assistance; and it sometimes happens that tools turn traitors. *Some things are known*. Do you understand me? I came for money. Can I have it?"

The abrupt manner in which the young man concluded, the peculiar emphasis he laid upon certain words, and the peculiar look which accompanied them, implied he knew far more than he chose then to reveal, and produced a curious effect upon his uncle, insomuch that he changed color often, dropped his eyes to the ground, moved uneasily in his seat, and allowed himself to be perceptibly embarrassed.— At the last question he started suddenly, and answered rather quickly:

"Certainly, certainly—how much do you want?" And then, bethinking he had thrown himself off his guard, he as quickly added: "That is—I—I must say—that— that—I am willing to assist my sister— or your mother, I should say—some—but do not feel able to do so to any great extent at present: in fact, to tell the truth, have no funds at all about me—but if you will call—"

"Nay," interrupted the other, "I will manage that. Just give me your check for a certain amount."

"Certainly I would—but—" began the other, and then stopping, as a sudden thought struck him, (which must have been prompted by the devil, if one might judge by the deep, sinister smile that curled for a moment around his mouth, shone in his eyes, and then vanished like one's breath from a mirror,) he added: "Certainly I will—let me see!—yes, I will do it;" and going to his *escritoire*, he wrote a few lines and handed them to the young man, with the injunction to trouble him no more, but hie to his mother and relieve her as soon as possible.

Glancing at the paper, Edgar Courtly was surprised to discover it a check for one thousand dollars on a banker in Wall street. The first impulse of his generous soul, was to seize his uncle's hand and crave pardon for all he had said, and own he had done him wrong; but then, remembering the peculiar manner by which the other had been wrought to this liberality, he altered his intention and simply said:

"Sir, I thank you! Good night!" and with the last words he opened the door and disappeared.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Oliver Goldfinch, as the form he hated quitted his sight; "you thank me, do you, you little know for what. Well, Edgar Courtly, you triumph now in your own conceit; but my turn will come next; and then—and then—" and shaking his head, with a dark smile, but leaving the sentence unfinished, he resumed his seat at the table, and turned again to his paper, as though nothing had occurred to disturb his equanimity.

CHAPTER II. THE HOUSE OF DEATH.

In a dingy, filthy street, known to those familiar with New York as Mott, there stood, among a great many others of the same class, an old, dilapidated, wooden structure, which, though it could scarcely bear the title of dwelling, was used as such, or rather as an abode, by a few miserable tenants, whose poverty precluded the possibility of their seeking one more pleasant and commodious. Since its erection, the street whereon it stood had been somewhat raised, which gave to the building the appearance of having sunk into the earth some two or three feet. Its windows could hardly boast a sound pane of glass— in some cases not any—and the door of entrance was broken from its hinges. There was no fear of thieves here, for the simple reason there was nothing within worth the trouble of stealing; and hence the tenants lived less in dread of their neighbors than the elements, whose cold penetration, on such a night as we have described in the opening chapter, was any thing but agreeable. Between this building and a similar one on the left, ran a narrow, filthy alley, communicating with a miserable hovel in the rear, containing only two apartments, badly ventillated and worse lighted. To this latter we must for the present direct our attention.

In the front apartment—or at least in that apartment nearest the street, for neither, strickly speaking, could be called front—on the night our story opens, there were two occupants—a mother and daughter— the former lying upon a rude bed, worn down almost to a skeleton, and in the agonies of a disease which was fast bearing her to a world that knows no sorrow, and the latter kneeling by her side on the damp floor, clasping her thin hand, and weeping the bitterest tears a mortal can feel. The elder was a woman slightly turned of forty, but bearing the marks of sixty years—the third score being added by trouble rather than time. Although, as previously stated, sadly wasted by sorrow and disease, yet the outlines of her pale, sunken features and a glance of her deep blue eye, which was scarcely shorn of its wonted luster, showed she had once been a very beautiful being—beautiful by reason of intellect as well as person. In sooth, what is beauty of person without intellect, but the cold expressionless wax figure, or the equally inanimate doll?

The features and form of the daughter bore a strong resemblance to those of her mother in her palmiest days. Her skin was fine and clear, and her deep blue eyes beamed with a soft and tender light, showing a soul full of all the sweetest, purest and holiest feelings of humanity. Her hair was a light brown, and parted over a smooth, handsome forehead, which gave to her a noble and benevolent appearance. In fine, combine the whole features—which to define singly would almost be impossible, as the strong points for which the painter would seek were every where wanting—and you beheld one of those angelic creatures that seem formed to convey to us an accurate conception of beings too lovely to dwell in a place so cold and heartless, unless for a brief period, to soften, as it were, by the sunshine of their presence, the dark and cheerless aspect which must otherwise surround us. Her form, not above medium, was airy and graceful as that of sylph; while her tiny feet and white delicate hands would have won favor from the most fastidious connossieur. Add to this, that her age was just eighteen, and with a little imagination you can place her accurately before your mind's eye.

Lovely as she was in person, not less so was she in those virtues which most adorn her sex. There was nothing in her disposition of a cold, haughty, repulsive nature; but, on the contrary, she was ardent, mild and affectionate, forgiving to a fault, and full of all those sweet and holy sympathies which sometimes make us pause and wonder why earth is permitted to contain a being so illy suited to its jars and discords. But a little reflection will show us that this is a wise ordination of that Great Being who set the wheels of creation in motion—for what would our world be without occasionally such spirits to produce a harmony with the rough chords of life? Without such gentle spirits, what would earth be but pandemonium— a darkened sphere of gloom and sorrow, illumined by no ray of happiness?

The apartment where these two beings were, was unfurnished, or at least so scantily as to be unworthy of the name. A few rough chairs, an old worm−eaten bureau, a deal table, on which stood a sickly, tallow candle, sending forth a dismal light, that rather served to show than dispel the darkness, together with the bed and a few of the most common articles in use, completed the list. In the fire−place lingered a few embers, fast going out for lack of fuel to renew the flame.

And this cold, dismal, dungeon−like place, was the present abode of those whose every look and gesture, to

say nothing of their language, told that to them it was a new life, or rather a living wretchedness to which they had never been accustomed. Oh, what a gloomy scene was this! what a terrible trial for those to undergo who had heretofore been used to wealth, ease and refinement! What are the sufferings of the miserable wretches who have never known aught but poverty, compared with those who feel it for the first time? In any case such condition is hard enough to be borne, Heaven knows; but the horrors thereof are increased ten−fold, when it falls upon such as have been born and bred in the halls of wealth. How the sensitive soul shudders and shrinks within itself, and even longs to escape its frail tenement of clay, and soar to that world of bliss where sorrow never enters, and all is bright and glorious sunshine forever!

And here were these unfortunate beings, alone by themselves, on a dismal night, when the storm without was howling in fury, shaking their frail abode even to its foundation, as it whistled and moaned through the crevices with a wail like the voices of imprisoned spirits seeking to escape their bell of torture. And why were they here on such a night as this? Let the wrongs of humanity answer. Let the crimes of those who sit in high places answer. Let him, no matter who nor where, who has robbed the widow and the orphan of their last mite, answer—ay, answer before that Great Tribunal where Justice alone sits Judge, and Power and Wealth and Position stand but as chaff before the gale. As this poor widow and her daughter were on the night we introduce them, so have thousands been both before and since; and from the same cause, the wrongs of those who have occupied, and do occu py, a high place in the eyes of the worldly wise. But look to it, ye Wrongers, and tremble! for surely as the sun shines at noon day, that the stars are above us in the night, or that death will overtake you, so surely will there come a day of retribution— of fearful reckoning—when your canting hypocrisy will avail you not— when the "silver vail" will be stripped from your vile features, and you will stand forth before the eye of Almighty God in your own natural, hideous deformity! Look to it, we repeat, and tremble! for it will be a fearful, a terribly fearful moment to you.

For a few moments mother and daughter remained as introduced, with hands clasped in each other's, while the quick breathings of the invalid, the sobbings of the younger, and the raging of the storm, were the only sounds audible. It was a damp, cold night, and yet they were almost without fire, and both so thinly covered that they shivered in spite of their efforts to the contrary.

"Do not weep, my child!" said the invalid at length; "do not weep, Virginia! for your tears make my sufferings intense."

"Oh! how can I help it, mother?" returned the other, lifting her soft, wet eyes to her parent, with a fresh burst of grief. "How can I help it, mother, when I behold you thus, on a bed of sickness and pain, and—and—perhaps death, (she shuddered at the last dreadful word,) without even the ordinary comforts of life to relieve in part your sufferings? Oh! it is too much—too much!" and she again sobbed aloud with grief.

"It is hard, my daughter, I know," rejoined the other; "very, very hard; but then, my sweet Virginia, we should remember it is the will of God, who does all things for the best."

"So I try to think, dear mother; and so I do think, and know; and I have struggled long and hard to be composed, and not excite you with my grief—but in vain. My cup of bitterness seems over full, and these tears will come in spite of all my efforts to the contrary When I think of how we were once, and what we now are, and to what we owe our misfortunes, it is impossible for me to restrain myself, and it seems as if my brain were on fire and I must go mad."

"But," pursued the other, "you must not give way, my child! I feel certain our afflictions are all for the best, if we, poor, weak, short−sighted mortals, could but see into the great futurity. We are chastened, and most severely, but it is by the hand of our Maker, and for some good end— perhaps that we may wean our thoughts and affections from the world, and place them on more holy things."

"Ah! dear mother," returned the daughter, affectionately, "it is gratifying to hear you talk thus—you who have suffered so much—to see you so resigned to the will of Him who holds our destinies in his hands; for did you indeed repine, I am sure my reason would desert me. But still, for all, dear mother, I cannot restrain these tears—tears that come to relieve the overcharged soul—and I thank my God I can weep. You are sick, dear mother— you are suffering, perhaps with the pangs of death—and yet without aught to relieve you—with no kind friends but your own unfortunate children to shed a tear or feel an emotion for your fate.— And we, alas! cannot assist you. Look round this desolate apartment, and say, can I help but weep? It is cold, and dismal, and our scanty fire is going out. Oh! mother," she cried, with a new burst of grief, "you are dying for want of the ordinary

comforts of life!"

"But I trust all will be better soon, my sweet Virginia! Edgar, you know, has gone to see his uncle, who, however unmindful of our necessities he may have been, will surely not reject his petition when he learns our present condition."

"Hope for nothing there, mother—hope for nothing from him!" rejoined the other; "for he who was so base as to rob us of all we had, and then so shamefully deceive us, is devoid of all pity."

"Well, well, my child, do not despond, for God is good, though man be base. Is it not most time for Edgar to return? I wish he would come—for I—I—feel—very —very weak;" and her voice died away to a whisper.

Virginia sprang to her feet, with a look of alarm.

"Oh, mother!" she cried, wildly, observing a marked change in the features of the invalid—a kind of deathly sinking about the eyes, and a lividness on the lips: "Oh, mother! dear mother! you surely are not dying?"

For a few moments Mrs. Courtly vainly struggled to speak. At last she gasped, rather than said:

"I—I—trust not, Vir−gin−ia; but—I— am very—we—weak—and—and—feel strangely."

"Oh, God!" burst from the terrified Virginia. "Dying, and no one by! Heaven help me! Oh, Merciful Father, help me! Oh, you must not die, mother!" she continued, wildly. "Pray take something to revive you! Here," she cried, seizing a small tin cup that rested on the table, and hurriedly applying it to the lips of the other, "take a draught of water!"

Poor creature! God help her! it was all she had to give.

With a slight motion of the hand, the invalid waved it away, saying, in a feeble tone:

"I wish Edgar would come. Ah! how dark it grows! Has the candle gone out, Virginia?"

"No, mother, it is still burning, but feebly."

"Then my sight must be failing, for I can hardly see."

"Oh, this is terrible!" shrieked Virginia, sinking upon her knees and burying her face in the miserable covering of the bed.

A groan from the sufferer made her again spring to her feet. "Are you dying, mother?" she asked, wildly; "really dying, think you?"

"Alas!" sighed the other, "that is more than I can say. I feel strangely—perhaps the hand of death is on me."

Virginia instantly caught hold of her hands. They felt cold. She then tried her temples and feet. They were cold also. Then she began chafing different parts of her body, while her own bosom heaved with emotions too deep for language to express. While thus occupied, there came a rap upon the door.

"Ha!" exclaimed Mrs. Courtly, with something like returning animation, "God grant it be Edgar!" and as Virginia sprang forward to give him admittance, she added, in an under tone: "for I would see him again ere I depart to return no more."

"And how is mother now?" were the first words Edgar spoke as he crossed the threshold.

"Alas! I fear she is dying," whispered his sister.

"Dying?" cried Edgar; and with one bound he stood beside the bed of his mother, and would have embraced her, only that he remembered in time his garments were dripping water.

"I am glad you have come, Edgar," spoke Mrs. Courtly, in a very weak, husky tone, "for I was afraid I should never behold you again."

"Are you then much worse, dear mother?" inquired Edgar, in a tremulous voice, striving to master his feelings so as not to appear agitated.

"Yes, Edgar," was the reply, "mortal aid I fear can avail me nothing now. I feel the hand of death upon me. My sight has already failed me. I cannot see you.— Give me your hand. And now yours, Virginia;" and as they both silently complied, she continued:

"My dear children, you must not weep and mourn for my loss, for you know I shall be better off in the land to which I am hastening. True, I could have desired to live longer, to comfort you with my counsel in these your darkest hours of adversity— but it is not permitted, and I will not murmur. You know what is right and proper; and I trust, when I am gone, you will not swerve from the path of duty and rectitude. However sorely you may be tried, and God alone knows to what extent that will be, I beseech you, with a dying prayer, never to do wrong! never to be led from the path of virtue into that of vice! I know you will have many temptations before you—will have examples of how the wicked prosper—but still be firm to your dying mother's injunctions, and all will in the

end be well. My children, I charge you, with my last breath, to value honor and virtue more than life! I would say more, but my strength is failing me so fast I cannot."

While speaking, both Edgar and Virgina stood gazing upon the countenance of their dying parent in silence, but with breasts heaving with feelings too deep and potent for the pen to record. As she ceased, Edgar exclaimed:

"Oh! mother! do not say your are dying! Perhaps it is only a faintness—a want of food—or of some reviving cordial. Cheer up, dear mother! you shall have every thing. I am rich now, dearest mother. I succeeded in my errand. See here! I have my uncle's check for a thousand dollars;" and he held the paper up before her.

"Then you will not starve, my children, God be thanked!" cried Mrs. Courtly, fervently, with energy. "I can die happier now for the thought. But it comes too late for me—for already I stand on the brink of death."

"Nay, mother, perhaps net. Stay! something must be done! I will run for a physician. I know I shall not be refused when I show this."

As he spoke, he turned hurriedly away and darted to the door to execute his purpose, but the feeble voice of his mother arrested his progress.

"Stay, Edgar," she said, "stay, I implore you! for if you leave me now, you will never behold me again on earth. I am more and more convinced every moment that I am dying—that I shall speedily pass away."

Edgar slowly returned, and again taking her hand, the manly tears he could no longer restrain followed each other mournfully down his anguished features; while his sister, placing her head on her mother's pillow, sobbed aloud. It was a heart−rending and dismal scene. Without the winds did fiercely blow— Within were desolation—wo.

For a few moments no voice broke the cheerless monotony of the driving storm. Then the invalid feebly said:

"Kneel, my children, and pray!"

Both silently obeyed; and as they arose from their knees and bent over their mother, each drew back with a start. The next moment a wild shriek from Virginia told the fearful tale.

Their mother was dead. During that prayer her spirit had passed away—gone from earth—returned to God who gave it.

CHAPTER III. THE LIVING MOURNERS.

It is a terrible thing to be alone in spirit. To feel, while surrounded by a multitude, there is not a single heart vibrating in sympathy with your own. To feel you are encompassed by cold, heartless strangers; that there is no tie to bind you to earth; no inducement for you to cling to a life already burdensome, unless it be the solemn dread of the uncertain change in throwing off this "mortal coil." How many have felt thus! How many still feel! How many have stood beside the bed of death and seen the eyes that ever looked bright on them, close; the lips which murmured in their last action naught but words of hope and comfort to them, sealed forever; the breath which seemed the Promethean spark of their own existence, cease; and the soul, which was the life of their life, wing its flight for aye beyond the shores of time, and felt that their last and only friend was eternally gone to that realm whence no mortal power can summon back. How many have felt thus, and in their anguish and despondency have sunk down and prayed that God would soon let them follow. Millions have felt thus; millions still feel; and millions unborn shall suffer yet the same. The world is full of misery. There is no such thing as unalloyed happiness here. Our very joys derive their chiefest pleasure from the strong contrast they present to our sorrows— the while our heaviest sorrows are lightened by the joys built on the hopes of the future. Perhaps it is this variety— this sunshine and storm—that gives to life its greatest zest—its fairest attractions; for it is a well established fact, we can only know pleasure from having experienced pain.

It was thus, but not wholly thus, with Edgar and Virginia. They were alone in the wide world, yet not wholly alone.— They had each other to live for, each other to weep for, each other to pray for, each other to console and be in turn consoled. But still they were as lopped branches from the withered trunk. Their mother, their only parent, in whom the deepest affections of both centered, was dead; and their young hearts felt anguish−stricken and desolate. They felt and knew *she* at least was better for the change; and yet, though they prized her happiness above their own, they wept passionately, bitterly, their irreparable loss; for such is the selfishness of even the most unselfish of mankind.

It was a sight to wring the heart of a stoic, to behold them stand, on that ill−fated, gloomy night, by the corpse of her whose whole soul in life had breathed naught but love and tenderness, and vainly implore her in touching accents to look upon them once more—to let them again hear the sound of her sweet, beloved voice— while the only answer returned was the seemingly fiercer howl of the Storm Spirit. Oh! who shall tell the anguish of that youth and maiden, as they grasped the hands of her they best loved in life, and passionately pressed them to their hearts— but found them cold and inactive—found them give no pressure in return!

For a few minutes after the sufferer had breathed her last, both Edgar and Virginia occupied themselves as just described; and then, finding too truly she was dead, the latter threw herself upon the corpse, and again and again kissed her cold livid lips, and wept, and groaned, and sobbed alternately; while the former, sinking upon a seat, buried his face in his hands, and rocked to fro like a strong oak shaken by the tempest. For a time he was unable to shed a tear, and his heart crept to his throat and almost strangled him, and his brain seemed parched and withered. In this state he rose and paced the floor for some minutes, during which the working of his features showed that his soul was on the rack of agony the most intense.— At last, greatly to his relief, he burst into tears, and again seating himself, for a long time he wept freely.

An hour passed, and both Edgar and Virginia had become more calm. In sooth, the latter had lain herself down by the corpse, and with one arm thrown over its breast, and her face partly buried in the clothes, had cried herself into a kind of dreamy stupor, from which she only arroused occasionally to draw a long, sobbing breath. Edgar, on regaining somewhat his former composure, approached the bed, and bending over his much loved sister, gently whispered her name; but finding she took no heed of him, he resolved not to disturb her, and reseating himself near her, he took a hand of the corpse in his own, and was soon lost in a painful revery.

An hour and then another went by, and still Edgar sat as before, motionless and silent, with features so rigid, that, but for his breathing, he might naturally enough have been mistaken for one of the dead himself. Meanwhile the sobbing of Virginia had became less and less frequent, until at last her breathing announced that, for a short time, she had forgot her troubles in a quiet sleep. Again arousing himself, Edgar now arose, and collecting all the loose clothes he could find, gently spread them over his sister, and then bending down, and pressing his lips to her

forehead, softly murmured:

"God bless thee, thou sweet but fragile flower, and let thy sleep be long, that *some* misery may be spared thee!" and then taking his position as before, he remained the sad and lonely watcher of the night.

Towards morning the storm abated; and though shivering with the cold, for his garments had not been changed and the fire had long since gone out, Edgar, overcome by fatigue and excitement, at last dropped off into a feverish slumber, constantly broken by sudden starts, and as constantly renewed by exhausted nature. And thus passed that eventful night.

The gray of morning was just stream ing through the dingy window and crevices of the old hovel, as Edgar, arousing himself with a start and shaking off his drowsiness, turned to his sister. Much to his gratification he found her still asleep; and again stealing a kiss and pressing his lips to the cold cheek of his mother, he sallied forth to procure fuel and food, and make arrangements for the last sad rite he would ever be called upon to perform for her who had given him existence. By this time the storm had ceased entirely; but still it was cold and damp, and the pavements slippery with ice. Only a few persons were abroad in the street, and most of the houses were closed and looked as cold and cheerless as he felt at heart.

Moving on for a square and a−half, Edgar came to a small, miserable looking grocery, (numbers of which can be seen at all times in all parts of New York, where a little of every thing is kept and doled out to the poor in any quantity, from the value of a cent upwards,) the owner of which was just taking down his shutters, preparatory to his morning's sale. Here Edgar knew he could procure every thing he desired at present, even to a few sticks of wood, or a small measure of coal; and approaching the grocer, a rough, coarse looking Dutchman, he said, blandly:

"I wish to purchase a few necessary articles, and in the course of the day will call and settle for them."

The Dutchman shrugged his shoulders and gave him a contemptuous look, as he replied:

"I never trusts nopodys, and den nopodys don't never sheats me."

"But, my good sir," pursued Edgar, reddening, "I do not intend to cheat you. I will call, I pledge you my honor, and pay you every cent between this and night. I have a check about me for a large amount, which, so soon as business opens in Wall street, I will have cashed, and then I can settle for a thousand times the value of all I now require."

"Vare you lives?" querried the Dutchman; and as Edgar informed him, he continued: "Vy you has der sheck and not der moneys?"

"I only procured it last night, and have not since had an opportunity of disposing of it."

"What for den you wants der trusts now?" asked the still unsatisfied grocer. "Vy you don't vaits till you sells him, and comes mit der cash?"

"Because," answered Edgar, humoring him, in the hope he would grant his request, "it is necessary I should have a few articles now. My home is entirely deyoid of every thing one needs. My poor mother (and here in spite of himself his eyes became filled with tears, and his voice faltered and grew husky,) last night breathed her last in this abode of wretchedness, without fire, food, or medicine—for our last cent had been expended and its purchase exhausted—and now my poor sister, whom I have left alone with her, will sorely suffer, unless I procure something immediately."

The Dutchman shook his head with a frown, as he rejoined:

"It won't do. You tells a goot story— quite petter ash nopody else; but it ish all a tam lie, mit der sheck and all. You tries agin, and somepody ash don't know much, you makes believe him. You shust go, mit your dead motter and shister, and your great sheck, vich you han't got more nor as I, mitout you stole him;" and saying this, the hard−hearted grocer turned his back on Edgar, and coolly proceeded to finish taking down his shutters.

For a few moments, Edgar stood as one stupified with amazement, at the gross insult to himself, coupled as it was with such cool indifference. Then his hand clenched, his teeth closed tightly, his lips quivered, his eyes flashed fierce indignation, and he took a step forward, with the full determination of punishing the other for his insolence; but then, bethinking himself he would only become involved in a quarrel—which, to say the least, would now be most imprudent—he turned away, muttering:

"Such is the selfish, uncharitable world— and why should I quarrel with what I cannot alter! Oh, why was I born to come in contact with such base spirits! God of the orphan and friendless, protect and direct me! for wild thoughts are busy in my brain, and my heart seems turning to stone, like those of the wretches around me."

In a few minutes Edgar had entered another of these miserable groceries, where he met with the same success as before, with the exception that the owner simply refused to trust, without farther insulting him. Sadly dispirited and chagrined, he tried another, and still another, but in each met the same cold reply—all refused to credit his tale—and he slowly retraced his steps to his desolate abode, overwhelmed with grief, crushed in spirit and nearly heart−broken.

"I must perforce wait," he said, bitterly, "till I can procure the means to satisfy their uncharitable, avaricious natures. But poor, poor Virginia! how she will suffer;" and he groaned at the thought.

As he said this, he felt for his check, to be certain he still had resources to depend upon. To his surprise it was not where he expected to find it. Alarmed at this, he made an eager search of his garments; and then, who shall judge of his dismay and horror, when he discovered it was missing—that his last and only stay of support, in this his most trying hour, was gone!

"Oh, God!" he groaned, "if that be lost, what will become of us?" and almost maddened with excitement, he hurried back to his wretched abode, in the hope he might there find it.

The door was slightly ajar, and as he rushed into the chamber of death, he found Virginia bending over the corpse of her mother, wringing her delicate hands and weeping bitterly, while beside her stood a female, but a few years her senior striving by gentle words to console her.

"Do not weep and take on so, fair girl!" he heard uttered as he crossed the threshhold.

"Oh, Edgar, my dear brother!" cried Virginia, as she heard his step; and springing forward, she threw her arms around his neck, buried her face upon his bosom, and sobbed grievously.

"My poor, sweet Virginia!" murmured Edgar, tenderly, straining her to his heart, while his eyes grew dim with scalding tears.

"I heard her cry of agony, sir," said the strange female, apologetically, "and thinking it some person in sore distress, I hurried to her relief, which accounts for my presence here."

"For which God bless you!" returned Edgar, in that deep, earnest, passionate tone which carries with it the unmistakable evidence of sincerity.

The visiter, gave him one heartfelt look of gratitude, and then, much to his surprise, covered her eyes with her hands, sunk into a seat, and burst into tears. Before Edgar could ask for an explanation of this singular conduct, she rose, and hastily wiping her eyes, as if ashamed of her emotion, said, in a sad, earnest, tremulous voice:

"You are surprised to witness this to you strange ebulition of feeling; but, sir, it is a long time since I have heard God's blessing invoked upon my guilty head;" and again, in spite of herself, the tears pressed through her eyelids.

Edgar looked kindly but sadly upon her ere he made a reply, and even Virginia for the moment forgot her own grief, and turning her head, beamed upon her guest a curious but tender expression from her soft blue eyes, which touched the other to the very soul. Both she and her brother now instantly became aware that their guest belonged to that class of poor unfortunates whom the world takes pride in despising, rather than reclaiming, the while it harbors and pampers the damnable villains that make them what they are.

She had once been a lovely creature, but though scarcely turned of twenty years, there was a sad look of grief, and care, and heart−desolation in her appearance. Her once fine, noble looking features were pale and almost haggard, and her bright dark eye had lost some of its wonted brilliant luster. Still she was handsome, though in a measure the wreck of what she had been. Her features were fine and regular, and there predominated over all an expression of feeling—of sympathy with the sorrows of others, and a kind benevolence—which rendered her an object of interest and pity to such as could properly appreciate these high−born quali ties. Her compexion was an olive, and her hair, black and shiny as the raven's plume, was neatly parted and arranged with care, though the loose wrapper she wore, told she had just risen and had not yet completed her morning toilet.

"And you, too, fair lady, have felt the wrongs of mankind most bitterly!" said Edgar, in a soothing, sympathetic tone, accompanied with an expression in keeping with the words he uttered.

"Suffered!" returned the other, shuddering at the thought; "yes, I have indeed suffered, and God only knows how much."

"Then," rejoined Virginia, tenderly, "we can the better sympathise with one another, for we have felt the bitterest pangs of wo."

"Oh, no, not the bitterest, I trust!" returned the other, with energy; "not the bitterest. You have felt not the

excruciating pangs of a guilty conscience; for I can see, by your open, generous countenance, you have suffered innocently—that the oppressive weight of guilt is not on your stainless soul, weighing you down to the lowest depths of degradation."

"No, thank God!" returned Virginia, "I have as yet been spared that."

"And well may you thank God," rejoined the other, with spirit; "for all the other ills of this life are nothing in compare with it. Once, sweet lady, I was as good and pure, perhaps, as yourself; but the tempter came, and—(here her voice grew tremulous, and she turned away her head to conceal her emotion—) and in an unguarded moment I fell, and now—" She paused, and then suddenly added; "But of what am I thinking, to trouble you with my sorrows, when you have such weighty griefs of your own to contend with;" and she glanced mournfully toward the bed, where still lay the corpse of Mrs. Courtly, as she had breathed her last the night before.

"My mother!" burst from Virginia, while the tears gushed forth afresh; and approaching the bed, she knelt on the floor, took one of the cold hands of the corpse in her own, pressed it to her lips, and then seemed lost in prayer.

Both Edgar and the stranger gazed upon her in solemn silence, each busy with painful thoughts, till at length she arose, and turning to her brother, in a calmer mood than she had hitherto exhibited, said:

"And why did you leave me, Edgar, without telling me you were going? and where have you been? I awoke, and not finding you here, and seeing my dead mother by my side, I felt so wretchedly desolute, that in my anguish of spirit I uttered the cry of agony which brought this kind lady to me."

"I thought I should return ere you awoke," answered Edgar; "and I went for fuel and food. But I failed to get either," he continued, bitterly, "because the cold−hearted wretches to whom I applied would not sell to me without the money, and that you know I had not. And that reminds me," he added, with a start, "that I have missed the check of my uncle, my sole dependence now, without which we must starve. Did I not drop it here on the floor last night? Have you not seen it, Virginia?" and he began an eager search of the apartment, assisted by his trembling sister.

"Alas! what will become of us now!" he groaned, as, after a fruitless search, he gave up in despair, and sinking hopelessly upon a seat, covered his face with his hands, as if to shut out the dread contemplation.

"If it be money you need," said his guest, "thank Heaven! I can assist you, and will, if you will accept my poor offering. Here! here!" she pursued, with vehemence, drawing forth her purse, "here is gold; take it, take it, I beg, I implore of you! for it will be a relief to my conscience to feel I have done one good act."

"No, no! I dare not take it," returned Edgar, mournfully, motioning her back with his hand, "for I might never be able to repay you."

"The deed will repay itself," pursued the other, energetically, thrusting it upon Edgar. "The gold is valueless to me; and if it will ease one sorrow of yours, I shall deem myself tenfold rewarded."

"God bless you, lady!" cried Virginia, springing forward and seizing her hand, which she bathed with grateful tears: "God bless you! for whatever your faults may have been, you still possess some of the holiest attributes of the angels."

"There, there!" rejoined the other, affected to tears; "say no more!—you praise me far beyond my deserts."

"It may possibly be in my power at some future time," said Edgar, rising, and speaking in a voice made husky by deep emotion, "to repay this overwhelming debt of kindness; and if so, rest assured that my very life will be at your command. Your generosity—"

"Enough! enough!" interrupted the other. "Say no more, I beg of you! for you have more weighty matters to think of at present, and I am fitter for the scoffs and jibes of mankind than such words as these. Your mother must be laid out and interred; and then you must leave this wretched, filthy abode, which is no place for such as you. I will send those to you who will rightly perform the last sad offices to her mortal remains. Meanwhile, procure such things as you need, and if you desire more money, let me know. My quarters are just over the way, in yonder brick building. Adieu, for the present. I will soon be with you again, and superintend the laying out of the corpse myself. Here is my card;" and placing it in the hand of Virginia, which she pressed with warmth, she hurried out of the apartment, as if fearful of being detained by farther expressions of gratitude.

Both Edgar and his sister turned to the card, and beheld simply the name of Ellen Douglas, written in a plain, neat hand.

It is unnecessary for us to longer dwell upon this painful scene. Suffice it, therefore, that Ellen kept her word

with regard to the funeral arrangements of Mrs. Courtly, and that ere the sun had sunk to rest, her remains were followed to their last resting place by a small group, composed principally of the clergyman, Ellen and the chief mourners, the latter of whom bedewed her humble grave with tears, as she was being buried forever from their sight.

CHAPTER IV. THE PAST RECALLED.

Ere we proceed farther with our story, it is important we should touch somewhat upon the past, in order to show the train of circumstances which placed some of our characters in the position they occupied when introduced to the reader. In doing this, we shall endeavor to be as brief as possible, well knowing that, to most, long details of such matters prove excessively tedious. To begin then at the beginning, let us go back some twenty−five years, to the marriage of Ethan Courtly and Mary Goldfinch, the parents of Edgar and Virginia. From some remarks dropped by Edgar to his uncle, recorded in the opening chapter, the reader has already had an inkling of what is to come; but still there are many things not yet mentioned, which, as a faithful chronicler, we deem it our duty here to set forth.

At the time the marriage in question took place, Mary and her brother were orphans, living on a small estate bequeathed them by their father, who had died a year or two previous, and who had himself been a widower some three or four years. Their place of residence was near a small village, in the state of Maryland, distant about thirty miles from the city of Baltimore.— But notwithstanding they remained on the farm or plantation of their late father, we would not have the reader infer they were awkward country rustics, who had never mingled in refined society. On the contrary, their doating father had taken every pains to give both an education and polish superior to those by whom they were surrounded. Oliver had entered college very young, and graduated in his twentieth year; and Mary had left boarding school a ripe scholar at the age of sixteen. In fine, so lavish had been the expenditures of their father on them, that he had much impoverished his small estate, and besides encumbering a part with mortgage, had been obliged to dispose of all his negroes but two, in order to liquidate the more pressing debts.

At his death, Oliver took charge of the estate, and, by close management, and a sale of a few acres, succeeded in raising the mortgage and becoming sole proprietor; for though his sister was entitled to a portion, he took no other notice of her claims, than to offer her a home so long as she might remain unmarried.

Mary was not well pleased, for the disposition of her brother was illy suited to render her happy. He was morose and haughty to those he considered his dependents, or held in his power, though fawning enough to his superiors, or such as he expected by hypocritical manoeuvers to profit by. He was, withal, very ambitious, grasping and avaricious—so that those who knew him best, shunned him as they would a viper, and scandalized him much whenever his name chanced to be mentioned. But he had a faculty of making his dupes think him perfect; and those on whom he had a design, who had as yet only seen the bright side, could not be brought to believe that the refined, softspoken, smiling, agreeable young Goldfinch, could be the base hypocrite men reported him. No! it was wilful, malignant slander, to injure a high−minded, honorable young man; and their sympathies being aroused in consequence, they were only the more fully and blindly drawn into the net he had prepared for them, and which they seldom if ever discovered until too late to escape. He was a man without principle, who would stoop to any meanness to accomplish his end; though, to casually see and hear him converse, one would suppose him the very quintessence of nobleness and honor.

The first thing that sorely troubled Mary, and opened her eyes to his real nature— for having both been sent to school at an early age, she had seen little of him until her return—was his importuning her to inveigle and marry some rich young man; and this, too, ere their father had been six months in his grave, and while she was deeply mourning his death.

"Now do not have any false notions, Mary," he would say to her, "but follow my instructions, and you will soon be mistress of a splendid mansion. I have several acquaintances who are rich, and, though a little wild, that need not matter, for they will be the easier entangled, if the card be rightly played, and be the less likely to look close into the affair afterwards; and so you get plenty of money, and live in elegant style, what need you care? Come! I will invite them here, and trust me, I will soon see you settled as becomes my sister."

At first Mary thought him in jest, and laughed at his to her curious ideas of what should make a proper husband; but discovering soon her mistake, she mildly reproved him for being so worldly, and firmly declared she would not *see* his friends alone, much more listen to any proposals of the nature he required, even should they be never so strenuous in urging suit. In vain her brother sought, by all the false reasoning he could invent, to turn her

from her resolve. The more he importuned the firmer she grew, until at last, so repugnant became the subject to her feelings, and so ardent her desire to convince her brother she would never relent, that she took a solemn oath, calling Heaven to witness, she would never, knowingly, marry a man of wealth. Oliver, who had seen enough of his sister to know she would keep her vow, now let the matter drop, and appeared to acquiesce in her decision—though in reality he was secretly laying a plan to entrap her, by introducing to her a young man of wealth, and concealing from her the fact. This plan he put in execution, and the young man apparently proving an agreeable suitor, the affair seemed likely to terminate as he desired.

Month upon month rolled away, and still the friend of Oliver paid his visits regularly to Mary; and, as is usual in such cases, Rumor, with her thousand tongues, said it would be a match. Oliver was delighted that his scheme was about to succeed; and on the strength of it, he borrowed of his intended brother−in−law a large sum of money, by which to prosecute a suit of his own, in Baltimore, with an heiress.

But there were two persons who had no faith in the reported marriage ever taking place. One of these was Mary herself, and the name of the other has already been mentioned in these pages, and will soon occur again. With Mary's ostensible lover, it also began to grow doubtful; for whenever he asked the important question, she would always desire farther time to consider. At last he grew desperate, and said he would not be put off any longer; that she must answer Yes or No at the end of a week, which he farther granted her of his own accord. She calmly replied, that if he would call a week from that night, he should have her positive answer.

At the time appointed the young man came, and was handed a note by the servent, which contained a direct, though respectful, refusal of his hand. Chagrined at this, he sought young Oliver, who had been the means of bringing him there, and who had often encouraged his addresses, by telling him his sister was passionately in love with him. When Oliver saw the note, he became very much enraged, and inquired for his sister. The servant said she had that evening gone out with the village schoolmaster, Ethan Courtly.

"By —!" cried Oliver Goldfinch, stamping his foot in a paroxism of anger, "I see it all. I thought that young scape−grace, whom I have frequently seen here of late, was after no good. They have eloped!— My horse! my horse! I must overtake the runaways."

But Oliver, and his friend who accompanied him, proved too late. Ere the former found his sister, she was the lawful wife of Ethan Courtly; and cursing her in the most vindictive language he could invent, and swearing roundly he would ever after disown her, and sometime be revenged, he turned upon his heel, and, accompanied by his friend, departed in haste.

Greatly were the good people of Sandville— for so we will call the village—astonished at hearing of the runaway nuptials of Ethan Courtly and Mary Goldfinch; for so cautiously had both managed, and so blindly had all given credence to the report of her engagement with another, that the news fell upon them like a thunder bolt.

About a year previous to this marriage, Ethan Courtly, a young man of education this time Ethan Courtly arranged to embark on one of his own vessels for a foreign clime, but with the intention and expectation of returning to his beloved family within a twelve−month from setting sail. Before he departed, Oliver was very strenuous in urging him to make his will; to which he remonstrated, by saying he did not deem such a proceeding necessary, as, in case he died intestate, of course the property would fall to his rightful heirs, which was all he desired. But the wily schemer, after much quiet reasoning, gained his point, as in fact he ever did with his single−minded brother−in−law, and was deputed to employ a lawyer and have all settled in due form.

It is needless to say more than that the will was drawn, attested, and placed upon record the day previous to the departure of Ethan Courtly.

We now skip a period of five months, during which Oliver Goldfinch assiduously attended to the affairs of his absent relative, when suddenly, with the shock of a thunderbolt falling from a cloudless sky, there came the painful intelligence that the Mary Helen, on which Ethan Courtly had embarked, had been wrecked off the the coast of France, and that every soul aboard of her had perished.

We pass over the effect of this news upon Mrs. Courtly and her children, both of whom were recalled from school to bitterly mourn the loss of a beloved and indulgent parent.

On the receipt of the tidings regarding the sad fate of his brother−in−law, Oliver Goldfinch went into mourning; and with a pale, sanctimonious face, and eyes made red by wiping, if not by weeping, managed to appear the most disconsolate of mourners; so much so, that it was often remarked by those who knew not the heart of the dissembler, that he must have loved his relative dearly to take his death so hard.

After a proper time given to sorrow, Oliver notified his sister that it would now be necessary to have the estate of his dear brother Ethan settled according to law, and that as he was aware the deceased had made a will, it would be proper to have it brought forward and read. To this, of course, Mrs. Courtly assented; but judge of her astonishment, and that of her friends, on learning that out of the vast estate of her late husband, only five thousand dollars had been bequeathed to herself and children; while the balance, amounting at the least calculation to many hundred thousand dollars, including the splendid home mansion, had been bestowed upon Oliver—with the provise, that should he die childless, it must revert to Edgar and Virginia and their issue—or, in case of their demise without issue, to the next heir or heirs at law.

Surprised and shocked as she was at this stunning intelligence, Mrs. Courtly doubted not it was all correct; and believing that her late husband, whom she completely idolized, had had a proper motive for what he had done, and that it would all prove for the best in the end, she never once attempted to dispute the claim of Oliver, or break the will and sue for her thirds, as all her friends advised her to do.

"No," she would say, in answer to the many solicitations that she would do so and so; "Ethan knew what was best, and far be it from me to alter what he designed. My happiness consists in conforming to his desires."

Finding her determined on the matter, her friends soon ceased to importune her, and Oliver had it all his own way. Knowing it required the most skillful management to effect his avaricious purpose, without wounding the sensitive nature of his sister, he redoubled his grief and duplicity, and went about bemoaning to her his hard fate, in being obliged to dispose of this thing and that, to carry out the desires of his dearly beloved brother, and always ended by saying, that when the estate should have become properly settled, he would give her a deed of the homestead, and settle upon her an independency for life. This promised providence for her future wants satisfied Mrs. Courtly, and she saw her fine home sold over her head, without a murmur, firmly believing her brother would keep his word, and in due time restore her all. In sooth, though she knew her brother had once been very worldlyminded, yet of late years he had been so guarded in her presence, so sanctimonious and demure, that she, poor woman, now truly believed there had been a wonderful reformation at heart.

It was at least a year or more from the reported death of Ethan Courtly, ere Oliver Goldfinch had settled every thing to his satisfaction. By this time, estates, ships, negroes, goods and chattels, each and all, had been disposed of; and with the money they brought in his possession, Oliver informed his sister that she might now remain contented in her home; that all had been arranged to her desire; and that he, with his wife and children, with the first of whom he had now become reconciled, were on the point of leaving for New York, where they hoped to have the pleasure of her society occasionally.

Thus they parted; and never for a moment did Mrs. Courtly doubt the word of her brother, until notified, about six months after he had left, that she must vacate the premises she then occupied, as the mansion, appartenances and grounds had been purchased by a gentleman who was now desirous of taking immediate possession. For some time Mrs. Courtly could not be brought to believe her brother had acted so base and ungrateful a part; and she at once wrote to him, asking an explanation. After considerable delay she received an answer, to the effect that he was very sorry to say the matter of sale was true; that he had done it to oblige a friend, who had set his heart upon having that residence; but that to compensate his sister, he was already negotiating for a residence, every way its superior, which, in case she resolved to come to New York, he would certainly purchase and present her.

For the first time the truth flashed upon Mrs. Courtly, that both she and her lamented husband had been the blind dupes of an artful and ungrateful villain; and so sudden, powerful and heart−sickening was the shock of this conviction, which she gained on reading his letter, that, clasping her forehead and staggering back, she sunk senseless to the ground, and a delirious fever followed, which nearly cost her her life at the time, and from the effects of which she never fully recovered.

We must now hurry to the close of this history, which we fear has already become tedious to the reader, but with which, notwithstanding, it was all important he should be made acquainted.

For a long time Mrs. Courtly did not deign an answer to the epistle of her brother. As soon as able, she quitted her once loved home with a breaking heart, yielding it up to strangers, and seeking a more humble abode for herself—both her children now being at school—and she fully determined to spend every cent, if necessary, in giving them what could not take wings and fly away—a good education.

And it did take every cent; and at last Mrs. Courtly was obliged to recall Edgar and Virginia, for want of

means to longer support them abroad. Two years now passed, and then, reduced almost to beggary, she wrote to her brother, detailing her wants, cares and anxieties. Having waited an almost interminable long while, and receiving no answer, Mrs. Courtly determined on proceeding to New York herself, and making an appeal to him in *propria personTo carry out this design, she sold her few remaining effects, and with the proceeds set out on her journey, accompanied by Edgar and Virginia. We have not space here to follow her through all her weary trials and disappointments, after her arrival in New York, up to the moment she was brought before the reader; but suffice, that to her horror and despair, she found herself disowned by him from whom she expected aid, and in a strange land, among strangers, cast upon a cold, heartless world, and doomed to suffer all the misery an innocent being can feel. Several times did Edgar call upon his uncle and ask for aid— but always to be insulted and refused; and even the negro servant, once his father's slave, having caught the infection, prided himself on his equality with the poor relations of his present master, as has already been shown by his conduct and language in the opening chapter. Vainly did Edgar seek for employment from day to day. Nothing could he obtain, for the reason that, having done nothing through life, he could not bring experience to back his suit. Day by day did the Courtlys find themselves becoming more and more reduced— for though very economical now, every little they spent made a wide breach in their limited means. To render matters still worse, the health of Mrs. Courtly began to fail rapidly; and it soon became painfully evident to her children, that unless a great change took place for the better, they would ere long be orphans.*

But notwithstanding her ailings, Mrs. Courtly would not consent to see a physician, because of the extra expense which would thus be incurred, and which they were now so illy fitted to bear. As it was, they were obliged to dispose of their jewelry, old family relics, and finally the greater part of their wardrobe, to pay their rent and procure the necessaries of life. Even these failed them at last; and only a few days previous to our introduction of them to the reader, their stonyhearted landlord seized upon and sold their furniture, and turned them into the street, with only a few remaining articles. The hovel where we found them seemed the only retreat now open; and into this they gathered their remaining effects, prefering even this to begging for a better. Their last cent was now soon spent for fuel and food, and the reader has seen even the last of these. The health of Mrs. Courtly now failed more and more rapidly, until exhausted nature could sustain her no longer; and suffering with cold, dampness, want of food, proper nursing and medical attendance, together with grief, care and anxiety for her children, she literally died of starvation and a broken heart.

CHAPTER V. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

The day following the funeral of Mrs. Courtly, saw Edgar and his sister located in small but comfortable lodgings, some three or four squares from their previously wretched abode. This was effected at the instance of Ellen, who insisted they should at once remove to better quarters, and for this purpose generously provided then with farther means to do so. She had many delicate scruples to overcome in effecting this change; for though excessively in need, Edgar was naturally very proud, and could not bear the idea of being under farther pecuniary obligations to one on whom he had no claim; nor would he, in fact, have consented to the arrangement at all, but for his sweet sister, whom it sorely wrung his heart to behold suffering the pangs of poverty. For himself he knew he could provide in some way—but what meantime would become of Virginia?— and this the generous Ellen pleaded as an inducement to his accepting her proposition. It was galling, too, to one bred in the affluence he had been, to be indebted to the wages of sin—to money earned by guilt—for the bettering of his condition; but poverty and circumstances are many times powerful combatants of sensitive scruples, and so they proved in the present instance.

"I will accept her aid as a loan," he at last said, "until kind Providence furnishes me with the means of repaying the debt with interest—for beggars must certainly not be choosers—and without this assistance, now that my check is irrecoverably lost, starvation stares us in the face. And why," he farther reasoned, "should I decline the means which doubtless Heaven has placed in my way for a wise purpose? Who knows but in accepting, I shall eventually be the instrument, in the hands of Providence, of reclaiming an erring one from the perdition to which she is fast hastening?"

Having thus settled the matter in his own mind, he went zealously to work, and a couple of hours search put him in possession of two very pleasant rooms, located in the second story of a small private dwelling on Elizabeth street, to which access could be had by a flight of stairs from without—so that he was as much secluded from a forced contact with others, as if occupying the entire premises. Hither he at once removed his sister, and what little furniture was still remaining; and then by a judicious purchase of a few second−hand articles in Chatham Square, among which was a carpet for the floor, he succeeded, at a very small outlay, in giving the apartments an air of comfort and tidiness, to which both himself and sister had of late been strangers—and which, contrasting with their previously wretched abode, made the present one seem a paradise.— Edgar next purchased a few groceries and some fuel, and Virginia prepared the evening meal—for by this time the day was drawing to a close—and as they sorrowfully partook of their first morsel since breaking fast in the morning, and thought of their poor, dead mother, no longer with them to share their griefs or joys, both wept freely, in silence—but wept as those who, not altogether despairing, feel there is something still to live for—as those who have some hope in the future, and believe that day is again dawning upon a night of rayless gloom.

Poor, bitterly wronged orphans! Who can sum up and realize their misery, without experience of the same kind! Alone upon the wide world, without home or friends, and indebted to the charity of a frail female stranger for bread to keep them from starvation! And these, too, they who once rolled in all the luxury wealth can give, whose hands were never soiled by labor, and whose exalted position in society ever held them aloot from the mercenary, coarse and vulgar minds with which they must now be brought in contact. Do no let the reader here misunderstand us, by supposing we intend to convey the idea that they were better for never having labored. No, Heaven forbid! for labor is ever honorable, while indolence is reprehensible. We only designed to impress more strongly the suffering they must perforce endure, from the great contrast of their present with the past.

For a long time both thought and wept in silence, neither intruding an observation upon the grief of the other. Edgar was the first to speak. Rising from the table, after having ate sparingly, he approached his sister, and throwing an arm around her neck and drawing her gently to him, said, tenderly:

"Let us try to weep no more, my sweet sister! Let us dry our tears, and prepare, like philosophers, to enact our parts, and pass through the ordeals of fate without a murmur. Life at the longest is not long, and death will come at last to relieve us of our sorrows."

"But, Edgar," sobbed Virginia, "I am thinking of our dear, dear mother."

"I know it, sweet sister, and so am I. But the thought has struck me, it is useless and cruel to mourn for one

who has exchanged our wretchedness for the happiness of Heaven."

"Ah!" sighed the other, "I see I am selfish; for it is not so much for her I mourn, as for myself; not for her loss, but my own. Oh! how we both will miss her sage advice and prayerful counsel!"

"But she is in Heaven," pursued Edgar. "Let that thought be uppermost, and dry your eyes. I would not recall her if I could—for *she*, at least, drank sorrow to the dregs, and should forever more be spared the bitter cup."

After a pause of a few minutes, during which Virginia gradually became more calm, Edgar resumed:

"And now, my sister, let us speak on another subject, but one I fear scarcely less painful. By the kindness of one I can never forget, we have been enabled to exchange utter wretchedness and starvation for something like comfort; but still the very thought of how this has been effected, gives me pain. To think we have taken money, earned by guilt, to better our condition, is revolting to my nature; and I can never rest until it be returned, and she who so generously assisted us be reclaimed. To effect the former, I must seek and find employment, with wages more than sufficient to support us, while the latter I leave to you; and let us both set about our tasks with right good will, and energies that will not allow us to fail. To−morrow, early, if God spares my life, I shall make a bold move. Surely, in this great city, supporting its three hundred thousand inhabitants, there is something I can find whereby to gain an honorable living. True, I have tried before and failed; but that is no reasen I must again; and something whispers me I shall succeed. So cheer up, my sweet sister! for it is an old saying, the darkest hour but barely precedes the dawn. To−morrow, probably, while I am away, Ellen will be here to see you; and you must use your best abilities to induce her to quit the terrible life she is at present leading. Begin with her gently and feelingly, as you best know how, and gradually progress until your righteous purpose be accomplished— which done, I shall feel that we have not wholly lived in vain."

"Ah! dear brother," cried Virginia, with a burst of affection, throwing her arms around his neck and pressing her lips to his, "how much you are like our dear, dear mother, in your counsels! I will do all you ask of me, and ten times more if it be in my power. Poor Ellen! If I can be the humble means of reclaiming her, filling her heart with happiness again, I feel I can then smile at my own misery, and thank God it has been for some useful end. But more than this, dear brother, I must assist you. I, too, perhaps, can find employment—"

"Nay," interrupted Edgar, "I could not see you labor. I could not see your delicate constitution broken down by toil, and thus prepared for an early grave. No, Virginia, you were never bred to work, and it would kill you."

"And you, Edgar—you who have been brought up in the same manner as myself— how then will you bear it?"

"I am a man, Virginia, with an iron constitution, and am by nature fitted for the rough scenes of life—at least far more so than you. No, no, Virginia—leave all to me; I can provide for both; but to see you toil would render me miserable."

In like conversation the evening passed away—Virginia insisting it was her duty, in their altered circumstances, to assist her brother, and he contending to the contrary most strennously. At an early hour both retired to rest, and with the gray of morning both were again astir. Making a hasty breakfast, Edgar kissed and bade his sister be of good cheer in his absence— as in all probability he would return with welcome tidings—and then sailied forth to seek employment in the great metropolis, prepared to put his hand to any honest pursuit that would return a fitting recompense.

As yet the sun had scarcely risen; but still the great city was swarming with citizens, mostly of the laboring class, all pushing forward to their daily task—some with pale, sickly, sorrowful visages, and some with countenances cheerful and gay— each an index of the heart within. Venders of all kinds were abroad, each loudly crying his particular article of traffic, which, from long habit, had become rather a peculiar, discordant scream, than any sound or word a stranger might find inteligible. Omnibusses, hacks, drays, coalcarts, bread−carts, market−wagons, and numerous other kinds of vehicles rumbled over the stony pavements, blocked up the crossings, occasionally startled the footpassers, and thundered out the fact that the business of the day had truly begun.

As Edgar slowly pursued his way down the Bowery into Chatham Square, down Chatham Street toward Park Row, and noted that every one he met seemed to have some employment, either present or prospective, he thought to himself how happy was their condition compared with his, who had nothing but trouble to occupy his mind. Ah! little did he know that many who passed him with rapid steps, were hurrying to a daily task, that, while it was literally crushing them under its iron burthen, barely returned a pittance sufficient to keep soul and body together. Little did he know that those who seemed better off than he, were dying by inches under excessive toil, that the

poor beings they loved, and who were solely dependent on them, might eke out a miserable existence. Little did he know this, or he might have been more contented with his own situation, trying as it was, and felt he had less cause to complain than they. We are too prone to think our own troubles and afflictions the most severe; and this because we know and feel our own, while those of others are wholly shut from us.

For a long time Edgar could not summon resolution to ask for employment at the different places where there seemed a possibility of his obtaining it, lest he should be refused in a way to wound his sensitive feelings. And then, what occupation should he ask for? and what experience or recommendation could he bring to aid him, even should the services of one like himself be desired? He had done nothing through life, and consequently knew no more of one business than another; but the fancy struck him, that could he obtain a place as salesman in some kind of a store, he could easily make himself useful and give satisfaction to his employer. With the design of seeking something of this kind, he passed the various shops of traffic, with many a wistful look, but still without venturing within to make the necessary inquiries. At last, after traversing the entire extent of Chatham street and Square for the third time, and knowing that nothing would ever be accomplished in this way, he made bold to address a middle−aged gentleman, who was standing in the door of a furniture ware−room

"Sir," he said, "can you inform me where a young man like myself can find employment?"

"What to do?" asked the other.

"Any thing that is honorable."

"For the matter of that," returned the other, "almost any thing is honorable, that a body can make a living at these times. Did you ever act as salesman?"

"I never have, but think I could soon give my employer satisfaction."

"Umph! perhaps. You look like a young man of good address. I suppose you can write?"

"Certainly," answered Edgar, promptly; "I have been blessed with a good education."

"Can bring good references, I suppose?"

"Why, unfortunately," replied Edgar, coloring, "I am a stranger in the city, and have no friend here to refer to."

"Umph! that's bad!" rejoined the other. "So much cheating going on now−a−days. so many dishonest persons about, that one don't like to take a stranger into one's service without knowing something about him. Now if you only had experience, and good references, and could come here at six in the morning and work till nine and ten at night, and do every thing that would be asked of you, without grumbling, I have no doubt you would suit me, for just such a person I want, and would be willing to pay such an one good wages. But as you are deficient in at least two of these requisites, why, I suppose I shall have to look farther."

"And supposing I were all you desire, what would be my salary!" asked Edgar.

"Why, in that case, I could afford to be rather liberal; and say you boarded yourself, allow you from two and a half to three dollars per week—at least through the busy season."

"And this you call liberality?" returned Edgar: "God help the poor!" and he walked away with a desponding heart.

For an hour or more, Edgar traversed the streets in a very unpleasant state of mind, ere venturing on a second application. And when at last he did make another trial, it was only to meet with a result similar to the first. Grown somewhat desperate and less sensitive through failing, Edgar now determined, that in case he did not succeed, it should not be his fault, and consequently went boldly to work, pushing his suit wherever there seemed a possibility of success. For hours he pursued this course; but meeting every where with disappointment, and being nearly overcome with fatigue and anxiety, he finally gave up in despair, and strolling into Tammany Hall, threw himself down upon a seat, with the air of one who feels his last hope has departed.

"It is no use to longer strive," he muttered, despondingly. "I can accomplish nothing. I am doomed to fail where others succeed. Oh! why was I born! Mother, thou saint in Heaven, I would I were with thee! Come, Death! dread monster as thou art called—thou terrifying Invisible— come here and strike! strike to the heart at once! and thou shalt behold a rare sight—a human face that will not blanch—a human form that will not tremble at thy summons."

As he said this half aloud, his eye chanced upon a newspaper lying on a seat beside him; and mechanically raising it, he glanced over the columns in a listless manner, as one who reads while the mind is occupied with other matters. For several minutes he sat gazing upon the paper, sometimes distinguishing a word, and sometimes beholding the letters all blurred and indistinct. At length something appeared to arrest his attention—for he

straightened himself in his seat, drew the paper nearer to him, while his eyes brightened and no longer exhibited a vacant stare. The cause of this change in his appearance, was an advertisement which read as follows:

"Poets, Attention! A gentleman requires a poetical address, for a certain purpose, for which, if suitable, he will pay handsomely. The length, subject and remuneration will be made known to applicants. Address C. B. E. — office."

Edgar was by nature a poet, and in his leisure hours had written some beautiful stanzas, which his modesty had thus far concealed from the public. His talents in this line he had never thought of turning to account until now.

"Perhaps!" he exclaimed, starting up with an energy that drew many eyes upon him: "Perhaps!" and immediately procuring pen, ink and paper, he wrote a few lines and left in haste for — office, where he deposited the note, superscribed in accordance with the advertisement.— Having done this he departed, with the intention of returning home; but he had scarcely gone fifty yards, when a hand on his shoulder arrested him, and turning, he beheld an elegantly dressed gentleman, with the billet he had just deposited, open in his hand.

"I beg pardon!" said the stranger, blandly; "but have I the pleasure of addressing the writer of this, Edgar Courtly?"

"That is my name, at your service," returned Edgar, with a graceful and dignified inclination of the head.

"I chanced to be in the office and saw you leave it, addressed to my initials," pursued the other, explanatory, "and hastened to overtake you, that the matter in question might be the more speedily arranged."

"I am most happy, sir," rejoined Edgar, "to make your acquaintance so much sooner than I anticipated."

"I perceive by this," continued the gentleman, whom we shall call Elmer, pointing to the epistle, "that you have had experience in poetical composition."

"I have written some little," replied Edgar, blushing; "but perhaps I am incompetent to perform what you require."

"That," rejoined Mr. Elmer, "must be decided hereafter. I am, as you must know, an actor, at present fulfilling an engagement at the Park. One week from to night my engagement closes—the last prior to my departure for Europe. Now what I desire is this: I wish to take leave with a poetical address, of from seventy−five to one hundred lines, expressive of my feelings." Here he explained, explicitly, what he wanted, and wound up by saying: "And now for the best address of this kind, sent me within five days, I am willing to pay the sum of fifty dollars—certainly, to my thinking, a liberal remuneration."

"It is indeed!" returned Edgar, much excited at the prospect of obtaining the reward. "Sir, I will do my best to please you."

"But I must warn you of competition," pursued the other. "I have had several interviews with poets already, each of whom has promised a trial, and I shall perhaps have many more, so that he who gains the prize must do so by merit alone."

On hearing this, the countenance of Edgar somewhat fell—for he thought to himself, "What chance have I among so many? But then," he reasoned, "I can but fail at the worst, and may succeed—in which event—" Here his feelings becoming powerfully excited, he hastily inquired the residence of Elmer, shook his hand and turned away, with the observation that he would soon hear from him again.

With a fluttering heart, palpitating between hope and fear, Edgar hurried through the crowded streets, heedless of all he met or passed, his mind occupied with one joyful thought, that of cheering the drooping spirits of his sweet sister with his new hopes and expectations. Arrived at his new home, he sprang lightly up the stairs and into his own apartments, expecting to take his sister by surprise.

The next moment he felt a chilling sensation creep over him—a sensation as awful as the coming of death. Wherefore the cause?

The rooms were tenantless—his sister was gone—and echo alone answered to his call.

CHAPTER VI. AN UNEXPECTED FRIEND.

Throwing himself upon a seat, in a state of mind full of alarm and strange misgivings, insomuch that he soon found himself in a profuse perspiration, Edgar sought to invent a cause for the absence of Virginia. It was so singular she should absent herself while he was away, and leave the house unfastened. Surely, she could not have gone far, and would soon return! Somewhat consoling himself with this idea, he waited rather impatiently for her appearance, hoping and expecting every moment she would enter; but as minute after minute glided by, and no Virginia came, he began to grow alarmed in earnest, and rising from his seat, paced rapidly to and fro the apartment. At length, when a half hour had passed, bringing no intelligence of the missing one, the excitement of Edgar had reached such an intensity, that he could no longer content himself in remaining idle. Something had happened, he felt sure, and his heart fairly sunk within him at the thought. Rushing down the stairs with the haste of a madman, he made eager inquiries of the people living in the lower story, and of whom he rented his apartments. But they could give him no satisfactory information. They had seen his sister go out about an hour and a half before, alone, taking the direction of the Bowery, and that was all they knew.

It was passed the hour of noon, and Edgar was fatigued and hungry; but forgetful of every thing but his sister, whom he somehow fancied was lost, he darted away in search of her. Fortunately, he had not to go far, ere, to his great joy, he met her returning, accompanied by a young man of genteel appearance, who walked respectfully by her side, carrying a small bundle wrapped with paper. Edgar was not surprised at this, for he fancied she had been shopping, and that the purchased articles were being sent home as is customary.

"O, Virginia!" he exclaimed, springing forward and seizing her hand, "how could you so alarm me! For the last half hour I have been on the rack of agony. Why could you not have deferred this business till my return?"

"I thought to give you a gentle surprise," replied Virginia; "expecting, when I left, to return before you; but I have been disappointed, and shall not again attempt the like, for already my folly has found a punishment."

"As how?" queried Edgar, eagerly.

"I have been insulted."

"Insulted!" repeated her brother; and his dark eyes flushed angrily upon the stranger.

"Nay," interposed Virginia, divining his thoughts, "not by him, Edgar. This gentleman has proved my deliverer."

"I crave pardon, sir!" said Edgar,quickly, changing his manner and cordially extending the other his hand. "Let me thank you in my sister's behalf, and trust we may be friends!'

"The latter, most certainly!" returned the youngman with warmth, and a hearty shake of the hand; "but as to thanks, I know not that one deserves them for simply doing his duty. I saw this lady annoyed by one whom I had reason to suppose entertained evil intentions, and I hastened to her protection. You should have seen how the offender slunk away as he beheld my visage, with a half uttered apology and look of shame—for well he knew me and I him—though for various reasons I hardly feel myself at liberty to give his name at present. I could not again leave the lady unprotected, and so am I here."

"But how happened this, Virginia!"— eagerly inquired Edgar.

"I cannot tell you here," answered Virginia, somewhat excited. "Let us first go home, it is but a few steps, and I will explain all."

Here the stranger was about to take his leave, but Edgar and Virginia both insisted he should accompany them, and accordingly all proceeded to the house together.

"And now," said Virginia, with a bright flush that heightened the beauty of her lovely features, "I will tell you, dear brother, how it all happened, if you will promise, before you hear my story, to pardon any error I may have committed."

"My pardon I know you will have," answered Edgar, "no matter what you have done, and so I may as well grant it first as last. Proceed!"

"Well, then, you must know, as I have before told you, I thought to give you a gentle surprise, and for this purpose determined, according to my argument last night, to render you what assistance I could in the way of earning a living."

"But, Virginia—"

"Do not interrupt me, and do not frown, for you know I have your pardon already Well, half the night I pondered on what I could do, and this morning was still undecided, when I chanced to see a woman pass, carrying a bundle of shirts. Accosting her, I learned that she was making them for a large manufacturer, whose address she gave me. I thought to myself I could do as well as she, and as soon as she was gone, hurried round to the place, expecting to return within half an hour. The result is, I succeeded in getting some work to do; but not until I had been kept waiting a full hour, and had been quetioned as closely as if I were a thief. Several times I was on the point of indignantly leaving—but then I thought of you, dear brother, and felt, after all, it was little to endure for your sake."

"And what were you to get for all this labor?" asked Edgar.

"A dime for each shirt," replied Virginia.

"And how many do you fancy you could complete in a day?"

"One, at least."

"One, my sweet sister! And you would work off your fingers, dim your eyes and ruin your health, for the paltry sum of a dime a day, and all to aid me! God bless you, dear Virginia, for a noble soul!—but I cannot allow such a sacrifice. Thank Heaven! I have brighter prospects in view, of which I will tell you anon. A dime a day!" he pursued; "how pitiful! And yet I suppose there are hundreds— perhaps thousands—forced to toil for even this."

"Indeed there are, sir!" chimed in the young man, who on his way hither had given his name as Dudley, and learned those of his new acquaintances in return: "Indeed there are, Mr. Courtly; thousands, who are not only forced to toil for this meagre sum, but are glad to get even this, to keep them from starvation."

"Ah! what a world!" sighed Edgar, musingly. What mighty contrasts! It does not seem as though we all had one Heavenly Father, as our divines inform us from the pulpit we have. Alas! God help the poor!"

"Ay," rejoined Dudley, "God help them indeed! for He is all the friend they have to look to."

"But you have not finished your story, Virginia," said Edgar, turning to her.

"While waiting for work," resumed Virginia, "and passing the ordeal of rather insulting interrogatives, I noticed a gaudily dressed fellow loitering about the door, who occasionally stared at me in an ungentlemanly manner; but I thought no more of it, until, having regained the street and gone a few yards, I found him walking by my side. Thinking it accidental, I slackened my pace that he might pass; but to my indignant surprise, I found he suited his to mine. He then requested permission to carry my bundle, as he was going the same way. I coldly thanked, and informed him I had no occasion for his services.

" `But you must, my angel,' he said.

" `Sir!' returned I, haughtily, coming to an abrupt halt, `you are insulting! Go your way, and leave me to go mine.'

"'Pon my word.' he answered, with a leer, `you talk prettily, and are really too lovely to walk the streets alone. Come, let us be companions.'

" `Leave me!' I cried, indignantly, `for you are no gentleman.'

" `Ay, leave, sir—begone!' said a voice behind me; and turning, I beheld this gen—a—I should say Mr. Dudley, since we have become slightly acquainted," concluded Virginia, blushing modestly.

"Of which acquaintance," chimed in Dudley, gallantly, with a polite bow to Virginia, "I am most proud, and sincerely trust it may be of long duration."

"The feeling is mutual, I assure you," responded Edgar. And then he added, apologetically: "We were not always as we now are, sir. Born to wealth, we never knew the want of money until after our father's death, when our uncle, his manager, came into possession of nearly all his property, as I have strong reason to believe most villainously.

Here Edgar proceeded to briefly sketch some of the prominent events of the past five years, winding up with an account of his last visit to his uncle, the manner in which he obtained the check and its subsequent loss, together with the death of his mother, adding at the conclusion:

"And now, sir, I must say, I feel I have been almost too confiding to one so late an utter stranger; but there is a something in your countenance and manner, which, step by step, has drawn me on to the full revelation."

"I thank you, Mr. Courtly, for the high compliment thus paid me," returned Dudley, warmly; "and assure you,

you will never have cause to regret your confidence as misplaced. But a question, if I may be permitted to ask one; for since you have told me your story, I feel a deep interest in your welfare, and will do all in my power to aid you. Will you give me the name of your uncle!"

Edgar mused a moment, and then said:

"I do not know why I should withold it. It is Oliver Goldfinch."

"What! the millionaire!" cried Dudley in surprise: "Oliver Goldfinch, the millionaire! Is it possible? No, it cannot be— there must be some mistake!"

"Then you know him?" said Edgar, quickly.

"But do you mean Oliver Goldfinch of— street?"

"The same, Mr. Dudley."

"Know him? Ay, I know him well, and very few that do not,either personally or by reputation. Why, he is one of our most prominent citizens, although he has been but a few years among us. There is scarcely a charitable association but is indebted to him for a handsome donation— or a charity−subscription paper afloat, that is not led off by his name, with a round sum attached. Besides, he is a member of one of our most popular churches, and is every where spoken of as a rich, but truly pious and benevolent gentleman."

"The hypocrite!" muttered Edgar, grinding his teeth. "O, that I could unmask him! but that I may never be able to do— for he is deep, cunning and far−reaching. Had I the money I wrung from him, I would quit the city and molest him no more."

"Really, I am all amazement," mused Dudley, "and hardly know what to think. You say he gave you a check, which you lost, and which, had you now, would relieve you from all embarassment. On whom was it drawn?"

"If I remember rightly, John Peyton of Wall street."

"You of course have been to stop payment?"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Edgar, with a start, "I have overlooked that." And then, after a pause, he added: "But it matters not—for some poor wretch may as well have it as Goldfinch."

"But by stopping payment, and applying again to your uncle, you may procure another."

Edgar shook his head.

"I would rather starve," he answered, "than again enter his hateful presence as a suitor. No! no!—let it go—let it go. There will perhaps be some way opened, by which my dear sister and I can live without begging favors of rich relations;" and as he spoke, he threw an arm fondly around Virginia, drew her to him, and pressed a kiss upon her lips.

Dudley followed the movement with his eyes, and his features expressed something like envy of the brother; and the color deepened on his cheeks, and those of Virginia, as, at the moment, they accidentally, as it were, exchanged glances.

What were the fancies, the feelings, the emotions in the breasts of each, we shall not here pause to divine. Suffice, that in refinement of thought and language, grace of manner, dignity of mien and personal appearance, each was well calculated to inspire the other with at least a sentiment of high regard. Mr. Dudley was what in common parlance would be called a handsome man. His age was about twenty−five, and in stature he was full six feet, but with proportions so symmetrical as not to appear awkward or over−size. He seemed formed by nature for a model, with not a pound too much or too little. And then his features were as comely as his person, with a forehead, nose, mouth, and chin of the Grecian cast. In his countenance were no sinister lines—no sly curves, where a sneer might lurk, or hypocracy find a foothold. No! all was open, and frank, and honest; and a single glance showed you he was a man after God's own image. In repose, his face exhibited a stern, thoughtful benevolence, as one who would do a good act for the act itself, and not for the reward that might accrue to the doer. Much of this expression was in the eye, a dark gray, which rarely changed its aspect−−never, unless altered by some one of the strong passions of his soul. His complexion was light, with light brown, curly hair, that added much to his good looks. Partly covering and under his chin he wore his beard unshaved, but neatly trimmed, which for him was very becoming.

In dress he had excellent taste. He wore nothing showy or gaudy, and yet every garment was rich, and fitted his person with the utmost exactness. No rings, chains, or breast−pins were displayed as ornaments, he seeming to fancy that nature and the tailor had done enough for him.— And this was a true index to his mind—as in fact dress generally is—showing him to be severely chaste and strictly correct in principle. And in fine it was this

correct principle which effected his acquaintance with Virginia and her brother—an acquaintance of which neither party as yet dreamed the import. It was not her beauty, as some might suppose, which led him to her protection. No! he saw not that till afterwards. He only saw a female grossly insulted, and distressed by the attentions of a villain, and he hastened to her relief; and had she been old and exceesively ugly, his correct principle of gallantry would have caused him to do precisely as he did. Not that we would imply he had no choice between ugliness and beauty; that he would have felt the same interest in Virginia, had she possessed no personal charms; by no means: we only wish to say, that in the former instance a sense of duty would have urged him to do with pleasure, what he now performed with great delight.

After some farther conversation of a nature similar to that detailed, Dudley rose to take his leave. Turning to Edgar, he took his hand and said:

"Our meeting and acquaintance, Mr. Courtly, I trust may prove of mutual advantage. You may think it a little strange, that having confided to me some important secrets of your life, I, in return, tell you nothing of myself. But you must not think hard of me, if I reveal nothing now. I shall soon see you again, and sometime you shall know more. I have my reasons for concealment. Consider me, however, your friend; and should you need my aid in any manner, have no scruples in so telling me, for it will prove a pleasure to me to do you a service.—Meantime, I will make your affairs in some measure my own; and depend upon it, if wrong has been done you, in the manner you suppose, the guilty shall be made to feel it, no matter how lofty their station. You may think me boasting, my friend— but time will show; and when time has shown, I trust you will have little cause to regret having gained my friendship."

With these somewhat mysterious words, Dudley again shook Edgar's hand warmly, and bowing gracefully to Virginia, withdrew.

For some time after his departure, Edgar and his sister conversed about the stranger, or Dudley as he had termed himself, and then the former proceeded to detail all that had occurred in his absence, and the sanguine expectations he had of obtaining the prize. Both were young, and notwithstanding the terrible trials they had experienced both were full of hope. Friends seemed to rise up to their aid where they least expected them, and the longer they talked, the lighter grew their hearts.

Poor, bitterly wronged orphans! Let us hope that day is again dawning upon their long, dark and dismal night of adversity.

CHAPTER VII. THE HYPOCRITE AND HIS TOOL.

In the same elegant apartment where we first introduced him to the reader, sat the lordly millionaire, the smooth−faced, oily−tongued, hypocritical Oliver Goldfinch. He sat in an easy chair, gazing thoughtfully into the fire—perhaps reflecting upon his past career, and listening to the still small voice of conscience—or perhaps devising some villainous scheme whereby to grind the faces of the poor, put wealth in his coffers, heap wrong upon wrong, the while he would make the world believe him unexceptionable in piety and benevolence. The latter, most likely; for Oliver Goldfinch was not one to regret what he had done, so long as he could keep his cloven foot concealed; and even in case of exposure, would care less for the crime than its publicity. If the truth were all told, he had many and black−hearted sins to answer for; but these only troubled when they menaced him. With him, as with many others, crime was not in the commission, but detection; and he ever took all possible means to guard against the latter, by rearing a pinacle of virtue behind which to screen himself—well knowing that the world looks to the deed, and not the motive, which latter may be deeply buried from human knowledge. For this he belonged to a popular church, and, like the Pharasee of old, made long prayers before his fellow−men, and wore a saint−like vissage of humility and attendant virtues. For this he gave liberally to benevolent societies, where there seemed a likelihood his name would be publicly displayed. For this he preached the virtues of a God, while he plotted vices Satan might envy, and which were fast bearing him down to his own damnation. Beware! thou opulent hypocrite!—beware! There is a boundary to all things; and thou, of all men, should'st beware thou dost not overstep thy limits!

For a quarter of an hour, Oliver Goldfinch removed not his gaze from the fire; but during that time his countenance often varied with the thoughts of his plotting brain. Now his brow would contract, and a dark shade steal athwart his features, as something seemed to perplex and annoy him; and anon his eye would softly twinkle, and a peculiar smile of deep meaning usurp its place, as though he had triumphed over a difficult obstacle. What his thoughts were—whether on a new scheme or old one—we shall not pause to investigate, but let them appear for themselves in the voice of the thinker.

Ringing a small bell on the table beside him, the black servant appeared in the door−way.

"Has Wesley come, Jeff!" he questioned.

"Yes, massa, him waiting," answered the negro, who, notwithstanding his arrogance to Edgar, and his boast of freedom, did not venture on dropping the usual term of slavery−servitude, by saying mister.

"Bid him come in!"

The black bowed and withdrew, and his place at the door was soon supplied by a white man, carrying in his hand a green bag, who doffed his hat with defference, and halted as if for an order to advance. The rich man had again fixed his gaze on the fire, and for a short time appeared unconscious of the other's presence. Let us take advantage of this quietude, to slightly glance at the new comer.

In person he was small and slender, and very ungainly, both in form and feature— in the latter particular possessing a cunning, sinister, hang−dog look. His black, coarse hair fell far over a low, villainous forehead, from under which, and long black eye−brows that met over his snub nose, two dark, fiery eyes gleamed out maliciously, and with an ever restless expression and movement, as if the possessor were continually on the lookout to guard against a sudden attack. To compensate in some measure, as it were, for his extreme ugliness and repulsive appearance, nature had endowed him with a soft, musical voice, and the faculty of smiling in such a way as to win favor and conceal the blackness of his heart. And this made him a dangerous character; for without this mask, he was too plainly marked as a villain to deceive even a novice in human nature; whereas, with it, the most experienced were sometimes made his dupes. He had round shoulders, bow−legs, and very long arms, terminating in bony hands and fingers. His age was thirty, though it might have been forty, for any thing by which one could safely judge otherwise. He was rather richly dressed in a suit of black, and wore a gold chain and diamond breast−pin— all of which served much to relieve his person of sheer ugliness—especially with those (and these comprise the greater portion of mankind) who look more to outward display than the inner man.

"Ah, you're here!" said the plottingman at length, turning his eyes upon the other. "Advance!" and he pointed to a seat beside the table. "So! what news?"

"Nothing particularly valuable," replied Wesley, as he quietly seated himself and placed his bag on the table.

"Any thing of Wall street?"

"Nothing—no."

"Strange!" mused Goldfinch, glancing at the fire; "I expected something before this."

"I did," responded the other.

"Have you seen him since!"

"Not since," replied Wesley, who, if it were possible, always answered a question by repeating the closing portion of it.

"And why, Wesley?"

"Couldn't find him."

"Ha! has he gone?"

"Gone."

"The old bird, too, Wesley?"

"The old bird, too. She's flown upward, the rest elsewhere."

"I do not understand you."

"She's dead, then, and the others have left."

"Dead, Wesley?" and the rich man gave a start of surprise. "Dead, say you?"

"Dead."

"And the others have removed?"

"Removed."

"And you don't know where?"

"Don't exactly."

"Out of the city?"

"Think not."

"Well, you must hunt him out. If in the city, mark me! you must find him. In case the first trap don't catch him, we must construct another, and put on a different bait. You understand, Wesley?"

"Understand."

"He is dangerous, I fear, for he threw out some very unpleasant hints. In short, he either knows or suspects too much, and must be silenced. *Must*, Wesley," repeatGoldfinch, with emphasis — "mark you that!"

"Exactly that."

"And now to other matters. Did you succeed in purchasing the Middleton property?"

"Succeeded," grinned Wesley.

"Good!" returned Goldfinch, smiling and rubbing his hands. "And, Wesley, did the ruse take, eh?"

"Took," nodded Wesley.

"Good again—good again!" exclaimed the rich man, in an ecstacy of delight rarely by him displayed. "Revenge and ten thousand dollars at one stroke is rather a good hit—eh! Wesley?"

In his happiest moods, Goldfinch sometimes, as now, threw off his usually dignified reserve, and allowed himself to be rather familiar with his attorney, counsellor, agent and private secretary, all of which offices Wesley filled.

"Good hit," grinned Wesley again.

"The old man," continued Goldfinch, with a sardonis smile of deep import, "old Middleton, little dreamed of the consequence of his attempt to crush me—to ruin my reputation, the villain! Ah, I had him. I cried him down by my agents, bought his paper at a discount, and then, best of all, bought his property at a sacrifice, by making his title appear doubtful, and paid him in his own notes at par. Well done, Oliver Goldfinch—well done!" This was spoken in a low tone, and evidently not intended for the ears of the attorney; but the latter was sharp of hearing, and he heard it, though not a single look of his betrayed the fact.— "What next, Wesley?" querried the millionaire.

"Widow Malone can't pay rent."

"Into the street with her then—you know my invariable rule in all cases of this kind."

"I did it."

"Ri h! Did she go quietly?"

"She called you a villain—cursed you."

"Humph! that little troubles me, you know."

"I know," grinned the attorney.

"What next?"

"Old Shuffler's sick and all his family— won't be able to pay rent, I reckon."

"Into the street with *him* then. Well?"

"Mrs. Brady, whose husband was killed by a kick of your horse, begs you will allow her a small sum to keep her family from starvation."

"Tell Mrs. Brady to be—"

"But she's noticed," interrupted the politic counsellor. "Mrs. Malcolm has already sent to her."

"Ah, indeed! that alters the case," said Goldfinch, with interest. "It will be known then: I must be liberal. Give her fifty dollars, Wesley. Any thing farther!"

"The New England Benevolent Tract Society wants your signature."

"Curse these societies—these blood suckers of the wealthy!" ejaculated Goldfinch, shutting his teeth hard in nager "But there's no avoiding them, and maintaining one's position," pursued the worldly man; "and so, as the old adage has it, `what can't be cured must be endured.' Is this society popular, Wesley!"

"Popular," responded the secretary.

"Give five hundred dollars then. Proceed!— what next?"

"Done," said the other.

"Ah, done, eh!" Then musing a few moments, and glancing keenly about the apartment, meanwhile, to be sure there were no listners, Goldfinch, in a low tone, resumed: "Do you think he can have got any clue to the truth, more than a vague suspicion, Wesley?"

"Hard telling," answered the other.

"You know there was but one besides you and I; and he, the prying fool, was drowned, was he not?"

"Was drowned," quoth the attorney, with a slight shudder.

"Well, he is dangerous, and we *must* be rid of him, my friend;" and the calm, cold, blue eye of the scheming man fastened upon his subordinate with an expression of deep, dark import. "I hope my first plan will succeed—if not—"

Here he paused, and glanced at the other significantly, who at once exclaimed:

"No, no—no more blood!"

"He must be silenced, though!" pursued Goldfinch, in a low, deep, sepulchral tone, bending over the table till his face almost touched his agent's: "you know that as well as I. Should he get the upper hand, we are lost—or rather you are—for I will make my money save me, though at the expense of my reputation."

As he said this, looking full in the eye of his dupe or tool, there was a glance— sudden and of lightning duration—a glance from the latter, which made him recoil as if bitten by a serpent. He looked again, but it was gone, and he was fain to believe his eyes had deceived him.

"Think of it," added Goldfinch, after vainly waiting for the other to make some reply; "think of it, and act accordingly. The inside of a prison is a dreary place;" and he waved his hand, as was customary with him, in token their conference was ended.

The attorney arose and withdrew without a word. As he descended the stairs, however, there was a terrible, sinister look on his ugly visage, and he muttered:

"He will make his money save him! O, ho! he will make his money save him, and I am to be the victim! Thank you, Oliver Goldfinch, for your candor! We shall see—we shall see;" and muttering thus, he quitted the mansion indignantly.

Better for the man of the world that that morning's conference had not been, or that he had been more like himself, less candid, farther seeing, more cautious.

For a few minutes after the departure of Wesley, the hypocrite rivetted his gaze upon the fire, with a stern, gloomy expression, when his reverie was broken by a soft, white hand being laid upon his shoulder. He looked up with a start, and his countenance betrayed the presence of guilty thoughts; but on perceiving it was only his daughter who stood beside him, he quickly recovered his composure, and pointing her to a seat, observed:

"I had forgotten I sent for you."

"Neither you did, father: I stole in upon you of my own accord."

With a motion quick as lightning, Goldfinch seized her by the arm, and eagerly peering into her face, while he held his breath, said:

"You have not been listening, Arabella?"

"Would I do so base a thing, father?" interrogatively answered the other, her color heightened with proud indignation.

"True—true—yes—ha, ha—of course— certainly not," stammered Goldfinch, in some confusion, aware his suspicion had betrayed his guilt. "I—I was thinking— ha, ha—in fact I hardly know what I was thinking—but—Well, now you are here I would like some conversation. You came opportunely, as I was about sending for you. 'Pon the word of a father," he added, gazing proudly upon her, "you look charming to−day, Arabella; beautiful, if I may be so complimentary."

And beautiful Arabella Goldfinch ever looked in the eyes of that hollow−hearted, fashionable world, which prefer the cold beauty that dazzles and towers aloft like a mountain of ice, to that softer and more effeminate loveliness, which, like a sylvan landscape full of flowers, steals gently upon the senses, and awakes all the finer emotions of the soul. In the bloom of nineteen summers, Arabella was a belle; and being a supposed heiress to great wealth, had more suitors to her hand than heart. In sooth, she was illy fitted to win by the latter; for her's was a proud, imperious nature, little calculated to love, herself, or inspire others with the tender passion. And yet both might come to pass; she might love, and be in turn beloved; but in her present position, and with her worldly education, the possibility was much greater than the probability. In stature she was medium, and possessed a form almost a model of perfection. A sp'endid bust, above which were a neck and head of a carriage the most lofty, gave her a commanding appearance, that, no matter what her position in society, would not allow of her passing through the world unnoticed. Her features were regular, but not particularly fine, unless seen by artificial light, at a short distance, when they appeared beautiful. Her forehead was high and smooth, bearing upon it the stamp of pride—pride as of a conscious superiority even over her equals. And this same pride was in her dark, lustrous eye, in her slightly expanded nostrils, and around her well formed mouth. It was a pride not only of birth, beauty, position and wealth, but of nature; pride that plainly showed she knew her value, and would by no means allow herself to be underrated. Had she been born a beggar, she would still have shown pride, and felt herself the superior of her companions. And this pride, so displayed, was her ruling or strongest passion; and though, when she chose, she could be extremely affable and winning, still pride was ever lurking near, and made her affability dignified, her reserve most haughty.

On the present occasion, she was richly dressed in a lilac silk, fashioned so as to display the outlines of her heaving bosom, which, even in its rise and fall, spoke pride. Her well−rounded, velvet−like arms were bare, save where encircled by golden bracelets just above her matchless, snowy hands. To mark her, as she turned her eyes inquiringly upon her father, one could not but admit she was handsome. In fact she was more so now than usual; and this it was which had drawn from him the compliment already quoted, and to which she responded with:

"Thank you! I must indeed look well to win the approbation of one so fastidious."

"And, by−the−by," returned the other, "this same beauty must bring its full value."

"What do you mean, father?" she asked, with flashing eyes. "Am I to be bought and sold like a slave or dumb beast?"

"By no means, my daughter, to be bought and sold. I would only imply that your wealth and beauty must not be thrown away upon one inferior to yourself in any respect."

"Never fear, my dear father," rejoined Arabella, with sarcasm and a haughty toss of her head, "that I shall stoop to disgrace myself or you. There is as much family pride in my breast as in your own. It is not every suitor, I beg to assure you, that will gain even a promise of my hand."

"But at the same time, Arabella," pursued her politic father, "you must not be too haughty when the *right* suitor is before you, or you may mar all."

"And who, I pray, *is* the *right* suitor?" she asked, sharply.

"Who should he be, but the rich and accomplished Clarence Malcolm?"

"Umpn!" rejoined the other, with a proud curl of the lip; "and am I then to do him reverence?"

"By no means; there are a thousand ways to win, without in the least sacrificing your dignity. Of a truth, a certain reserve is necessary to inspire a man with proper respect and esteem—for every thing is prized according

to the labor and expense required in obtaining it—and to nothing does this more strictly apply than to woman; but what I fear is, that you may so far forget your true policy, as to treat him as you have done many a one before him, with a haughtiness so disdainful that his own manly pride will force him to leave you."

"I shall treat him," rejoined Arabella, "according to his deserts and behavior. If he presume too much, he shall find I have not forgotten what is due to myself."

"But let me charge you, Arabella, to be very cautious, for he is certainly a prize worth securing. I have it from his own lawyer, that he has already been apportioned five hundred thousand dollars, and will in time fall heir to as much more. He is an only son of a widowed mother, and her possessions are vast; so you see the importance of making him yours; and will do it, I trust, even at the sacrifice, if necessary, of a little self−pride."

"I do not know that I shall," returned Arabella, coldly. "I do not think I shall cross my nature for any man, rich or poor, high or low. Besides, I am not anxious to tie myself in wedlock, at least for the present. There is time enough for that years ahead."

"But think, my dear Arabella," pleaded the worldly man, "what it is to be the wife of one so immensely rich, and so universally esteemed as Clarence Malcolm. If you have true pride, my daughter, this is the way to gratify it; for you will thus not only triumph over all your associates, but place yourself in a position where you can overawe them with your grandeur and magnificence. Think what it is, my child, to be the richest lady in the metropolis, and leader of the *ton!* Why, were I you, I would stoop to any thing to be so exalted."

"Would you?" said Arabella, with another scornful curl of the lip; "I wouldn't— there is the difference. I would not condescend to lose one grain of self−respect, such as you advise, to win Clarence Malcolm, were he even ten times what you represent him. No, did I do so, I could never after forgive myself."

"But, my daughter—"

"Nay, hear me out. That Clarence Malcolm is rich, I believe; that he is a gentleman of fine talents and accomplishments, I know; and, to be candid, I like him as well as any other, and have reason to believe, from his attentions to me of late, that I have found favor in his eyes. Farther than this, I know nothing; for not a word of affection, or any thing tending towards matrimony, has ever passed our lips to one another. Now should Clarence Malcolm see proper to sue for my hand in a correct way, taking me all in all, as I am, with all my imperfections on my head, I might be disposed to grant his suit—not for his money, mark you, father—not for his fine accomplishments—but simply because the whim might be upon me."

"Well, well, Arabella, you are a strange, spoiled child, and so I suppose must have your own way, though I trust you will not disappoint me in this matter."

"But why are you so anxious, father? Have you not wealth enough?"

"Enough, Arabella! why, you talk like a simple girl. Enough! bless your soul— why, were I as rich as Croesus, I should still thirst for more. Enough! no, I shall *never* have *enough*, though every addition will be something towards a satisfaction. My whole soul, Arabella, is concentrated upon the ambition of being the wealthiest gentleman in the metropolis, that men may point at me and say, `There goes he who can buy and sell all others.' So be a true child of mine, Arabella, and aid me to accomplish what I have struggled for for years. With your consent, and our cards skilfully handled, we are sure to win. Malcolm is in every sense a strict man of honor, and would rather sacrifice his right hand than do a mean action, or be thought guilty of one. His attentions to you have already been somewhat marked; endeavor to make them still more so, and we are safe. I will have the report circulated that you are engaged; and then, should he seek to avoid you, I will privately threaten him with a suit for breach of promise. This will settle the matter; for he would suffer death sooner than have his fair name dragged thus before the world and bandied in the public prints."

"But, father," said Arabella, with a look of painful displeasure, "what respect could he have for a wife so obtained?"

"Respect? Pshaw! girl, don't be a fool! Who cares for his respect, so we have his money!"

"But how would his money benefit you?"

"Ah, leave that to me—leave that to me!" answered Goldfinch, rubbing his hands with delight at the happy prospect of effecting some well concocted, devilish scheme, which he did not care to reveal to his daughter. "Come, girl, promise me you will use your best endeavors to succeed in this!"

"I will think of it," said the other, coldly, rising to withdraw.

"You will promise, Arabella?" urged her father. "Come, say you will promise!"

"I say I will think of it," sharply and haughtily rejoined Arabella. And then turning, as she was about to quit the apartment: "Who was that young man I saw here the other evening?" she asked. "His face seemed familiar, but I do not know where to place him."

"Mention him not!" replied Goldfinch, with a dark frown; "mention him not, Arabella; he is a villain who has much annoyed me of late;" and he bit his lips in vexation.

"Then his face belies him," rejoined Arabella, looking hard at her father; "for I have rarely seen a more handsome, frank, ingenious countenance;" and without waiting a reply from her angry parent, she quitted the apartment, with the proud majesty of a queen, leaving the schemer alone to his thoughts.

"So, so," he muttered, "her pride overtops her judgment, and therefore must have a fall. She must wed Clarence Malcolm, though, for I have set my soul upon it, and when was I ever known to fail in my undertakings!"

Beware, Oliver Goldfinch! for you are reckoning without your host.

CHAPTER VIII. NEW AND STRANGE ADVENTURES.

Whatever the mass of mankind, who have had no experience, may think to the contrary, the life of him who gains his bread by the labor of his brain, is by no means an easy one. To many who know not its trials, struggles and vexations, it may seem very romantic, pleasant and delightful: but it is like a mountain seen from afar, which appears smooth and beautiful in the distance, but which a near inspection proves to be craggy, rough, and both laborious and dangerous of ascent. It is one thing to read and another to write. In the former instance all is plain and smooth before you, word follows word, sentence follows sentence, idea succeeds idea, and without any effort on your part, your eye skims the page and your mind grasps the sense, and you say to yourself, "Where is the effort of the author in what is so simple and easy?" Ah, you little dream what that same sentence may have cost him, simple as it seems! Perhaps hours of severe application and brainracking thought. It is not always the smoothest and simplest passages that have been easiest penned. On the contrary, it is these which may have cost the severest toil—for as an instrument only becomes resplendent through intense attrition, so the ideas of an author can only come forth refulgent and polished by the same skill, care and attention.

You that think the life of an author to be envied, sit down, when you have leisure and feel in fine humor, and attempt to compose. And then, when depressed in spirits, oppressed with grief, care and anxiety, ailing in body, and your brain seems clogged and heavy, or, on the contrary, parched with a burning fever, sit down and try it then. Remember your task is before you, that you must go on, for on this hangs the power to provide for yourself, and, peradventure, those as near and dear to you as your own heart's blood. And remember, too, you must not slight your task, or that great tribunal, the public, before which you must be judged, will not fail to censure and thus destroy your occupation. Remember, furthermore, you are continually called upon for new scenes, new ideas and new events, which your already aching and overtaxed brain must supply. And lastly, remember this is not for a day, nor a week, nor a month, but for years, perhaps a lifetime. Make this trial we say, take into consideration all these facts, together with the pittance you will receive, even if fortunate enough to dispose of your labor, and then, if you envy an author's fate, go follow his profession, and make an early grave for yourself, and a name that will live perchance till your body has turned to corruption and dust.

Similar to these were the reflections of Edgar Courtly, as, pen in hand, and weary with thought, he paused over the task he had undertaken. We have said elsewhere, that in his leisure hours he had written poetry—but that had been done simply through inclination and for his own amusement, and was very different from his present attempt, where, with nothing to inspire him save the hope of reward, on which his very life as it seemed to him depended, and the shuddering fear of failure, he toiled on, straining each mental faculty to its utmost tension.

"And even when completed," he sighed, "I may fail, and all my anxiety and brain−torture go for naught."

But he determined to fail not through indolence or carlessness; and hence he wrote and read, revised and re−wrote, until there seemed no possibility of his improving what he had done; and gladly then, yet not without misgivings, he pronounced the poem complete. This occurred at a rather late hour on the third night from his meeting with Elmer; and having read it aloud to Virginia, and received her joyful approval, he retired for the night—but not to sleep soundly—for hope and fear were too busy in his breast to allow him more than a feverish, fitful slumber. At dawn he was up and dressed, and without partaking breakfast, so anxious was he to have the article put in hand as early as possible, he set out for the lodgings of Elmer. Elmer slept late, and so of course an interview at that hour was out of the question; but he left the parcel, properly superscribed, in the hands of a servant, with imperative instructions, that so soon as Elmer should rise, it must be given to him as a matter of great importance. Pondering upon what would be his success against so much competition, he turned away, and, in a musing mood, strolled down the street in the direction of the Battery.

It was a clear, cold, but beautiful and invigorating morning; and the sun, as he rose, wore a cheerful aspect, and brightly gleamed down upon tall spires, making their bright balls seem fire; and upon the houses and trees, turning their net work of frost into diamond dew drops; and upon the harbor and rivers, forming their waters into polished mirrors; and upon the rushing steamers, arching rainbows in the spray of their wheels; and upon the oars of the boatmen, making every stroke dip silver; and upon the sails of the stately ships, giving them a light and swan−like appearance; and, in a word, upon every thing abroad, animate and inanimate, brightening, enriching

and beautifying all.

As Edgar arrived at the Battery, and took in all this at a glance, he felt his spirits revive with a feeling akin to the scene; and for an hour he forgot his sorrows in a happy reverie. Then, remembering he had not yet broken his fast, and that his sister, having prepared the frugal meal, would be patiently awaiting him, he set out upon his return; but instead of retracing his steps, shaped his course along the shipping of the East river. Pushing forward, little heeding any thing around him, his mind occupied with grave reflections, he had passed some half a dozen squares, when his progress was arrested by a groan from a man lying on the pavement just to his right. His first impression on coming to a halt, was that the man was drunk, and he was about to pass on, when something in the appearance of the stranger led him to think otherwise, and he approached and accosted him in a kindly tone.

"What is the matter, my friend?" he asked.

"God bless you," returned the other, in a feeble voice, "for those kind words—the first I have had addressed to me for many a day! I am sick, kind sir, and, I fear, nigh unto death. I lately arrived in port from a long voyage, and was immediately taken ill with a fever. I sought lodgings in yonder house, (pointing to a villainouslooking groggery) for I had not much money, and did not know where to go. While my money lasted, I received some attention; but it gave out last night, and ere daylight this morning, I was rudely thrust into the street, with the cold hearted remark, that, being now a beggar, I must seek other quarters. I tried to get elsewhere, kind sir, but my strength failed me, and here I am., O God!" he added, in a sort of prayer, "if my time has come to die, take me to thyself!—but I would, merciful God, that thou sparest me longer, that, if possible, I may bring the guilty to account, and right the wronged!—but do, O God, as to thee seemest best!"

"Poor fellow!" sighed Edgar, struck with the stranger's manner and the mysteriousness of his last words; "here is another example of the world's humanity. Who are you, friend?" he asked; "for though dressed in the garb of a common sailor, your language bespeaks one bred in a different school."

"I am not what I seem," rejoined the other, in a still more feeble voice, and evidently in much pain; "but I can explain nothing now. If you can assist me, kind sir, do so—if not, leave me alone to die. Ah, me! God's mercy on me!"

"Alas! stranger," rejoined Edgar, "it is little assistance I can render to any one; but what I can do I will; you must not be left alone to die. Have patience a moment; I will see what can be done;" and seeing a well−dressed gentleman at a short distance, he hurried to him, explained the case and asked his advice.

"He had better be sent to the hospital," was the reply.

"But will they receive him?" queried Edgar.

"If a sailor, they are bound to do so;" and he gave Edgar instructions how to proceed to gain him admittance.

Acting upon the other's advice, Edgar procured an elliptic spring dray, a vehicle much in use in the great metropolis, and placing the stranger upon it, accompanied and saw him safely deposited in the hospital, where he would receive the best of care and medical attendance.

"And now," he said, as he was about to take his leave, "I shall make it my business to call upon you daily. For whom shall I inquire?"

"Alanson Davis," answered the invalid, feebly pressing the hand of Edgar. "And now yours, my kind benefactor, whom may God reward for your humanity!"

"Edgar Courtly," replied our hero.

The invalid started, clasped his forehead with one hand, and, weak though he was, partly raised himself with the other, while his eyes fastened upon Edgar with a wild, eager expression.

"Perhaps I was mistaken," he said, in a hoarse whisper. "Repeat your name once more!"

Edgar did so.

"And your native place!"

"Is Baltimore," said Edgar.

"You—you have—an uncle?" almost gasped the other.

Edgar set his teeth hard, and frowned darkly, as he replied:

"My mother, God rest her soul! had an unnatural brother."

"Whose name is—"

"Oliver Goldfinch."

The sick man nodded his head and sank back, too much exhausted to make an immediate reply. At length he

feebly muttered:

"Go! go!—but be sure you return to me! God grant I live, for your sake!— Heaven be praised that we have me! I have much to tell you—but not now. Go! go!" and so exhausted was the invalid with excitement and the effort to speak, that his last trial died away in a whisper.

Edgar, surprised and bewildered at these mysterious words, would fain have lingered, in the hope of hearing something farther; but the physician touched him on the shoulder, and warned him that his presence was endangering the life of the patient. He therefore took his departure, and bent his steps homeward, musing upon the strangeness of his adventure, and wondering what secret the stranger had to reveal. That there had been crime committed somewhere, he believed; and might not this man have been a tool of his uncle, and have aided in wresting from him his rightful possessions? He had spoken of wrong that had been done ere he knew whom he addressed; and when the name was made known to him, his agitation was such as could spring from no ordinary cause. And the dark hints he had himself thrown out to his uncle on the night his mother died, and the singular effect they produced, all recurred to the mind of Edgar, with the convincing force, that where was so much uneasiness, there must be some secret but potent cause; and now that he was once upon the trail, he resolved to ferret this out, let the consequences be what they might.

The hospital, of which mention hasjust been made, stands on Broadway, but retired from the constant jar of busy life by a large enclosure or park, which slopes away in front, forming a beautiful lawn and sylvan grove, from among the shrubbery of which the picturesque structure peeps forth with a rather delightful and inviting appearance, more especially in the summer season, when the green fluttering leaves seem to speak of pure air and gentle, refreshing quietude. His homeward course from this park, led Edgar directly past the Tombs of Centre street, upon which he now gazed with a strange, unacountable feeling of awe, that he had occasion soon after to remember as an evil presentiment.

The Tombs—so called from its resemblance to the Mausoleums of Egypt's mighty kings, and, also, as some say, from the number of suicides committed by prisoners within its damp and filthy cells, thus making it a sort of charnel−house— is a building well calculated to arrest the attention of a stranger viewing the curiosities of the great metropolis. It is a massive structure of stone, built in the Egyptian style of architecture, and serves the several purposes of a city prison, police court, the court of sessions, law and other offices. It is a grand but gloomy pile, lifting its huge turrets high in the air, surmounted by a cupola, whose summit overlooks a great portion of the city. A high wall encloses three sides of it, forming an area, the fourth side of which is guarded by the main building, into which from this opening, entrance can only be had through heavy iron doors, kept doublelocked and bolted to prevent the escape of prisoners. This area answers many prison purposes, and among the rest that of admitting light and air to the cells looking out upon it, and as a place of private execution to those convicted of capital offences, whose death in such cases is only witnessed by a few prisoners and officials. The building is so constructed that a criminal may be led from his cell to the court room, have his trial and be remanded, without once beholding the world without, until he is taken hence to serve out his term of sentence, either at Blackwell's Island or Sing−Sing. In front you enter by a long flight of stone steps, and pass directly under a fine colonnade, which, together with the quaint appearance of the whole building, as seen at a short distance, and the remembrance of the purpose for which it is used, gives it an imposing and solemn aspect, that makes a deep and lasting impression upon the mind of him, who, in a reflective mood, views it for the first time.

While occupied in gazing upon this gloomy structure, and thinking of the poor wretches therein confined, Edgar was suddenly startled by the piercing shrieks of a female; and looking round, he beheld a horse tearing down the street at the very top of his speed, with a light vehicle attached, in which sat a lady, nearly frightened out of her senses, from whom issued these frightful sounds of agonized despair. That she must soon be thrown out and dashed to pieces, or terribly mangled, seemed inevitable—for the carriage rocked from side to side, occasionally balancing on two wheels for a moment, so evenly that a pound seemed sufficient to upset it, and then, just as all hope was over, settling back to its original position, or swaying as far the other way, while on dashed the frightened animal more fiercely than ever. Hundreds had tried to check him or change his course; but on, on he still furiously sped, heeding no obstacle, and turning neither to the right nor left. Thousands had collected behind the lady, and were gazing after in breathless awe, expecting every moment to witness a sight that would make their blood run cold with horror. In front, men, women and children were rushing to the sidewalks, to place their own persons in safety; while others, from every direction, were hurrying to the scene to gratify a

morbid curiosity.

From the moment Edgar put eyes upon the lady, he determined to save her, even at the risk of his life—and a fearful risk it was, in the manner he attempted it. The horse was descending Centre street from the direction of the Park, and unless his course were changed, must pass within a few feet of where he stood. There was but little time for reflection—but Edgar thought rapidly, and his plan was soon laid, though it must be confessed one of peculiar danger to himself. Perceiving a club upon the pavement, he seized it, and steping forward a few paces, awaited the approach of the furious beast, well knowing that should he fail in his design, his own life in all probability would be the penalty. On came the maddened beast, rolling fire from the flinty pavement beneath his hoofs, and making each one he passed shudder with an undefined terror.

Edgar had taken his position directly in front of the animal, so that, unless one or the other turned aside, the latter must pass directly over his body. To turn aside neither seemed inclined; and when the beast, still tearing ahead with unabated velocity, had reached within a few feet of our intrepid hero, there was a general cry of alarm for his safety. The next moment the cry was changed into a universal shout of applause, and men marvelled at what their own eyes revealed to them. The horse lay sprawling, panting and kicking upon the pavement—the vehicle, upset and broken, was partly piled upon him—while the lady, safe and unharmed, was resting, all unconscious, in the arms of her deliverer.

The manner this had been effected was simple, though seemingly a miracle to those who beheld it. As the foaming horse came bounding up. Edgar struck him a violent blow upon the head, which felled him to the earth; then springing quickly back, he caught the lady in his arms, as she was thrown forward by the sudden stopping of the vehicle. It was a most dangerous feat, but one he had correctly counted on performing, and he now stood the proud hero of a thousand admiring eyes.

His first movement was to bear the lady up the steps of the Tombs, where water being procured and dashed in her face, she presently revived, only to stare in wonder and maidenly timidity upon the dense crowd that had gathered around. A single glance at her person and dress, showed her to be young, beautiful and wealthy— or at least a lady of some distinction, and Edgar was perplexing himself how to proceed next, when a middle−aged gentleman came pushing through the crowd, which gave panting and way with deference, and catching her in his arms, wildly called her his own dear child, and seemed fairly beside himself with joy at her providential escape.

Seeing she was now in proper hands, and that there was no longer need for his services, Edgar took advantage of the confusion, and quietly and modestly withdrew.

When the father, having learned the details of how his daughter had been saved by a heroic daring on the part of another which astonished him, and full of profound gratitude, inquired for her noble deliverer, he was gone, much to his regret and disappointment, and none could say where he might be found. In a word, while men were eagerly seeking him, that he might receive a due reward for his noble daring, Edgar was quietly wending his way homeward, satisfied In his own conscience that he had performed his duty, and disposed to seek no other recompense.

The sun was several hours advanced towards meridian when he reached his humble lodgings, and Virginia, having prepared the morning meal, was awaiting him with an anxiety full of a thousand fears for his safety. To her he explained at once all that had happened to detain him; and throwing her arms around his neck, she pressed upon his lips the sisterly kiss of approval, and both partook of their frugal repast with increased appetites and lightened hearts.

CHAPTER IX. THE ABODE OF THE UNFORTUNATE.

Although impatient to know the decision of Elmer regarding his production, Edgar did not deem it proper to intrude upon him for a day or two, or until all his competitors should have sent in their efforts. Feverish with anxiety as concerned his success, it was now his object to while away his time so as to think as little upon the matter as possible. For this purpose he sallied forth into the bustling city, passing through the main thoroughfares, along the quays, and, in short, visiting every place which he fancied would serve to withdraw his thoughts from what had now become a painful subject—painful, because he felt that in case of failure, the hope which had buoyed up his sinking spirits would be irrecoverably sunk in the dark waters of despair. After rambling about for several hours, he visited the hospital, in the hope to gain from the lips of Davis an explanation of his mysterious words; but in this he was sadly disappointed; for the physician informed him the man was delirious, and in all probability would not survive the attack, as anxiety and exposure had increased his malady to a very malignant form; and even should he recover, all conversation on worldly topics must be excluded for at least a couple of weeks. This was sore news to Edgar, as he had counted much on getting some clue to the supposed villainy of his uncle, whereby he might, if not convict him, at least force him to a satisfactory compromise, and regain enough of his father's property to render himself and sister independent. It was, therefore, with a heavy heart that he again shaped his course homeward, unconsciously passing over the very ground he had traversed in the morning. As he came along side of the Tombs and looked up to the huge pile, he felt a cold shudder pass over his frame, and his very soul recoil, as it were, with an undefinable fear.

"Strange!" he mentally ejaculated; "strange, I should feel thus, when looking upon the walls of a prison! I have never done a wrong deed, that I should have such terror of the criminal's home. Is it—can it be a foreboding of farther evil! God grant that my worst trials are over!—for misery and I have too long been acquainted, and I had hoped we should again be strangers."

Musing thus, he pursued his way until he entered Mott street, when an irresistable desire seized upon him to visit Ellen, his generous benefactress, whom neither himself nor sister had seen since changing their quarters, and also to look once more upon the wretched abode where his poor mother had ended her sufferings. As he drew near the place and glanced toward the miserable hovel, again tenanted with the most squalid poverty, his heart leaped to his throat, his eyes grew dim, and he was fain to turn quickly away to master his emotion.

The dwelling of the unfortunate Ellen was nearly opposite, and to this he bent his steps. His first impression was that the house was tenantless—for the door was not only closed, but heavy wooden shutters barred all the windows. Although passed midday, there were no signs of life about the premises, and Edgar was on the point of leaving, thinking there were none within, when something altered his determination, and he at once advanced to the door and stoutly applied the knocker. After some little delay, Edgar heard the rattling of bars and the clanking of chains, and then the door swung ajar a few inches, but not sufficiently to admit the entrance or exit of even a child, and a hoarse, cracked female voice said:

"Who are you? and what's wanting?"

"Is Ellen Douglas within?" asked Edgar, in reply.

"Well, 'sposen she is?" was the inhospitable rejoinder.

"Why, then, I desire to see her," said Edgar, already half inclined to depart without more ado.

"I'll see if she'll see you," said the voice. "Who'll I tell her wants her?"

"Edgar Courtly."

The door swung to—bolts, bars and chains rattled back to their places—and for a few minutes all was silent. Then a shutter cautiously opened over Edgar's head, as if for some one to peer down, and then as cautiously closed. Presently there was another rattling at the door, which this time swung open, and the same harsh voice said:

"Come in."

As Edgar crossed the threshold, he beheld a corpulent woman, some forty years of age, with a red, bloated countenance and blear eyes, dressed in a loose gown or wrapper, who eyed him coldly until he had cleared the swing of the door, which she shut with impatient violence and carefully refastened.

Then turning, "Up stairs," she grumbled, rather than said, and led the way herself.

Passing through a long, dark hall, preceded by the woman, Edgar ascended a flight of stairs, richly carpeted, to the second story, when, turning to the right, his conductress threw open a door into a fine apartment, magnificently furnished, and lighted, although broad daylight without, by a large alabaster lamp, whose mellow light gave to each object a rich, luxuriant softness. A splendid Brussells carpet covered the floor, over which, in elegant profusion, were arranged the most costly articles of furniture. Here stood mahogany and rosewood sofas, ottomans, settees and chairs, covered with purple and crimson silk−velvet; there two large marble tables, strewn with books and music; yonder an organ and piano of the most expensive workmanship; while the walls were adorned with mirrors, that doubled the splendors of the whole, and with busts, and statuetts, and with paintings worthy the attention of a connoiseur of art.

As all this flashed upon Edgar, a refinement so far beyond what he had expected to find, he could hardly credit his senses, and was half beginning to fancy himself a subject of fairy magic, translated to an oriental palace, when his eye fell upon the object he sought, the beautiful Ellen, reclining on a settee at the farther side of the room, robed now in a costly silk, and resplendent with pearl, diamonds and gold. She did not rise, but motioned him to close the door and advance to her side. He did so, and as she reached out her hand to him, he saw she was very pale and a good deal agitated.

"How is your sister? was her first question.

"I thank you, she is well," replied Edgar, seating himself by her side; "but I fear I cannot say as much for you."

"No," rejoined Ellen, with a sigh, "I am not well. I have been ailing ever since I saw you, and have not been out of my room for several days."

"I thought there must be something of the kind, that you did not call upon us," returned Edgar, "and therefore came to see you."

"You are very kind," said Ellen, scarcely able to repress her tears, "to take such disinterested interest in one despised by the world."

"Not disinterested either," rejoined Edgar. "You forget you are our benefactress."

"I would to God I could forget all other things as easy," she replied, with anguish. "That was nothing — nothing. If my money did you any service, I am rejoiced to know it—but I pray you mention it not again."

"I am in hopes soon to restore it," said Edgar.

"Nay, do no such thing!" returned Ellen, with energy. "I would rather you keep it; for in your hands, and that of your sweet sister, it will be used for virtuous ends; while in mine, base mortal that I am! it might only serve some unholy purpose. Oh, that I were dead and in my grave," she continued, bitterly, "away from the sight, the scorn and contumely of man! Were it not I dread the great and terrible Hereafter, another sun should not rise upon me in life."

"Nay, Ellen, why talk thus?" returned Edgar, gently and soothingly. "You have done wrong, undoubtedly; so have I—so have all—for all human nature is prone to err in a greater or less degree. But there is one consolation left us: We can repent of our errors and reform our ways; and, Ellen, I beseech you, as one who has your happiness at heart, to change your present course!"

"And be a thing for the world to point at, hiss at, and insult!" rejoined Ellen, mournfully. "No! no! I would rather be as I am—for now at least I am on an equality with those around me."

"But leave here−−go where you are unknown−−live an upright life, and you need have no fears of being insulted," returned Edgar, seriously.

"And think you, my friend—for of all men I have known, you are the only one I can truly venture to call so—that my guilty conscience would allow me to mingle again with the virtuous?—the wolf in the sheep's fold? No, no, no!" she pursued, hurriedly; "I can not do it: I have thought it all over time and again, and have wept such tears as only the conscience−stricken guilty can know. Go where I would, I should feel that all eyes were upon me, reading the thoughts of my poluted soul; and it would be a hell of torture to me far beyond even this. I am a woman, and well you know, when one of my sex is branded with shame, there is no door of mercy and pardon left open for us. No, do what we may, having once done wrong, we are disgraced for ever, and towards us the world's finger of scorn stands eternally uplifted. I am proud as I am wretched, and to see myself shunned by all honest people, as a creature to be abhorred, would be a punishment I could not endure, and to which even death on the rack would prove a glad substitute. Oh, I am most wretched at times; and were it not, as I have just said, I dread

the consequences hereafter, another sun should not rise save upon my livid corse."

"Nay, let me entreat you to think differently, Ellen!" pleaded Edgar, gently, taking her hand.

"Do not attempt entreaty!" she said, rapidly, "for you will only fail where others have failed before. There was one," she pursued, pressing her hands upon her throbbing temples, and looking wildly upon Edgar, "whose warning voice I disregarded ere I became criminal; and if she could not arrest me in my wayward course, think not that any have now the power to reclaim. My mother! oh, my mother! oh God, my mother!" she cried, in anguish; and again hiding her face, sobbed aloud.

Edgar endeavored to console and tranquilize her, but for a long time without producing any effect, other than to cause a fresh burst of agony. At length, becoming a little more calm, and striving to repress all emotion, she resumed:

"And can you indeed look upon me without abhorence, considering what I am?"

"It is not that I consider what you are," answered Edgar, "so much as what you may become, if you will but heed my counsel, which makes you less criminal in my eyes than your own. The evil you do, or have done, no one can more heartily condemn than I. It is the good remaining to which I hopefully turn, to see you saved from a fate the most horrible to contemplate. You have intimated that here you are on an equality with your associates. Permit me to venture the assertion, that in nobleness of nature and refinement of soul, you are far, far their superior; and hence what to them is of easy endurance, to you is a torture almost unbearable. To them, sin is a golden ball of delightful temptation—to you, a grinning skull, horrifying to your senses. They have done and still do wrong, because it is the strongest passion they possess— you, because you have been seduced into error and fancy there is no escape."

"You speak much truth," rejoined Ellen, mournfully. "Were I what I was once, with all the knowledge I now possess, not a world, were it laid at my feet, should tempt me to be what I am—but being what I am, a world, even had I such to offer, could not restore me to the purity and happiness I possessed ere the tempter came. My tale is brief and soon told— you take an interest in my fate—therefore listen to what these lips have never as yet revealed to mortal ear:

"On the banks of the beautiful and romantic Hudson, some hundred miles or so above here, stands a lovely cottage, shaded in the summer by a sylvan grove, and by vines and flowers that entwine themselves gracefully and luxuriantly about it. Here, in times past, lived a happy family—a father, mother and daughter—the latter an only child, on whom both parents fondly doated—too fondly, I fear, for their good and her own. The fearful epidemic of 1832, called the father suddenly to eternity, and struck the first tell blow to the happiness of the two survivors. Time passed on, and the love of mother and daughter, which had been heretofore divi ded by a husband and father, now centered upon each other, with an intensity that softened their grief for the lost one. Fair and beautiful—alas! too beautiful for her own salvation—the daughter bloomed eighteen, the reigning belle of the village, with a host of admirers ever in her train. Unsuspicious as she was unsophisticated in the ways of a heartless world, and somewhat vain by nature, but more so by circumstances, she was thus a fit subject for the machinations of one of the handsomest and most accomplished young men she had ever beheld. Add to these attractions, that he was from the fashionable circles of New York, the son of a millionaire, and that to her, comparatively a country rustic, he paid the utmost defference, professing at the same time an ardent attachment, and you will scarcely wonder that, dazzled by his position and the prospective brought before her mind's eye, as well as grateful for the distinction she fancied conferred upon her, her affections should become enlisted, and she gradually be led on to her own destruction. This her mother saw and warned her of repeatedly; but when was an overindulged youth or maiden ever known to profit by the counsels of maturer years, unless coerced or brought to the thinking point by sad experience. Yet do not fancy she leaped from virtue to vice knowingly. No! all the world could never have persuaded her to that. She knew she was doing wrong, but did not dream of aught criminal, until the fatal Rubicon of vice had been passed, as in a dream, and she awoke to the horrible reality of knowing her steps could never be retraced— that her fair name and fame were blasted forever—her peace of mind forever ruined. Nor was this effected but with the basest deception. She was persuaded to elope with him she loved, and be privately married, that the news thereof might not reach his father's ears, and he thereby be cut off with a shilling. At night, and by stealth, she left the roof of her fond mother and came to this city, where she was joined in holy wedlock—or at least so led to suppose, until the awful truth of the ceremony being a sham was subsequently revealed to her. Then it was the lamb became a tigress, fearful to look upon; for all the wild passions

of hell itself were stirred within her; and he who had brought her to this, was fortunate to escape with life until her first frenzy was over. As it was, even, when next she and her lover met, there was a fearful scene; and with the door of her apartment bolted upon him, a glittering dagger in her hand, there would have been a new tragedy— a horrifying tale of bloody retribution for the world to gossip over—had not he, on his bended knees, calling Heaven to witness, solemnly vowed to make her his lawful wife, and that, too, ere another month should roll over her guilty head. To jump detail," concluded Ellen, with mournful energy, raising herself to a sitting posture, "three years have since passed, and yet that vow has never been fulfilled."

"But the lover—the seducer," asked Edgar, quickly, "what of him?"

"He is her lover still; and if not by the laws of man, at least before high Heaven, Ellen Douglas is his true and loyal wife."

"But when he broke the vow?"

"He did it by giving good cause, and making another equally as strong and equally as futile. But I loved, trusted and forgave him—for what will not poor woman do for him she loves! He has made a dozen vows since then, only to break them all and leave me what I am."

"Then why accuse yourself of being such a vile wretch, when the sin was not so much your own as another's?" asked Edgar.

"But the sin was my own." said Ellen, mournfully; "for did not I disregard the counsels of a beloved mother, and basely, like a guilty being, forsake her in the dead hour of night?—alas! alas! to the breaking of her heart;" and turning away her face, the wretched girl burst into tears.

"An I where is she now!" inquired Edgar.

"Where!" echoed Eden, with startling emphasis; "where I would to God I were— with the dead!" and sinking back upon her seat, she remained for a few minutes completely overcome with the force of her feelings.

Edgar made no reply, for he knew there were sorrows, and more especially those where a self−condemning conscience formed a portion, far beyond the power of human consolation, and the which it were but mockery to attempt to soothe. After a silence of some minutes, only broken by her sighs and sobs, Ellen turned to Edgar and resumed:

"This, my friend, made me a wretch— this, and the thoughts of what I am, most wretched. But," she added, with a wild, startled look, "I could bear all—even my disgrace and the contumely of my fellow creatures—bear all to my death, without murmuring—were I assured that he, the idol of my heart, as he is the author of my misery, but loved me with one half the passion he has professed. Oh! it is the bitter, harrowing thought, that after all I may be abandoned, forsaken, and that for another, which keeps my brain on fire, and has driven me nigh distracted! But he shall never wed her and Ellen Douglas live!" she cried, with sudden vehemence, springing to her feet, greatly to the surprise of Edgar, and towering aloft like an indignant queen, while her dark eyes glared fearfully around: "No, he shall never wed her and I live poluted!—never never, never—I swear it before high Heaven!" and she threw back her head, cast her eyes upward, and raised her hand aloft, with a natural eloquence of gesture the mightiest orator might have envied.

"And if I may be permitted the question," said Edgar, almost fearful to hazard the inquiry, "who is the villain of whom you speak?"

"Nay," cried Ellen, eagerly, suddenly grasping his arm and fixing her eyes upon his, "call him not a villain—it is too harsh a term! I may call him so, but I would not hear another."

"I crave pardon!" returned Edgar, perceiving his mistake; "but my indignation got the better of my prudence."

"As you are a stranger here," resumed Ellen, abruptly, seeming not to heed the apology, "and know not the personage in question, I will venture to answer you— but all in confidence, remember— Know then, he is the only son of one Oliver Goldfinch, well known here as a millionaire."

"What!" exclaimed Edgar, springing to his feet in astonishment: "Acton Goldfinch?"

"You know him, then?" cried Ellen, breathlessly.

"Only by report, and as my cousin—not personally."

"Your cousin?" almost screamed the other, grasping his arm and looking completely bewildered. "Your cousin, did you say?"

"Unfortunately he is so," rejoined Edgar, setting his teeth hard in anger.

"He your cousin!" repeated Ellen, who in her astonishment could think of nothing else; "and you thus!—such

disparity between you! Pray tell me how is this?"

"By the devil's own labor," replied Edgar, bitterly; "you know his servants seldom go without the good things of this world, whatever they may receive in the next. But come, we have been thrown together singularly, you have briefly sketched me your history, and as I believe our misfortunes both date from one source, sit down and I will briefly tell you mine;" and Edgar proceeded to give the outlines of what is already known to the reader.

"And now, Ellen," he said, in conclusion, "as you know something of his history, I fancy you will be less credulous to what comes from his forked tongue; for that your betrayer will keep one vow with you, I solemnly do not believe."

"Alas! what will then become of me?" groaned Ellen, in anguish of spirit.

"Let me repeat my advice. Leave here and retire to some secluded part of the country, where you can ever remain unknown."

"No, no, rejoined Ellen, "I could not do that. I am so constituted, my friend, that once certain I am not loved—once sure I am forsaken—But hark!" she exclaimed abruptly, starting up and springing to the window; "there is a knock at the door−−perhaps it is Acton. It is!" she added, hurriedly, the next moment, as gently she opened the shutter and peered down. "Quick, quick, my friend, you must begone! I would not have you seen by your cousin for the world! He is already too jealous, and the sight of you would be my undoing! Pass out of the room at once, and as he approaches, appear to have come from another apartment! Now quick, my friend, quick! Adieu! I will see you another time—adieu!" and as she uttered these words rapidly, she fairly pushed Edgar from the apartment and closed the door.

Edgar followed her instructions to the letter, and the next minute had passed his cousin, whom he now beheld for the first time, and was on his way, unsuspected by the other, to the street door, where the same female who gave him admittance now gave him exit.

CHAPTER X. THE BETRAYER AND HIS VICTIM.

As the reader may have some curiosity to know something more of Acton Goldfinch, an individual destined to fill a dark page in this history, we will return to the splendid apartment of Ellen Douglas.— Ere he entered her presence, Ellen had resumed her reclining posture on the settee, from which, as the door opened, she languidly raised her head to give him a faint welcome. As he advanced to her side, the light, falling full upon him, revealed a young man of slight but handsome figure, some three and twenty years of age, with a countenance peculiarly calculated to arrest and rivet the attention of the most casual observer. Though slightly effeminate, it was comely, much beyond what is generally seen in one of the male sex—possessing that singular beauty which is far more apt to fascinate than please the fastidious. His features were fine and regular, with dark, eloquent black eyes, capable of a soft and languishing, a bright and merry, or dark and piercing expression, according to the varying moods of their possessor. A rather high, though somewhat narrow forehead, a slightly aquiline nose, a pertectly formed mouth, filled with a beautiful set of ivory teeth, and a neatly curved and well rounded chin, gave him a physiognomy that would have been prepossessing as it was handsome, were it not for a something in the expression, seen at intervals, like a light cloud passing athwart the sun, which warned one to be chary in bestowing confidence. His complexion was dark, but very clear, almost transparent, adding much to his beauty; and as he raised his hat, he displayed a comely−shaped head, covered with a profusion of dark brown, natural curls. He was richly but rather gaudily dressed, nearly every article differing in color, though each the brightest and most showy of its kind; while a profuse display of jewelry, all incompatible with good taste, proved his vanity paramount to his judgment. And this, if he had any at all, might be set down as the ruling passion of Acton Goldfinch—for to gratify his vanity, he had been led into those very excesses which were fast and surely hastening him to his own destruction. Unlike his father, he was not far−seeing, and lacked the cunning, shrewdness and intellect to be a great schemer. He was a villain, but not a deep one; and this not on the score of principle—for in this he was deficient— but because he lacked the mental power necessary to make him such. Honor of a certain kind he had—a sort of fashionable honor—which causes disolute young men to pay their gambling debts, though many times at the expense of such as do them menial services. Honesty he had to a certain degree—insomuch, that having enough of his own, he never thought to steal from others. He was benevolent, too, in some respects—that is, he could and would give freely whenever his fancy prompted and his vanity seemed likely to reward him; but he would go no farther−− the usual claims which suffering penury has upon our sympathies, having no effect upon his. If he had any veneration, it was for the man who could best handle a pack of cards, make the largest single count at billiards, or prove champion in a pugillistic encounter. In short, his mind was gross and selfish, and adapted rather to sensual than intellectual enjoyments. Yet he could be remarkably fascinating to the opposite sex—too much so for their own good—for his consummate vanity and unprincipled nature, ever led him to take advantage of their innocence whenever opportunity favored. It was to gratify his vanity he completed the ruin of Ellen Douglas; and it was alone her beauty, of which it was his pride to boast among his associates, that had thus far kept him from utterly deserting her. Perhaps the reader, acquainted with the localities of New York, and knowing Acton so vain, will be surprised he did not board Ellen in a more fashionable quarter of the city; but for this he had his reasons, of which it is unnecessary we should speak.

To all the qualities, good and bad, of Acton Goldfinch, we must add one other, more dangerous than all the rest. If he had a countenance and an eye to fascinate, he certainly had a voice to charm, whose every intonation was melody itself— and this was by far the most dangerous weapon with which he assailed the citadel of virtue. Possessing a good flow of language, he could talk for hours, in a way to please, soothe and enchant, like the music of a murmuring stream—and yet never advance one grand or original idea, or inculcate one highly moral principle. But the mass of mankind look more to the manner of delivery than the sentiment; and hence a gem of thought, plainly spoken, will make less impression than a stale idea brilliantly uttered. In this latter virtue lay the power of Acton Goldfinch, and he both knew and used it.

"Well, Ellen," he said, in a bland but carless tone, "you are looking disconsolate— how is this?"

"I seldom look happy," was the grave reply; "or if I do, my looks belie my heart."

"Not happy," he rejoined, pertly, stroking his chin with an air of self−complaisance, "and a rich man's son for

your lover! Fie, Ellen, fie!"

"I would he were a poor man's son," said Ellen.

"Why so?"

"I could then hope."

"Hope? poh! will you never cease of that—always harping on the same theme. You have the reality before you, so for what need you hope?"

"That he who sits beside me, will redeem his many broken vows, and in part repair the wrong he has done me."

"Nonsense, Ellen—what has put you to thinking of this again?"

"It is never absent from my mind."

"Well, well," rejoined Acton, hurriedly, and seeming somewhat embarrassed; "all in good time, Ellen—all in good time."

"You procrastinate," said Ellen, fixing her dark eyes upon him. "You even use less protestation of compliance than formerly."

"Poh! you mistake, girl."

"No," cried Ellen, with vehemence, grasping his arm somewhat wildly, "I do not mistake! You have some other plan in view—you intend to desert me!"

"No, on my honor!" returned Acton, in some confusion: "I tell you you mistake."

"And I tell you I do *not* mistake!" rejoined Ellen, more vehemently than ever, now fully roused to a sense of meditated baseness on the part of her lover.

"And can you for a moment, my dear, beloved Ellen, think I would desert you? No, on my knees, I swear—"

"Hold!" interrupted the other: "swear no more, Acton Goldfinch! for you have broken oaths enough already to damn one far less guilty than yourself. Swear no more, I tell you, for the thought of it sickens and fills me with horror! On your bended knees, calling Heaven to witness, you swore, three years ago, to make me your wife. A dozen times since have you done the same thing—and yet what am I now? A thing to be loathed and despised by all virtuous people—a poor human wretch, destined to fill a guilty grave! Oh! Acton, why did you come to me, when I was happy, and beeause I loved you and trusted you, coldly and cruelly betray my confidence, and put a stain upon my name that an ocean of repentant tears can never wash away? Why did you come to me, I say, when I was happy, and with insiduous arts forever ruin my peace of mind, making of me a wretch that abhors her own existence? You knew I loved you, wildly and madly—so madly, oh God! that I forsook my own home and my beloved mother at your request! For you I disregarded the righteous counsels of one whom, but for you, I would have drained my heart of its blood sooner than so offended. And what have been the awful consequences which I have struggled to bear for your sake? Look at them, Acton, as I do, with a quailing eye! My mother is in her grave— her broken heart crumbling to dust— a noble heart, broken by the conduct of me, her daughter, because she loved me more than life. And I—I—" she fairly screamed in frenzy, griping his arm fiercely, and letting her dark eyes burn into his, that quailed before their powerful glance and sunk to the ground—"I broke that heart for you—for you—who in return only blighted mine, as the frost does the flower, and made me the victim of false−sworn vows! Look at the three years of suffering I have borne—suffering beyond the power of mortal tongue to describe—suffering full of wo unatterable, ruined hopes, corroding remorse, and a guilty conscience, still made guiltier by the damning deeds of daily perpetration! Think of it, Acton—look upon it—and let the thought harrow up your soul to a redeeming virtue! Remember all this has been done for you— for love only—by one you once basely betrayed, and have now planned to desert and cast away, as we throw chaff upon the wind!"

Ellen paused, and gazing upon her trembling lover for a moment—now trembling with fear rather than regret—she relaxed her grasp, sank slowly back on her seat, and covered her face, as if to shut out the horrid scenes her memory had called up from the eventful past.

For a few minutes Acton made no reply, and for the simple reason he knew not what to say. What he had just heard he felt was true; and he was completely confounded at Ellen's seeming knowledge of what he had supposed a profound secret, and overawed by her wild, impetuous manner. Never had he seen her thus but once, and that the time already referred to by herself, when she forced from him a solemn vow to make her his. Three years had since passed, and she had been to him a quiet, docile being; and he had fancied himself secure—that her spirit was crushed— the lion of her nature forever subdued. But now was he suddenly made aware of his mistake, and saw himself entangled in a perplexity whence there appeared little chance of extrication. What was to be done! He fain

would have lied on, but she had stepped his oaths and would not receive his vows, and therefore had made him dumb of protestations. Should he come out boldly, own all, and brave her to her teeth? He feared to do so, and yet this might produce the desired effect. At all events, he resolved to try duplicity once more, and should this again fail him, he would be guided by circumstances. Having resolved, he turned to her, and gently taking her hand, which she passively permitted, he, in his blandest and most musical tones, said:

"Ellen, dearest Ellen—idol of my heart— my soul's adoration—you wrong me! What you have said of suffering on your own part, I know to be true; but it seems you have overlooked mine. I too have suffered under the vigilant eyes of a suspicious father, lest our secret should be discovered, and either I be ruined in prospects, or all intercourse between us be broken off forever. How can you accuse me, for a moment, of thinking to desert you?—you whom I love almost to madness, and for whom I have done so much. Look around you, upon the splendors of this apartment! Is there a thing here that was not purchased with my money?—and would I have bestowed it thus, had I not loved you?"

"Take back all you have given me!" said Ellen, sternly, uncovering her pale face, and fixing her dark, determined, unquailing eye upon his; "take back all, strip me of every thing I possess, clothe me in rags, feed me on bread and water, but make me your lawful wife, and I will bear all without a murmur—will never reproach you more—nay, will daily bless you, and do all that within me lies to render you happy. You say you love me! Give me the proof of your hand and I will be happy—Or if not *happy*," she added, quickly, correcting herself, "I will at least make no complaints, and will ever greet your coming with a smile, your going forth with a blessing."

"But," hesitated Acton, "if I were to do this, and it should reach my father's ears—"

"But it shall not," interrupted Ellen. "There is no necessity of making the affair public. We can be privately married, and none be the wiser of our secret."

"Well, I will see what can be done."

"Then you must see quickly, for I have set my heart upon it, and it must speedily be accomplished. Ay, for that matter, a license can be procured, and the ceremony performed at once. Why should we delay?"

"Certainly," returned Acton, stammering; "but you see—the fact is—I—that is—"

"Hold!" exclaimed Ellen, springing to her feet and gazing upon him with the dignified calmness of suppressed passion. "Hold, Acton Goldfinch, ere the love I have borne you turns to hate, and these hands do a deed time can never undo! I see it all! You do not love me, and never did—all your false oaths to the contrary notwithstanding. And now, Acton Goldfinch, you almost hate me—and for why? Because you fancy I stand in your way. Well, sir, you fancy truly. I do and will stand in your way, so long as I am cursed with an existence; and if you farther wrong me, my sinful spirit shall rise from my grave to haunt you. Now mark me, and ponder well on all I say! for not one word will be spoken that has not been carefully weighed. You are on the point, or at least you think so, of forming a wealthy alliance. Nay, start not, and use not thy lying tongue, for you see I know all! The daughter of Calvin Morton is no small prize; and I can hardly wonder you should seek to cast off for her, one whose artless innocence you succeeded in betraying, and whose now blasted reputation would, as your wife, add nothing to your besetting sin of vanity. I do not wonder, I say, you seek to cast her off for another. But this may not be. Edith Morton, I learn, is an angelic creature of pure virtue. She must not link herself to one who has proved himself a villain! Besides, I, who now stand before you a polluted wretch, was once, perhaps, as good aud pure as she. Who made me what I am? You, Acton Goldfinch—you—and to you I look for such reparation as lies in your power."

"But surely, Ellen, you would not blight my fair prospects?" pleaded Acton, greatly astonished at her knowledge of what he believed her ignorant.

"Blight your fair prospects!" repeated Ellen, with indignant scorn: "Blight *your* fair prospects! Why not? Have you not blighted mine—not only temporally but eternally?"

"But you know that was in the, excess of youthful passion, when the brain was hot."

"And having cooled on my disgrace, the passion fled, you would say?" rejoined Ellen, with the utmost difficulty suppressing a burst of indignation.

"Why, not exactly that, though something like it," answered Acton, mistaking the apparent tranquility of the other for something more real. "But come, let us settle this matter amicably, as two lovers should. You have a strong claim upon me, I admit; but I am wealthy, and will buy it up. By Jove! you shall be rich; and with riches, you know, come all the other creature comforts. Come, what say you?"

It is impossible to describe the expression on the countenance of Ellen, as these heartless words escaped the

lips of her perfidious lover. It was a curious mingling of scorn, hate, grief, self−reproach and remorse. In a moment, as it were, the scales had fallen from her eyes, and she beheld Acton Goldfinch the mean trifling villain he was. A villain, to some extent, it is true, she had always believed him; but she was unprepared for such cold−hearted baseness. He seemed no longer anxious to put her off with even false promises, but rather to let her understand she was a commodity to be trafficked with—to be bought and sold as a beast or slave. Hitherto, amid all the stormy passion of her ill−fated existence, there had been no period when the bea con−light of hope appeared completely extinguished. It had burned dim and dimmer— had been almost lost sight of in the mists of the distance—but still its vicinity could ever be traced, and by it her frail bark had been saved from destruction. Now a single breath had extinguished it, and she was left to grope her way in darkness. It is a terrible thing to feel utter desolation— to know your last hope is gone— that you have now nothing more cheerful to look to than death and the cold silent tomb! How it chills the heart, making the very blood that courses your veins like ice−bound streams, and your soul shrink within itself with a trembling, undefinable horror!

Ellen made no loud demonstrations of anger or disappointment; but she looked fixedly at Acton, till his eyes, that at first encountered hers triumphantly, sank to the ground, and an awe, he in vain sought to shake off, held him spell−bound and speechless.

"You have spoken," she said, in a voice so changed and sepulchral that its tones startled him;" you have, in a moment, turned to hate the love of one whose greatest fault has hitherto been that of loving you too well. Well, be it so; but take yourself hence at once and forever!— Henceforth I would forget, during the short period I may survive, I have ever seen one who bore the name of Acton Goldfinch— one whom I now hate with all the bitterness of my nature. Go, sir! begone! and let us never meet again, or I may be tempted to do what can never be undone!"

"But, dear Ellen," pleaded Acton, "you surely will not follow to persecute me?— you will let me go my ways in peace?"

"So far as this: I solemnly swear, before that Almighty God in whose presence ere long I expect to stand, that if in my power, I will expose you to Edith Morton, that she may be saved, if she will but take heed. Farther than this I care not"

"You swear to do this?" cried Acton, starting up in rage.

"I do."

"Then, by—! you shall not!" he cried, seizing a silver hilted dagger that rested on the table. "Sooner than be so exposed by a dishonored thing, like yourself, I will let out your heart's blood!" and he made towards her, as if to strike, his countenance expressive of the blackness of his heart.

Ellen showed no signs of fear, but calmly folding her arms on her breast, again fixed her dark, penetrating eye upon his. Acton, encountering that look, paused irresolute.

"Fool!" she said, tauntingly; "for what do you take me?" And then added sternly: "Begone, Acton Goldfinch—begone!"

As he did not seem disposed to comply at once, she suddenly sprang forward, and ere he was aware her object, wrenched the weapon from his hand and wildly brandished it before his eyes.

"It is my turn now," she exclaimed, triumphantly, as he took a step or two backwards in alarm. "Begone, I say! or, by my mother's soul, I strike this to your heart!"

"I go," he said, hastily quitting the appartment and shutting the door behind him. "I go," he muttered again, to himself; "but I will have my revenge! She will expose me, eh?" he continued, biting his lips. "Expose *me*—make me the laughing−stock and gossip of the town! No, no, by —! she shall not; I will see her dead first;" and with these dark words, uttered by his heart as well as lips, he left the house.

As for Ellen, as soon as he was gone, she turned, staggered to the settee, and throwing herself upon it, in a state of exhaustion, burst into tears.

Poor girl! Her heart was now indeed desolate—her last hope had fled.

CHAPTER XI. THE REWARD OF DARING

After waiting in much anxiety the time appointed by himself for calling upon Elmer, Edgar repaired to his lodgings and sent up his card. In a few minutes the servant returned with Elmer's compliments, (who was too busy himself to see any one) and a package neatly sealed' which Edgar took with a trembling hand and beating heart, for this he rightly judged contained the so long wished for decision. As soon as he was alone in the street, he hurriedly broke it open, and to his dismay found it to contain only his own manuscript and the following note:

"Mr. Elmer begs leave to return Mr. Courtly his manuscript—not from want of merit, for it is an excellent production— but simply because he has selected one written by a friend which will answer his purpose."

"And for this I have struggled, and toiled, and hoped!" said Edgar, bitterly, rending the manuscript into a thousand pieces, and scattering them like snowflakes upon the earth. "Well, well, well— the fates are against me, so why should I contend with my destiny. O, man! selfish, cruel, unfeeling man! O, that I could forever fly your sight, and in some far off wilderness end my days! Alas! poor Virginia!—she will weep when she knows my success, for she sanguinely counted on my gaining the prize. But I will seek again for manual labor. I must have something wherewith to cheer her.— But stay, let me look at this paper again;" and taking one of the daily journals from his pocket, he opened and read:

"The noble stranger, who a day or two since so heroically saved the life of a lady in Centre street, at the risk of his own, is particularly requested to call at No. —, Eight Avenue, where he will find friends who are not ungrateful."

"This is certainly a curious coincidence, or I must be the person meant," mused Edgar; "and if so, something advantageous may come of my answering the advertisement. Saved the life of a lady in Centre street! Well, it was in Centre street I checked the running horse, which, peradventure, left to himself, would have dashed the lady to pieces. At all events there can be no harm in ascertaining who is referred to, and I will go."

Putting his determination in practice, Edgar in due time found himself before a stately mansion—rivalling, if not surpassing, his uncle's in splendor of appearance— on the door of which, engraved on a silver plate, he read the name of Calvin Morton.

"Can this be the place?" he asked himself, and again had recourse to the advertisement.

Yes, it must be, for the numbers tallied; and looking at his thread−bare garments, then at the beautiful marble steps, the silver bell−handle, and the high windows, hung with white and damask curtains, Edgar was debating whether to venture a ring or depart, when a female, richly dressed, but double−veiled for concealment, passed him hurriedly, and then paused, and like himself gazed curiously upon the handsome structure. Then ascending the steps, she took hold of the bell−handle, looked around eagerly, partly raised her veil, gave one glance at Edgar, veiled herself again quickly, and, without ringing at all, descended the steps in haste and departed in much apparent agitation.

"Strange!" mused Edgar; "what can this mean? Some new mystery I suppose.— Those features—surely, I have seen them before! Ha! now I bethink me, but for the place where I find her, I could almost swear they were those of Ellen Douglas."

Edgar might have so sworn with impunity, for Ellen Douglas it was; and the reader will doubtless find less cause to marvel at her appearance there and manner than he did.

Decided at last to enter, Edgar rang the bell, and on inquiring of the servant for Mr. Morton, was shown into a library at the far end of the hall, where sat a mild, middle−aged gentleman, plainly dressed, of benevolent aspect, who looked up through his spectacles from among a huge pile of books with which he was partly surrounded, and to which it would seem he made frequent reference, as many of them were lying open. Before him was a table strewn with manuscripts, and in his hand a pen, which, as he carlessly nodded Edgar to a seat, he dipped in ink and commenced writing with great vigor and haste. For something like five minutes, he neither looked up nor spoke; and Edgar, fancying himself an unwelcome intruder, at last rose to take his leave, when the other, motioning with his hand for him to be seated, said, hurriedly:

"In a moment, sir."

Edgar sat down again, but found the moment of another five minutes duration; and picking up a huge volume

by his side, he was fast becoming interested in a statute on forgery—for the books were those of the law—when the gentleman, putting down his pen, moving back his chair and slipping up his spectaeles, said:

"Now, sir, I am at your service."

"I beg pardon, for intruding upon you while so busy," began Edgar; "but seeing this advertisement, (pointing to it) I thought I would answer it."

"What!" cried Morton, his whole manner and expression changing from a cold business air to one of eager, delighted surprise, "are you the young man who so nobly saved the life of my dear daughter Edith?"

"Of that," said Edgar, "I am not certain, and you may mean another. I saw a lady in danger, however, from a runaway horse; and thinking it possible to save her, I stepped forward,knocked the animal down, and, as she was thrown, caught her in my arms."

"It was you, then!" cried Morton, starting up and seizing Edgar by the hand, which he shook long and heartily. "God bless you, sir, for the deed! God bless you! I say—and I mean it. But for you, I should now be childless, and then, oh!— But I will not think of that. Come, come— let us to the parlor, and Edith shall thank you in person."

"I pray you excuse me," said Edgar, coloring; "but you see I am hardly in fit condition to enter a lady's presence;" and he glanced wofully over his well−worn, faded garments.

"Poh! poh! young man—don't talk to me of dress. Look at me, sir! Mine is but little, if any, better than yours. Dress is nothing, sir—nothing; a mere tailor can make that. The mind, sir—the mind— the soul—is every thing: that is the jewel to look to, and that is of God's manufacture. But come with me—come! Did I hear your name?"

"Edgar Courtly."

"And a fine name it is, too. I once did some business for a namesake of yours, and I found him a perfect gentleman. Perhaps some relation! He was from Baltimore, and his Christian name Ethan."

"My father!" exclaimed Edgar, with a start of surprise.

"Your father!" rejoined the other, in equal astonishment. "God bless you! you come of good stock. But fortune changes, I see," he added, glancing at Edgar's faded garments. "When I knew your father, he was rich. How fares he now?"

"Alas, sir, he has been five years dead!" answered Edgar, mournfully.

"Ah! indeed!—sorry to hear it. He was a gentleman, every inch of him. And your mother?"

"She—she too—is—is dead," said Edgar, vainly striving to suppress the tears that came bursting through his eyelids. "My father died worth near a million— my mother starved to death in a land of plenty."

"Starved, say you, Mr. Courtly? Good Heaven! I trust not starved?"

"Ay, Mr. Morton, starved, and in this very city. But wo to them that did it!−− for so sure as there is a God in Heaven, their damnable deeds shall recoil upon their guilty heads, even to the third and fourth generation!"

"Of whom do you speak, Mr. Courtly? Has wrong been done you?"

"Ay, sir, the foulest! But come, you knew my father, you seem to take an interest in my fate, and, to make us better acquainted, I will give you a sketch of my history."

"Do so—you could not confer a greater pleasure," returned Morton.

By this time the two had reached the parlor, and taking seats, Edgar at once proceeded to sketch the most prominent events of his past life, not overlooking the villainy of his uncle.

"Great God! how much you have suffered!" ejaculated Morton, as the other paused. "And no one left but yourself and sister, and you almost starving! Well, well, thank God! I have enough; and while Calvin Morton lives, you shall not need a friend. But who is this base uncle? and where can he be found? The miscreant! he shall be exposed, let him be whom he may, if such a thing be in my power."

"And yet," rejoined Edgar, "should I tell you his name, you would be tempted to discredit my story."

"Not I, in faith," said Morton; "for your story comes too much from the heart to be an imposition. I have seen and studied too much of human nature, I fancy, to be easily deceived."

"What say you, then, to Oliver Goldfinch?"

Had a bolt of lightning at that moment descended from the heavens and torn up the ground beneath his feet, Morton would scarcely have exhibited greater astonishment and dismay than at this simple announcement.

"Oliver Goldfinch?" he exclaimed. "No, no, Mr. Courtly—there must be some mistake!— for he, I assure you, bears a stainless reputation, and is one of our most opulent citizens."

"If there is any mistake," said Edgar, "it must be on your part, in not knowing him so well as I. But I here tell

you, under oath if you like, that noble, and rich, and stainless in reputation as he is, it was Oliver Goldfinch who took possession of my father's property, and afterwards denied his own sister, refusing her money to buy food, even when she was dying of starvation."

"Be this so, may God's curses light upon him!" said Morton, a good deal excited.

"And they will—on him and his—sooner or later," returned Edgar. "All things find their level at last."

"And my Edith is as good as engaged to his son."

"To Acton?" cried Edgar.

"The same."

"Then, as you love your daughter, forbid the bands and all farther intercourse— for he is a villain of but little remove from the blackness of his father. Now I see it all; and it was to this lady Ellen alluded, when she said he should never marry her," continued Edgar, as if to himself; "and it was she, then, I saw at the door! She came to warn Edith; and no wonder she was agitated, poor girl!"

"Of whom are you speaking, Mr. Courtly?"

"Of the victim of Acton Goldfinch— poor Ellen Douglass!" answered Edgar; "of her who so generously supplied me with money, when my mother lay a corpse, and her living children had not wherewithal to keep them long from joining her; of one who has been most foully, most damnably wronged!" and Edgar proceeded to detail what he knew of Ellen and her seducer.

"And this is the man that aspires to the hand of my daughter?" said Morton, when Edgar had done. "O, the scoundrel! But his cause here is hopeless. Edith shall know all; and if you have told me true, which I believe, she shall spurn him hence as a worthless dog. But speaking of Edith, reminds me you have not seen her to receive her grateful thanks. Excuse my neglect; but so taken up was I with your story, I forgot all else;" and as he spoke, he rang a bell.

"Bid my daughter and her mother come hither at once," he said to the servant; and scarcely three minutes elapsed, ere the door opened, and Mrs. Morton, followed by Edith, entered.

The former was a fine, matronly−looking lady of forty, with nothing to distinguish her, unless it were a mild, sweet, benevolent expression, which lingered on her open features as naturally as sunlight upon a flower, and inspired the beholder at once with confidence and pleasure.

But the countenance of Edith was marked— not so much with the strong lines of light and shade, which the artist readily seizes and transfers to canvas, as with the expression of intellect and nobleness of soul that was every where visible, but more especially in her soft, gray eyes, which sweetly beamed through their long lashes, like the sun of an unclouded summer's morn gently struggling through a grove of weeping willows. Not a feature but was perfectly moulded; and yet not on one, nor on all combined, could you fix the beauty which you acknowledged as both triumphant and charming. Chisel them in marble, let the soul be wanting, and they would be but marble still, as unattractive as the face of a doll; but light them with the intellect they now displayed, and they spoke to you more eloquently than the tongue of an orator. Around a face of classic mould, and over a beautiful neck of alabaster whiteness, that rounded off in a swelling bust, floated a mass of golden ringlets, less the work of art than nature. A dimpled hand and form of airy lightness, elastic with the fresh vigor of seventeen summers, made Edith Morton an object not to be lightly passed over by one susceptible of woman's charms.

And such an one was our hero, who, as at a single glance he took in all we have described, felt his frame thrill with an emotion to which he had hitherto been a stranger. For a moment, as she entered, his eyes encountered hers; and then his gaze instantly dropped to the ground, and for the first time, perhaps, in his life, he felt really embarrassed in the presence of a lady. He could not but remember now, with a feeling of pride he had not before experienced, it was this lovely being's life he had saved—that to him she owed the sweetest of all debts, the gratitude of a grateful heart.

"My wife and daughter," spoke Morton, "allow me to present to you Edgar Courtly, the noble young man to whom Edith is indebted for her life."

"Indeed, sir, was it you?" said Mrs. Morton, seizing both the hands of Edgar in her own, and pressing them warmly. "May Heaven bless you, young man, for the heroic deed! Here, Edith, come and thank him!"

"I do, mother," returned Edith, approaching and modestly extending her hand to Edgar, who took it in one, that, in spite of himself, trembled: "I do thank him, from my very soul."

Her eyes, as she spoke, were looking sweetly into his; but from some cause, as she concluded, they sank

toward the ground, and a bright tint heightened the beauty of her cheeks. Edgar would have given the world to speak freely; but somehow his tongue, at all other times an obedient member, now clove to his mouth; and it was not till after two or three vain attempts, he managed to articulate, in a tremulous voice:

"I did but my duty."

"So say all high minded persons, when they do a noble act," rejoined Mr. Morton; "but the obligation is none the less binding on our part, that you are pleased to consider the matter in so modest a light. Eh! Edith, what think you?"

"That I shall never be able to repay Mr. Courtly for what he terms a simple act of duty."

"Not so, Miss Morton; I am repaid already, a thousand times—ay, even were my claim to your gratitude a thousand times greater than it is," returned Edgar, with an earnestness of tone and manner that again brought the bright crimson to the lovely face of Edith, and made his own blush correspondingly.

"As the preserver of my life, at the risk of your own, I can never cease to remember you with gratitude," rejoined Edith, in a voice full of music to the soul of Edgar, accompanied as it was with a sweet but modest smile.

"Who would not," he thought to himself, "have done as much for a like reward?"

"To cut matters short, and end any thing like formality," joined in Mr. Morton," you must know, Edgar—excuse the familiarity I take with your Christian name—that we all feel ourselves under the deepest obligations to you, and will do all in our power to cancel the debt. Look upon this house, sir, as your home, and to me for any assistance you may need."

The earnest manner in which this was spoken, showed Edgar, conclusively, the speaker was sincere; and so affected him, that the tears sprang to his eyes, and it was with difficulty, as he grasped the other's proffered hand of friendship, he could articulate:

"God bless you! for through you my day seems dawning once more."

"Ah, poor youth, God grant it!—for it is high time, methinks, it dawned again to you. Yours has indeed been a stormy night of wretchedness. And your poor sister—Heaven pardon me! I had almost forgotten her—bring her here, and she shall have a home and be as my daughter."

"You overwhelm me," returned Edgar, tremulously, brushing away an obdurate tear.

"Have you then a sister?" cried Edith, eagerly. "O, by all means, bring her here! for I know I shall love her so."

"Ay, do, Mr. Courtly, do!" chimed in Mrs. Morton. "Edith has often wished for a sister, and yours shall be hers."

"And, mother, we will send the carriage for her at once," pursued Edith, with an expression of heart−felt eagerness. "O, I am so anxious to see her! Ring, father, for the coachman!"

"Nay, I would you let me prepare my sister first," interposed Edgar, gently.— "To−morrow, if so you desire it, I will conduct her hither myself."

"We must perforce wait your pleasure," smiled Edith, "though the sooner you bring her, the better I shall be pleased. Does she resemble you?" she inquired, *naively*.

"There is, some say, a slight resemblance," replied Edgar; "but in justice to dear Virginia, I must own she is younger and far the best looking."

Edith looked as though she thought the latter impossible, but simply said, in an artless tone, that again brought the blood to Edgar's cheek:

"O, I know I shall love her. Virginia! what a sweet, beautiful name!"

Edgar just then thought Edith full as sweet.

In like manner the conversation proceeded for half an hour, when Mr. Morton, on the plea of business, reconducted Edgar to the library. As the latter took leave of the ladies, both Mrs. Morton and Edith pressed him warmly to tarry for dinner, and made Mr. Morton promise to do his best to detain him. What a wonderful change a little time had wrought in the condition and feelings of Edgar. An hour before he was an object for commiseration, and felt too wretched to exist.— Now he was surrounded by influential friends, and would not have exchanged places with the proudest monarch. O, uncertain life! O, vacillating human nature! We are but puny chess−men, changed at the will of the Great Player, and are much or nothing, according to our position in relation to one another.

"Edgar Courtly," said Mr. Morton, abruptly, as they entered the library, "there is something about you I like."

"Thank you," returned Edgar, coloring.

"Stop! no thanks, sir!—at least none to me—for I want nothing but what is my own; and thanks for liking you, is much like thanking a man to eat a good dinner at your expense. No, Edgar; if you thank any body, thank God, for having made you what you are—one of his noblest works. There, stop, now—don't interrupt me!" he continued, as he saw Edgar about to make reply. "Don't interrupt me, I repeat! for I am a singular man, and like to say what I think, without hindrance or contradiction. It is seldom I tell a man I like him, for I see very few I can say thus to and speak the truth, and it is my rule to speak nothing but what I mean. But a truce to this. I have no time to spare, as an important case, which comes on in two days, requires all my time and closest attention. To be brief, then, what can I do for you?"

"A thousand thanks for your offer! but I require nothing at present."

"You seemed annoyed at the appearance of your dress, when I first invited you to join the ladies. You are a young man, have your fortune to make, and I appreciate your feelings−−for dress, in the eyes of the world, is every thing. Here is a check for fifty dollars."

"No, Mr. Morton, a thousand thanks for your generosity! but I will accept nothing, unless you show me a way to earn it first."

"Rightly spoken, like a nobly spirited youth! You would make a capital lawyer, methinks. What say you to the profession?"

"It is precisely to my mind."

"Will you take me for a tutor?"

"The very favor I would have asked."

"Enough! Consider the matter set tled. I can pay you what salary I please, you know. Come to−morrow, sir, and bring your sister, and I will put you to your task. Shall I see you at dinner?"

"Not to−day, as my sister would be uneasy at my absence."

"I shall see you to−morrow, then?"

"God willing, you will."

"Will you accept this money in advance?"

"Not to−day, I thank you!"

"And so Oliver Goldfinch is the uncle who so basely used you!" he said, musingly, making an abrupt change to the subject that now bore upon his mind. "Ay! ay! I must look to this—I must look to this. If I can get any hold upon him, friend Edgar, you shall have justice. And Acton is a villain, too! So, so—this shall be attended to. To−morrow I shall look for you early. Good morning, sir—good morning, Edgar;" and turning quickly away, the lawyer resumed his writing, without deigning even another look at his visiter.

As Edgar quitted the mansion and slowly took his way homeward, he mused, with a lightened heart, upon the events we have just described—upon the curious chain of circumstances which had so suddenly placed him on terms of intimacy with one of the most opulent families of the city—upon the striking contrast between him he had just parted from and his own uncle—but, most of all, upon the sweetly smiling countenance, the light and sylph−like form, and the soft, melodious voice of the fair and lovely Edith Morton.

CHAPTER XII. FORTUNE STILL PROPITIOUS.

But the happy termination of his visit to the Mortons, was not the only high favor Edgar was that morning destined to receive from the hands of capricious fortune. Scarcely had he proceeded half a dozen squares, when, as chance would have it, he met with Dudley.

"The very person I desired to see," said the latter, with a cordial shake of the hand. "I was even now on my way to your dwelling."

"Happily met, then," replied Edgar, "for I am homeward bound;" and joining arms, the two proceeded on their way.

After some casual remarks, on unimportant topics, Dudley said:

"Pardon me, Mr. Courtly—but may I inquire how you succeeded in the matter you had in view when last I saw you, as regards pecuniary recompense?"

"It proved an entire failure," answered Edgar.

"Then, my friend, if you will allow me so to call you, I am both grieved and rejoiced at the same time—grieved, that you should have been disappointed—rejoiced, that I have it in my power to assist you. Since I saw you, I have thought of you much, and of your sister also, and have puzzled my brain no little as to how I could be of service to you and not wound your sensitive feelings. Now the case is this: one of my warmest friends is a young man named Clarence Malcolm, who is rich in this world's goods, and, what is perhaps somewhat rare, as benevolent as he is wealthy. All that I know is known to him, and vice versa, for our minds are as one mind, and consequently your history has been stated to him exactly as to myself. The result is, that he desires me to beg you will accept this as a loan, until such time as you may feel yourself able to return it without the least inconvenience."

As he spoke, Dudley extended to Edgar a small purse of gold, which the latter gently waved back, saying:

"Be so kind as to return Clarence Malcolm, whom I have never seen, my warmest thanks, and tell him I do not feel myself in a condition at present to borrow, even on his own generous terms. I have already refused a kind offer this morning, simply because my pride revolted at the idea of taking money to which I had no claim. I have never borrowed but once, and then most stern necessity forced me against my will. Let me have a chance to return an equivalent in the shape of la bor, either mentally or physically, and I will accept the money with pleasure—but on no other conditions."

Dudley seemed both pleased and displeased at this answer.

"I admire both your spirit and principle," he said, after musing a short time; "but still would be better satisfied to have you accept my offer without farther parley. To speak candidly, I think you a little too scrupulous—though if placed in your situation, I should, in all probability, do precisely the same; and this, by the way, happily illustrates the principle, that we often preach what we never practice. You spoke of mental labor—am I to understand you compose?"

"I have done a trifle in that way," answered Edgar, modestly, "though nothing worthy of notice."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the other, brightening with a new thought; "I am pleased to learn you write at all. Poetry or prose?"

"The former has been my choice, and consequently most of my execution, though the latter has come in for a trifling share."

"Have you ever published?"

"Never."

"And why?"

"Because my productions are unworthy."

"And for the very reason you think so, I will wager they are worthy some of our best poets. True merit, friend Edgar, is always modest, for it requires no ordinary talent to perceive our own defects. By the way, would you like to see your productions in print?"

"Why," hesitated Edgar, "if of sufficient merit."

"I will venture that, and yet have never seen a line from your pen. Come, I will bargain with you. Will you sell

what poems you have on hand?"

"But they are worthless, I tell you."

"That is not answering my question. Will you sell! Come, do not hesitate! I have a speculation in view, of which I will tell you nothing now, save that to complete it I must purchase your poems. Come, what say you? I will give a hundred dollars for what you have on hand."

"You flatter me, Mr. Dudley," returned Edgar, somewhat staggered at the offer; "but really, I cannot take such advantage of your generosity."

"Never look for generosity in a bargain, Mr. Courtly; for both buyer and seller, considering their shrewdness at stake, will give nothing then, lest the one boast of his cunning in overreaching the other. In a gift there is generosity—but none in a trade; so set your mind at rest on that score, and consider whether you are willing to take the paltry sum of a hundred dollars for your productions. Of one thing rest assured—that I have an object in buying, and that *I*, for one, shall be perfectly satisfied, provided you think I have not underpaid you. Say, is it a bargain?—or shall I give more?"

"Why, since you press me," replied Edgar, "and since I so sorely need the money, they are yours, on condition you find them not so good as you expected, you will consider yourself under no obligation to take them."

"I accept your offer," returned Dudley, with a gleam of delight. "Now, at least," he added, mentally, "I have the means of forcing money upon him without wounding his sensitive feelings." Then he continued aloud: "By−the−by, how would you like to take charge of a magazine or newspaper?"

"Were I deemed competent, and the proposition had been made me a few hours ago, nothing would have pleased me better," answered Edgar; "but now I hold myself partially engaged to Calvin Morton."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Dudley, in a tone of surprise. "If to read law, you are most fortunate; for he stands the very first in his profession; and is, besides, a gentleman of the right school."

"You know him, then?"

"Better than I know you."

"You seem in fact to know every one."

You must bear in mind, I am a native of the city—have lived here all my days— have mingled no little in society, and consequently have been brought in contact with nearly all the old citizens. But tru ly, I am delighted at your prospects; for very few have the honor and good fortune to read law under the tuition of Calvin Morton. I am curious to know by what means you effected the arrangement."

Edgar at once proceeded to narrate the circumstance which had led to this result. As he concluded, Dudley grasped his hand and shook it heartily.

"Let me congratulate you," he said, "on a fortune in prospective; for you have put one under obligations who will never rest content till he has seen you on the high road to wealth and renown. Calvin Morton is a very singular man. He seldom forgives an injury or insult—he never forgets a favor, no matter how trivial.— With him there is no half way. He loves or he hates. Unlike what you represent your uncle, there is no dissembling. As a general thing, what he thinks he says, and what he says he means. And as to his daughter, the fair Edith, a sweeter creature does not live. What! blushing, eh! So, so—then you readily believe all I can say of her, I see. Well, I must repeat, I think you very, very fortunate.— Speaking of your uncle, reminds me that Clarence, who visits there occasionally, has promised to sift the matter, regarding what you told me, to the very bottom; and if he can prove he has acted basely, he will expose his hypocrasy, and hold him up to the scorn of all honest men."

Conversing thus, Edgar and Dudley at last reached the abode of the former.— Virginia, as Edgar entered in advance of his friend, at once flew to embrace him; but on perceiving who followed, she paused, blushed, and in an embarrassed manner, while she timidly proffered her hand, said:

"You have taken me by surprise, Mr. Dudley: I thought Edgar was alone."

"Let me hope the surprise does not prove a disagreable one!" returned Dudley, carnestly, with a flushed countenance.

"O, no, no!" rejoined Virginia, with sudden energy, looking full in the face of her guest; and then immediately added, letting her gaze sink modestly to the ground: "The friends of my brother are always welcome."

"I trust," rejoined Dudley, in a low, bland tone, "I may be considered the friend of both!"

Virginia, embarrassed, did not reply, though evidently desirous to do so, which Edgar perceiving, quickly came to her aid, by saying:

"We are both proud, I assure you, Mr. Dudley, of your disinterested friendship— for disinterested it is, since we have all and you nothing to gain by it."

"Ah, my dear friend, you mistake entirely," responded Dudley, with a smile, "in supposing there can be such a thing as disinterested friendship. Whatever gratifies, interests us; and where either our pride, vanity, sympathies, or more common place feelings are enlisted, we cannot be wholly disinterested. It is a prevalent idea, that when one performs a noble act and conceals it from the world, he does it through disinterested motives. But it is not so. His self−approving conscience is his reward; and that kind of reward being what he seeks, and of more gratification to him than the world's applause, becomes the motive incentive to action. In friendship, especially, there is self to gratify on both sides; for where self is not enlisted, there can be no interest; where interest is wanting, there must be indifference; and where is indifference, there can be no friendship. We may call friendship disinterested, to distinguish it from the seeming friendship of base self−interest—which latter, in my opinion, is unworthy the ennobling name of the former—though even in the purest of the former, if we look into it closely, we shall find self the basis on which the fabric is reared. But I am running into a dissertation, where I only intended a simple explanation, and so will conclude ere I tax your patience too far."

But on such and similar topics Edgar never wearied of conversing; and the two friends continued in a pleasant discussion for more than an hour, gradually passing from one subject to another, as each was suggested by a continuous train of ideas.

Virginia, though for the most part silent, occasionally joined in and expressed her views, in a manner that both surprised and pleased her guest, who acknowledged to himself he had not before given her credit for−one half the mind she really possessed. Her remarks were ever terse, concise, and to the point; and what was still farther evidence of good judgement, were always well−timed; and Dudley, discovering all this with delight, could not but admire her and admit to himself she was one of the most lovely, intelligent and fascinating of her sex—certainly a great deal to be admitted by one who had seen so much of intellectual society, in favor of one he now beheld for the second time.

And how was it with Virginia? She gazed upon the handsome countenance of Dudley, she listened to the full, rich melody of his voice, and marked the lofty and not unfrequently poetical and original sentiment which flowed from his lips, with feelings both new and strange to her— the while she took no note of Time, who, casting aside his glass and renewing his youth for the nonce, now flew by on the wings of lightning.

Passing from one thing to another, the conversation at last turned upon poetry, a theme with which all were familiar, and in which all were alike interested.

"O, above all things, do I love poetry!" said Virginia, with enthusiasm: and then she added, a moment after, in a faltering tone, vainly struggling to suppress her emotion: "And so did our poor, dear mother."

For a short time there was a dead silence; and the tears sprang from the eyes of both Edgar and his sister, as they thought upon her who had so loved, but who was forever gone from among them. Even Dudley was much affected at witnessing their silent grief; but knowing it both useless and detrimental, since it could not restore the dead and must impair the energies of the living, he began, in a mild, soothing tone, to console, and gradually lead their thoughts back to their previous channel.

"We should not mourn too much," he said, "for those who have preceded us only for a brief space at the longest; but rather console ourselves with the thought, that earth is not our abiding place, and that we are destined to meet again in that bright realm where the poetry of music makes an eternal melody to delight us forever. And speaking of poetry again— who among the great masters of song is your favorite, Edgar?"

"It is difficult for me to say," replied the latter, drying his eyes, "for each is my favorite in his particular sphere. When I read Milton, I think none can approach him, for he is great in sublimity; and in his masterly conceptions of what we never saw, stands preminent—a something ennobled, exalted and inspired far above frail humanity, and almost beyond human comprehension. I read Shakespeare, and feel he is equally great in his line—that of creating what we have seen, and depicting all the varying passions of the human heart. I read Byron, and love him for his wild grandeur of thought, when he grapples with the dark spirits of the storm, expands his soul over the mighty relics of the past, throws out the sarcasm of a noble heart on the villainies of a hollowhearted world, or portrays, with an immortal pen, the grandest scenes in nature and art. I delight in the melodies of Moore; for when I drink his flowery thoughts, I ever fancy myself reposing on a bed of roses, beside some murmuring stream, whose continual ripple sings me to a quiet sleep. The argument and classic beauty of Pope excites my admiration,

and the poetical romance of Scott is a source of unalloyed pleasure. Take them all in all, it is impossible for me to select my particular favorite; for like the dishes on a table at a feast, we must needs partake a little of each, to satisfy our changing desires and make our repast complete."

"You have expressed my own views and feelings, as regards the great poets, better than I could have done myself," rejoined Dudley, delightedly. "And now that I have had your opinion, I must see your own composition."

"Nay," said Edgar, blushing, "since we have been speaking of the great masters, I am really ashamed to display my humble efforts."

noshouremmber, my friend, that all were beginners once, and that no one could have predicted from a first attempt, that a Milton, a Shakespeare or a Byron would follow. Nature has never produced what she cannot again; and so we may even look to see poets of the present become as great as the greatest of the past."

"Well, as you have bargained for my effusions, unseen, you of course have a right to examine your purchase," rejoined Edgar; "and this shall be my apology for bringing them forward;" and retiring into the adjoining apartment, he shortly returned with a package of some dozen articles, neatly written and folded with care.

Dudley seized them with avidity, and, in spite of Edgar's protestations, opened and began to peruse them.

"Beautiful!" he exclaimed, as his eye ran rapidly over the first; "beautiful! Ah, better still!" he pursued, as he concluded the second. And then hastily scanning the others, he added, grasping Edgar's hand: "My friend, I do not wish to flatter you, but, for a first attempt, I have never seen any thing to compare with these. I have reason to rejoice at my bargain. Here is your money;" and he counted Edgar down a hundred dollars in gold.

It would be impossible to describe the feelings of the latter, as he modestly accepted the reward of his toil. It was gold honestly earned, and it was his: gold paid to his genius: gold that told him he had talents above the herd—that at least he was fit for something; and as he thought over the events of the day, his eyes brightened, his soul seemed to expand, and with a sort of giddiness, common to first success, he already fancied he stood on the dizzy heights of fame and beheld an admiring world at his feet. As for Virginia, she was all bewilderment; for the whole proceeding was a mystery to her; but she saw her brother had at least the means of living, and her heart bounded with delight at the thought.

"When next we meet," said Dudley, as he rose to take leave, "I trust I shall see you both in a station befitting your early years and education;" and pressing the hands of both warmly, but with a heightened color as his own touched Virginia's, he departed.

As soon as he was gone, Edgar sat down, drew his sister upon his knee, kissed her sweet lips, and, in a voice tremulous with joy, told her all that had happened, and the bright prospects now in store for them; and both mingled their tears of gladness, that the night of their sorrow was passing away and a day of brightness was already dawning.

"We must not appear before our new friends in these faded garments," said Edgar; "and now that I have money, honestly my own, let us forth and make some purchases. Oh, that our poor mother were living!—how this would make her heart rejoice!"

Carrying out his own suggestion, Edgar purchased a ready−made suit for himself, and a handsome black dress and bennet for his sister; and when they had donned their new habiliments, each congratulated the other on appearing again as in the days of their prosperity.

"And now," said Virginia, as she carefully folded the cast off garments, "let us preserve these, should fortune prove propitious once more, to remind us of our days of adversity; so that when we behold our fellows suffering, we may remember what we have endured and not forget to be charitable."

"As you will," replied Edgar; "but with you and I, my sweet sister, it will hardly need these as remembrancers of what we have been. Ha! what is this?" he added, as, in overhauling his garments, a paper secured in the torn lining caught his eye. "Good heavens! is it possible!" he continued, drawing it forth. "It is the lost check, as I live."

Great were the rejoicings of Edgar and his sister at this discovery, for to them it seemed inexhaustible wealth. As it was not yet past banking hours, Edgar hastened to Wall street, and in a short time returned to Virginia with more than a thousand dollars in his possession. And then what joy was in their hearts, as, with arms thrown fondly around each other, they sat and talked over their plans for the morrow.

Alas! poor oppressed orphans!—they little dreamed what the morrow, or even the night, had in store for them. The fowler had sprung his net, and they were already becoming entangled in its meshes.

CHAPTER XIII. THE PLOT THICKENS.

It was an early hour in the morning of the day which closes the preceding chapter, and in the same apartment where we first introduced them to the reader, sat Oliver Goldfinch and Nathan Wesley. The former was in fine spirits, if one might judge from the manner he rubbed together his hands, and the gleam of fiendish delight which overspread his countenance.

"And so," he said, turning to his attorney, "he is caught at last?"

"At last," dryly responded Wesley.

"Ha, ha! this does my soul good. Now he shall feel what it is to beard me. Now he shall know what is to fall into the clutches of the tiger he has goaded to madness. Hypocrite, indeed! Thanks to fortune, my hypocrisy is of a useful kind, for by it I can triumph over my enemies, and crush them that lie in my path. Ay, and crush them I will!" he cried, with a hellish gleam of malice darkening his features. "And him above all others will I crush! Yes, by—!" he fairly shouted, uttering a blasphemous oath, "I will extinguish the race!—and then, and not till then, will I deem myself safe."

"And will you then?" quietly asked the attorney.

"Will I then?" repeated Goldfinch, in surprise. "Will I then? Certainly—why not?—what do you mean?"

"O, nothing—merely asked the question."

" 'Tis false! I know you well—you never speak without a meaning. Do *you* think to betray me?"

"I!" replied the other, in pretended astonishment. "I betray you?—betray my *master?*—(this last was said with sarcastic emphasis)—how can you think of such a thing? Besides, supposing I did? Your gold, you know, would save you."

"Ha!" cried Goldfinch, with a start, remembering his words to the other at their last conference: "Beware, Wesley—beware! I am not one to be trifled with. I have already been warned of you: so beware! Even so much as *attempt* to turn traitor, and, by heavens, I will not wait the slow process of the law! No, by—! with my own hands will I let out your heart's blood!"

"And get hung for your trouble," quietly returned the other.

"No, I thank you, good Mr. Wesley—I will make my gold save me," sarcastically rejoined the millionaire; and then hastily added: "But come, a truce to this. It is all important you and I should be friends, Wesley."

"All important," said the attorney, dryly.

"You must assist me in this affair, Wesley, and swear point blank to whatever I dictate."

"And so perjure myself."

"Well, what of that? You have already done darker deeds, you know."

"Now stop!" cried Wesley, with a terrible gleam in his small black eyes. "No more of that! What I did was for selfdefence; but you mustn't throw it in my teeth again! It was a bad job, and I've never had an easy conscience since."

"Well, well, let it pass, Wesley. You did well—and for doing well got gold—and gold, as they say of charity, will cover a multitude of sins. You have done well now—only finish your good work. Away, good Wesley, and take this warrant for his apprehension. He must be caught and caged to−night. Away, now—set the hounds of the law upon him and drag him forth, though he be kneeling at the altar of Christ! Once convicted, friend Wesley, and it shall be the best day's work you ever performed. Make all safe, and then let me know;" and as Goldfinch concluded, the attorney rose, bowed, and took his leave.

For a few minutes after being left to himself, the scheming hypocrite paced the room and rubbed his hands with delight; and then muttering, "Now for my visitor below," he quitted the apartment.

Meantime Wesley, instead of leaving the mansion at once, ascendéd a flight of stairs, and carefully opening a door on his right, entered another elegant apartment, where stood a young man before his mirror, carefully arranging his toilet. As the attorney closed the door, he looked round carelessly, and disclosed the features of Acton Goldfinch.

"O, it is you, eh?" he said, yawning. "Well, Wes, what deviltry is afoot now, eh?"

"Your own," answered the other.

"Speak it out, man!"

"You want to get that girl in your power?"

"Yes, yes!" said Acton, hastily, in a low tone, his eyes brightening with interest.

"I can put you in a way."

"How? quick! tell me!"

"And if you succeed?"

"The fifty dollars I promised are yours."

"Do you know who she is?"

"No, and care less, so I once have her in my power, and no particular *friend* by as before."

"Then come with me."

"But how will you arrange it?"

"It's fixed already. Come with me and I'll show you."

"In a moment;" and completing his toilet in haste, Acton and Wesley quitted the mansion together, both bent on the devil's mission.

While these things were transpiring above stairs, Clarence Malcolm, of whom mention has frequently been made, and Arabella Goldfinch were sitting *tete−a−tete* in the magnificent parlor below. The former was a fine, noble−looking young man, of commanding appearance, who seemed, by his erect carriage and lofty demeanor, to feel himself fully on an equality with the proud, haughty heiress who sat by his side, a sort of queenly, breathing statue, so cold and inflexible she appeared. In fact it was apparent from her present manner, that she either cared nothing for her guest, or that she had taken offence at something in the conversation preceding our introduction of the parties.

But whatever the cause of her *hauteur*, Clarence was evidently desirous of removing it; for after two or three ineffectual attempts to draw her into conversation, he said:

"If I have offended you in any way, Miss Goldfinch, it has been done unwittingly, and I crave pardon!"

"Of course you have it," she answered, coldly.

"Thank you!" he rejoined, with slight sarcasm in his tone. "It is something to know one is forgiven, albeit one never learns wherein one has offended."

To this Arabella deigned no reply; and after a rather embarrassing silence of a few moments, the other said, abruptly, fixing his eyes steadily upon the haughty beauty:

"You have cousins in town, Miss Goldfinch?"

Arabella started, and her features flushed, as she replied:

"Not that I am aware of, sir."

"Indeed! that is very strange!"

"Is it?" dryly responded the other. "And suppose I have cousins in town, is there any thing so very remarkable in the fact?"

"No, certainly not, Miss Goldfinch. Your having cousins in town is not remarkable. It is that you should know nothing of them, and, while living in luxury yourself, they should be literally starving."

"What mean you?" demanded the other, haughtily.

"What I say, Miss Goldfinch," replied Clarence, in the same haughty vein. "I never speak with a double meaning."

"Indeed!" rejoined Arabella, biting her lips with vexation. "Well, sir, you will be good enough to be more explicit, or let the subject drop, for I do not comprehend the drift of your conversation."

"A single question, then?"

"Well, sir?"

"Had your father a sister?"

Arabella's face flushed as she replied:

"I have so understood—I never saw her."

"She married a Courtly?"

Arabella nodded haughtily.

"And had two children?" continued Clarence.

"So I have heard."

"The father was lost at sea?"

"Even so."

"Your father became possessor of his property?"

"Sir," rejoined Arabella, indignantly, rising proudly from her seat, "you are now touching upon family affairs, with which you and no other stranger has any business."

"Nay," said Clarence, gravely, "I am not exactly a stranger, Miss Arabella, and am not yet convinced I have no right to question as I do."

"Then question those who will answer you," she said, scornfully, preparing to quit the apartment.

"Stay!" said Clarence, rising and gently touching her on the arm. "I do not wish to give offence, Miss Goldfinch—nor do I ask these questions idly. They are perhaps all important to you, to me, and to others. Sit down, I pray you! I will not detain you long."

Arabella hesitated, but finally resumed her seat.

"Your father, I say, became possessed, by will, of his brother−in−law's property; and a vast possession it was, which he still holds; but his sister, after spending the little bequeathed to herself, removed with her children to this city, and here died of starvation and a broken heart."

"Sir!" cried Arabella, turning pale; "Mr. Malcolm! do you say this to insult me?"

"No, Miss Goldfinch; I pride myself on being a gentleman, and no gentleman will insult a lady; nevertheless I must tell you the truth."

"How know you this?"

"That, begging your pardon, is a secret I must withhold. Let it suffice, that my information comes from a worthy source."

"You speak in riddles to me, Mr. Malcolm: I cannot comprehend your object. If I have relatives in town, so poor as you say, they should have applied to my father and been relieved. I trust you do not hold me answerable for their neglect in making their condition known?"

"But they did make their condition known to your father, and were refused assistance, even so much as would drive starvation from their doors."

"Hold!" cried Arabella, springing to her feet, her proud bosom heaving with angry passions, and her dark eyes flashing defiance: "I will bear this insolence no longer! You, Clarence Malcolm, are the first that has ever so dared to insult me, and I hate you for it. Ay, were you to become an emperor and sue at my feet, I would remember what you have this night uttered, and scorn you from me. You have said that my father refused assistance to his poor relations, knowing them to be destitute."

"I repeat it," rejoined Clarence, firmly, also rising and confronting his angry hostess. "Yes, Miss Goldfinch, I repeat it; for I have it from a source entitled to all confidence—no less than from the parties themselves. But stay—understand me—I do not accuse you. A thousand things may transpire, even in your own mansion, of which you may be ignorant; and from your manner and conversation, I sincerely believe you knew nothing of your cousins; and that had you known their condition, your own private purse would have generously relieved them. So much I will say; but that your father was not ignorant, and that he did refuse them means to live until his sister was in a dying state, I do boldly assert."

If Arabella could have withered and annihilated Clarence Malcolm with a glance, the glance of hate and scorn she bestowed upon him, as he concluded, would have done so. For a few moments her excited passions would not allow her an answer; and she stood before him with heaving breast, expanded nostrils and flashing eyes. At length, with all the haughty scorn she could throw into her words, she rejoined:

"Mr. Malcolm, allow me to give you due credit for having *once* to−night spoken the truth; and that when you said, had I known the condition of my kins−people, I would have relieved them. But what you say of my father, begging your pardon for the unlady−like expression, is false! No man, sir, is more benevolent than my father; and that he has given large sums to benevolent societies, and to the poor, you, sir, know as well as I; and therefore, I again repeat, what you have said is false— a base, willful, malignant slander! Henceforth, sir, we are strangers; and as I hear my father's step, perhaps you will have the audacity to re−speak your slanderous language to his face."

Saying this, Arabella walked proudly to the door, where she was met by Goldfinch, just come down from his interview with Wesley to join her, and, if possible, further his scheme of effecting a union between herself and

Clarence.

"Eh! my daughter—what is this?—what is this?" he said, hastily, making an effort to detain her, and glancing at Malcolm as if for an explanation, who stood proudly drawn up to his full height where Arabella had left him, calmly watching her motions.

"Question him!" replied Arabella, with a gesture of displeasure toward Clarence; and stepping proudly aside, she passed her father and disappeared.

"Ah, my dear Malcolm," continued the hypocrite, closing the door and approaching the other with hand extended, "I am delighted to see you. How is your health this evening, and that of your good mother?"

"We are well," answered Clarence, coldly, barely taking the hand of the millionaire, and letting it fall without pressure.

"Ah, yes—glad to hear it," said the other, affecting not to notice his cool reception. "So you have had a little lovequarrel, eh? you and Arabella. O you lovers!—always fighting and making up again. Well, well—just so with my wife and myself before we were joined in holy wedlock. Ah, me!" he sighed, affecting to weep: "Poor Fanny! she is gone to her long home now. Well, such things must be, you know, in this ever changing world of sin and death; and we should not repine, but, like true Christians, be resigned to the will of our Maker."

"*A* truly pious sentiment, Mr. Goldfinch," dryly responded Clarence, eyeing the other closely.

"There is nothing like a Christian's hope in such hours of affliction," meekly rejoined the dissembler, with a sanctimonious face befitting a Godly priest. "When my dear wife Fanny died, a year ago, I thought my heart would break; but I looked to Him for support in my trying hour, and not in vain; for he filled my soul with the hope of an eternal meeting beyond the grave. But I beg pardon, friend Clarence! I am keeping you standing. Come, let us be seated, and have a little private conversation."

"With all my heart," said Clarence; "for there is a matter of some little moment I wish to touch upon."

"O, yes—exactly—I understand," returned Goldfinch, with what he intended should be thought a knowing smile. "Well, to come to the point at once—and that is what all lovers desire, though most of them are backward enough in doing it themselves—I must say that, though a little petulent and proud at times, Arabella is a dear, sweet girl, with whom I am extremely loth to part; but then, when I consider she is to be united to one so highly esteemed as yourself—"

"Sir," interrupted Malcolm, with crimson features, "you mistake. My desired conversation has no reference to your daughter."

"Ah, indeed!" said the worldly man, seeming to be abstracted, though his cold blue eye was seeking the while to penetrate the very soul of his guest. "Indeed, my young friend, I exceedingly regret that two persons of such good sense as you and Arabella possess, should let a trifling lovequarrel so interfere with your desires."

"Again you mistake," rejoined Clarence, sternly. "We have had no love−quarrel, as you term it."

"No? Then I was mistaken in supposing you offended with each other?"

"No, Mr. Goldfinch, in *that* you were *not* mistaken."

"Hum! hum! Well, you lovers are mysterious."

"Nay, sir, be so good as to understand me, once for all, that we are *not* lovers!" said Clarence, indignant at the other's perverse assumption of what he knew was false.

"Not lovers? and you visiting her regularly? Poh, pho—don't tell me that!"

"True, I have visited her somewhat regularly of late, and may have had some serious intentions in so doing—but they are past now, and this is my last visit."

"Indeed!" returned Goldfinch, seriously; "you surprise me! Is not my daughter good enough for you?"

"Too good, perhaps—at least she would have me think so—but that is neither here nor there."

"Pray tell me the reason of your quarrel?— for quarreled you have, I see."

"I will—at least as far as I know.— What she first took offence at, she better knows than I—for I had said nothing that I am aware of to give her cause—but the last matter in discussion, and at which she most took fire, was regarding her cousins and yourself."

As he said this, Clarence fixed his eyes upon Goldfinch, and witnessed a most rapid and fearful change, which convinced him he was right in the course he was pursuing. A deadly pallor overspread his countenance, his brow darkened, his lips compressed, and a cold, sullen gleam shot from his blue eyes. For a moment he gazed sternly upon his guest, without speaking, and then said, with assumed composure:

"Well, sir, what of her cousins?"

"Why, in the course of conversation, I remarked that it was singular she should be living in splendor, while they were starving in the same city."

The millionaire started, and his face grew darker—more devilish—so much so that Clarence gazed upon him in astonishment.

"Well, sir?" he said.

"Your daughter denied all knowledge of the fact," pursued Clarence, quietly, still eyeing the other closely, "and said if such was the case, they should have made known their condition to you and been relieved. I replied that they had done so, and been refused assistance."

" 'Tis false!" cried Goldfinch, springing up in rage, completely thrown off his guard. " 'Tis false, I say—false as hell! I gave Edgar Courtly a check for a thousand dollars."

"But not until his mother, your sister, was dying."

"How know you that, sir?"

"That is my secret."

"And even if she was dying, what is that to you?"

"Everything—since their cause has now become mine."

"Indeed! and what do you intend to do?"

"Set the wronged right, and make villainy tremble."

"Is it possible! I trust you will have a pleasant time of it!"

"If I succeed, I doubt not I shall."

"Take my advice, young man—go home, and meddle no more with what does not concern you!"

"But this does concern me, I say; and since you are free to give advice, Mr. Goldfinch, take a little of mine, and be cautious what you do hereafter; for every action will be watched—every motive closely scanned."

"Then I am to have spies upon me, am I?"

"And have no more than you deserve, since your former deeds are becoming known."

"Ha! what do you know?" quickly interogated the other, turning very pale.

"Time will show, sir, what I know.— Again I say, be cautious!"

"Some villainous report of that cursed nephew of mine. By—! I will have him hung!"

"Is this your *Christian* piety?" querried Clarence. "So, so—the mask is off sooner than I anticipated; and I now behold you what you have been represented— a base hypocrite!"

"Leave my house, sir!" cried Goldfinch, stamping his foot violently, completely beside himself with rage.

"I do so with pleasure," returned Malcolm, calmly, rising from his seat;" and promise you, moreover, I will never again darken your door. And furthermore, I now tell you to your teeth, I am henceforth your determined foe, and will spare no pains to expose your hypocrisy at any and all times and places; and if I can prove you have gained your property wrongfully— taken it unlawfully from the widow and orphan—I solemnly swear to devote time, energy and money, to the last cent I have if necessary, to bring you to the punishment you so richly merit. There are so many hypocrites in the world—so many wolves in sheep's clothing—that it is not only an act of justice, but a righteous act, to expose and punish all we can."

It is impossible to portray the appearance of Goldfinch as he heard these words. His usually serene features became almost haggard with fear and rage, his eyes glared wildly, and there was a foam and lividness about the lips, such as madmen sometimes exhibit. As Clarence ceased, he clenched his hand and took a step forward as if to strike him. Then pausing irresolute, he turned, and casting himself upon a seat, buried his face in his hands and groaned.

Gazing sternly upon him for a moment, Clarence turned upon his heel and left him to his own bitter reflections.

For the space of ten minutes the schemer rocked to and fro, like one in agony, and then started up suddenly.

"Fool! fool!" he exclaimed; "a cursed fool I am? Foiled again, by—! Why did I admit that matter of the check? But *he* at least shall not escape me! No, sooner than that, I will bribe a dozen witnesses to swear him to eternal perdition;" and with these dark words upon his lips, Oliver Goldfinch quitted the apartment to plot new schemes of hell.

CHAPTER XIV. THE ARREST.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening, that Edgar and Virginia sat together before a cheerful fire, recalling the events of the day. There was an air of gladness on the features of each, mingled with a slight shade of gloom, like the first breaking forth of the sun upon a late stormy landscape, which made them appear very interesting. The dark habiliments of mourning now worn by each, contrasting with their pale, expressive features, gave them a sort of classic interest, if we may be permitted the phrase, over which an artist would have lingered with delight.

"And what is he to do with your poems, dear Edgar?" asked Virginia, with her beautiful hand resting gracefully on his shoulder, and her soft, blue eyes looking tenderly and earnestly into his, while around the half parted lips lingered a sweet though rather melancholy smile, as if the sorrow of the past and the joy of the present were commingling in her soul.

"Indeed, sweet sister, I do not know," replied Edgar, turning to her his manly, noble countenance, and imprinting on her lips a kiss of fraternal love. "As I told you before, he spoke something of a magazine and newspaper, and of giving me the charge of either; but I more than half suspect he made the poetry an excuse to put in my possessisn the money I had refused as a loan. Generous soul! how noble in him to do this! and what a contrast he forms to our selfish, avaricious, hypocritical uncle, who, though he gave me something at last, did it as if he feared to do otherwise—fancying, methought, I had a clue to some dark secret, that, if known, would be his undoing. And this, by the way, reminds me I must not fail to call on Davis to−morrow. Perchance he may be in a condition to explain his mysterious words. But ah! why do I think of man's baseness now, at a time when my hear' is made glad by the nobleness of disinterested friendship and generous gratitude! No, banished be all from my thoughts! I will think of an angel I this day for the first time beheld."

"Of Edith Morton," quoth Virginia, with an arch smile.

"Of one, dear Virginia, you shall love as a sister. O, that to−morrow were come, that you might behold her!"

Virginia sighed.

"I, too," she said, pretending to search for something at her feet, "will think of—"

"Dudley," added Edgar, as she paused. "Ay, think of him, sister, for he is worthy of your thoughts."

"Nay, I said not him, Edgar," cried Virginia, quickly, now showing a face deeply flushed—possibly caused by bending forward— possibly by the fire—or, possibly— by what you will, reader.

"Hark!" exclaimed Edgar, suddenly; "there are heavy steps on the stairs, and rough voices without. What can be the meaning?"

Virginia drew close to him in alarm. The next moment there came a heavy double−knock on the door, as if struck with a club, and a voice without said hoarsely:

"Guard the windows, and see he don't escape by t'other door!"

"Who are you, and what is wanted?" demanded Edgar, rising and taking a step forward, while Virginia clung tremblingly to him.

"Open, in the name of the commonwealth! I'm an officer of the police."

"No, no—do not!" cried Virginia, intercepting her brother as he was about to comply with the demand. "This is some plot to murder you."

"Be firm, Virginia, and reach me yonder knife," said Edgar, in a low tone, with deathly pale features and compressed lips. "Should they prove to be impostors, it shall go hard with some of them. Quick, the knife! and then retire into the other apartment."

"Open, or I'll split down your door!" said the voice without.

"Do so, and you are a dead man!" returned Edgar. "Quick, Virginia! There, now hasten into the other apartment."

"But, Edgar, dear," began Virginia, in trembling tones.

"Nay, away, before violence is done!" interrupted her brother. "Fly, and close the door!" and as Virginia complied with his entreaty, he turned the key in the other and threw it open.

Two figures at once advanced into the apartment—one the villainous person of Wesley, and the other a stout, coarse−featured, red−faced individual, partly muffled in a rough over−coat, who carried in one hand a paper, and

in the other a heavy hickory club.

"That's him," nodded Wesley toward Edgar.

"Edgar Courtly," said the other, advancing and placing his brawny hand on his shoulder, "you're my prisoner."

"For what?" demanded Edgar, calmly, while Virginia, uttering a wild shriek, came bounding forward.

"For forgery," gruffly replied the officer.

"Great Heaven! I arrested for forgery! You must be mocking me!"

"There's the document; and if you think there's any mockery in that, why you're welcome to think so, that's all," replied the constable, showing Edgar the writ for his apprehension.

"'Tis even so," said Edgar, clasping the almost fainting Virginia to his beating heart. "Great God! are we never to know the end of our misery! Must one affliction tread upon another till they crush us into our graves! Oh, God of the orphans!" he cried, wildly, clasping his hands and looking upwards, "bid death be speedy and summon us to a better world!" Then turning fiercely to the officer, he continued: "Who hath done this, sir!—who dares accuse me of the crime you have named? In the presence of my Maker, sir, I swear I am innocent!"

"Yes, yes," screamed Virginia, wildly, "he is innocent—he never did any wrong— and you shall not tear him from me! Go! go!—you shall not take him!"

"Come, come, pretty Miss, it's no use to whine," returned the officer; "because, you see, now, I've got to do my duty whether or no. I've no doubt the young man'll be able to prove his innocence—but with that I've nothing to do. There's my paper, which says arrest Edgar Courtly, and I've got to do it. So, (to Edgar) come along! for it's time we's a−moving."

"I see it all!" exclaimed Edgar, as a thought flashed through his brain. "It is a damnable plot of my uncle to put me out of his way: but I will triumph yet, and then let him beware! Cheer up, Virginia! I have friends, and shall not long be kept in durance; and then let them that have done this beware! Cheer up, sweet sister— stay here to−night—and early in the morning hasten to Calvin Morton and tell him all. Farewell!"

"No! no!" screamed Virginia, clinging tightly to him; "you shall not go! I will not let you go—they will murder you! Oh God! oh God! to come to this! You shall not go!"

"Nay, dearest Virginia," said Edgar, in an agony of mind better conceived than described, pressing his lips to hers, and straining her to his heart in a fond embrace, "I must go; the officer is waiting; you must not detain me!"

"Then I will go with you—they shall imprison us both—we will not part!"

"That cannot be," spoke up Wesley. "The rules of the prison won't allow it. Better stay where are you are, lady, and I'll bring you any information you desire. Although I'm here with the police officer, yet I'm your brother's friend, and will do all in my power to render this disagreeable business bearable. You spoke of Calvin Morton, the lawyer: do you know him, Mr. Courtly?"

"Thank Heaven, I do!" replied Edgar. "I did him some service, for which he is grateful, and will stand my friend. Oh, sir, if you are friendly toward us, as you say, will you not hasten to him at once, and tell him the condition in which we both are placed? It is the greatest favor I can ask of you at present, and you shall have gold for your trouble."

"I'll do it," said Wesley, with a singular gleam in his small, black eyes—"that is, if you'll persuade your sister to remain, so that if they send after her, as I know they will, she can surely be found."

"Do you hear, Virginia? Now, sweet sister, stay where you are till this gentleman returns, or sends some one to take you among friends; and in this way you will both hasten my release and relieve my mind."

"Then farewell, brother!" cried Virginia, throwing her arms around his neck and bursting into tears. "Farewell, Edgar!— I—I will do as you say. God bless you!—adieu!" and as if fearful to longer test her resolution by remaining, she sprang away from him and into the adjoining apartment.

"Lead on!" said Edgar to the officer; and with a firm step, but with a deathly, sickening sensation at heart, he left the house, accompanied by Wesley and the constable.

As the party reached the foot of the stairs, two figures approached them, and a voice said:

"Why, Gus, I d begun to think you wasn't a−coming. What in thunder kept you so long?"

"Why, the chap's got a sister up there," answered the other, "and she, woman like, wouldn't let him go till she'd cried a few— that's all."

"Well, I 'spose we can push ahead now;" and the speaker came along side of Edgar, while the fourth personage drew aside and was joined by Wesley.

As Edgar now moved away between the two officers, he noted, with considerable misgiving, that the other two persons loitered about the premises, conversed in low tones, and occasionally pointed toward the apartments of his sister.

Could it be possible, he mused, that they meditated treachery! And then like lightning the remembrance came over him, of how strenuous Wesley had been in urging his sister to remain. Perhaps this was some devilish plot to remove him and get her in their possession! and he felt his blood run chill and his brain reel at the thought.

Halting abruptly and looking back, he said to the officers:

"Before I go with you to prison, I must return to my sister: I have something important to tell her."

"Can't do it," replied one, gruffly, placing his hand heavily on Edgar's shoulder. "You've kept us bothering too long already, and must come now whether or no."

As the other spoke, Edgar saw the two figures slowly depart in an opposite direction, and watching them disappear, he strove to banish from his mind all suspicion of wrong, and turning, signified his readiness to proceed.

With a heavy step and heavier heart, Edgar moved through the streets, bitterly reflecting upon his hard destiny, in having the only cup of happiness he had possessed for years dashed suddenly from his lips at the very moment his wearied and thirsty soul was about to take a refreshing draught. And what could be the meaning of the accusation for which he was now held a prisoner! He strove to recollect what he had done, to bring himself even under the curse of suspicion; but for a long time he puzzled his brain without success, when suddenly the truth flashed upon him with almost overwhelming force. His uncle— his base, inhuman uncle—was at the bottom of it! Yes, this was the cause of that liberality which had so surprised him— this the cause of that gleam of triumph which he had marked at the time, but without a suspicion of what it imported. And to what extent had he power to carry his villainy? He would of course attempt to prove the check he had given him a forged one. But would he succeed? Doubtless he already had witnesses bribed to swear falsely; but notwithstanding, Edgar knew himself innocent, and could not but believe that all would turn out right in the end, and that the black−hearted baseness of his uncle would recoil upon himself and his tools with overwhelming force.

As he came in sight of the Egyptian Tombs, rearing its massive walls high in the starlight air, and standing out vague, and dim and gloomy from its murky background, the same cold, sickening shudder he had twice before experienced, passed over his frame, and he knew it now a strange omen of evil. And what singular feelings were his, as, ascending the steps, he walked over the very spot whither he had borne the lovely Edith, then an unknown female just rescued from peril, but now an object in his eyes of no little interest! And with what peculiar emotions he recalled the plans he had laid for the morrow, in each of which she held a part, only to know them all swept away by the strong hand of destiny, and himself a prisoner, on his way to the dungeon of the criminal! And with what a sinking heart, a sense of loathing and utter desolation, he entered the cheerless, noisome cell apportioned him, and heard the harsh grating of the iron door as it swung to on its rusty hinges, shutting him from light, and air, and seemingly the world forever! And lastly, when all were gone and all was silent, save the dull sound of his feet, as to and fro he paced the rocky floor of his present narrow abode, what a whirlwind of thought, what a chaos of ideas, crowded his feverish brain, straining it to the verge of madness, and making his very soul seem like a thing of flesh and blood, filled with barbed irons dipped in rankling poison!

But with all his misery−−his mental anguish— Edgar had an easy conscience; and with this we leave him, while we return to those who were even now taking the preliminary steps to a fearful retribution.

CHAPTER XV. THE PLOT AND THE TRAITOR.

"I tell you, Acton," said Wesley to his companton, as they stood before the lodgings of Edgar and Virginia, "it's no use to think of venturing there now, for she'll know it's some trick to deceive her: so come away, leave all to me, and I'll make my plan succeed."

"Why, Wesley, you see we are here now, and the bird is caught."

"But surely, Acton Goldfinch, you're not fool enough to attempt force with a woman, when stratagem will succeed better. If she should scream, we'd have the whole town upon us."

"O, I would only attempt the gentlest persuasion."

"Pshaw! what would your persuasion do with her? And see," continued Wesley, pointing toward Edgar, "that young scape−grace has stopped. He likely suspects something, and if we stand here much longer, we'll have him back upon us. Come! we must leave, if only for policy's sake."

Acton grumblingly consented, and the two worthies moved away together. Entering the Bowery, they shaped their course to one of the many grogeries surrounding the theater, and passing through the barroom into a more private apartment, called for a couple bottles of wine, over which, in low tones, they discussed the matter uppermost in their minds.

"But, Wesley, how will you manage it?" asked Acton.

"As I said before, leave that to me and you'll see. But I say, where'll you take her to, Acton?—have you got that fixed?"

"Why, not exactly: I must take her where I'm acquainted, for there might be trouble with strangers. Ha! by Jove, I will do it!" he added, with flashing eyes, striking his fist on the table with a force that made the bottles and tumblers ring again. "Yes, she shall go there," he continued, rather to himself than his companion. "She has dared to threaten me to my teeth and cast me off, and I will show her that I can console myself with the society of one more beautiful still. And then, peradventure, she'll get in a passion and do some rash act—for of course she'll be jealous of her rival. Well, so much the better; for if she but break the law in one iota, I will have her dragged to prison, where I'll manage to keep her until my wedding is over. Yes, by—! I'll do it!"

"And who is this person you're speaking of?" asked Wesley, carelessly.

Acton gave a start of surprise.

"Well, that is my business," he answered, sharply, now for the first time aware he had been thinking aloud. "You do your part, sir, and leave mine to me."

Wesley made no reply, but there was a peculiar cunning expression on his ugly features, and a malicious gleam in his small, black eyes, as stealthily he watched the countenance of the other. Then he said, in a careless tone:

"By−the−by, Master Acton, have you that fifty handy?"

"Insolent dog!" returned the other, angrily; "do you want your pay before you do your work? Don't intrude mercenary affairs upon me, when you see I am busy with weighty matters."

"So, so," grumbled Wesley to himself— "he calls me an insolent dog, eh?—and his father will make his money save him, eh! O ho, my good masters—we shall see— we shall see."

"What do you think, Wes," said Acton, in a familiar, patronising tone, intended perhaps to allay any harsh feelings his previous language might have excited, and throwing off as he spoke a tumbler of wine: "think the little jade will be refractory, when she finds there is no backing out of the matter, eh?"

"Hardly," answered Wesley.

"Sewing girls, you know," continued the other, on whom the wine already began to take effect, "are not apt to be troublesome— at least I—ha, ha—I never found them so. But then you know," he added, with assumed gravity, stroking his chin complacently, "there is every thing in the looks of the person—eh! Wesley?"

"Every thing," rejoined the other, quietly, eyeing him closely.

A few more turns at the bottle made Acton very loquacious, and he began to talk of his own private plans with less and less reserve. Urging the liquor upon him, but taking care to keep a cool brain himself, Wesley watched his opportunity, and when he found the other in the right mood to be communicative, said:

"Between friends, you know, Master Acton, there should be no reserve!"

"That's fact," hiccupped the other; "that's a fact, by —! What do you wan't to know, Wes? Eh! what is it?"

"Know? O, nothing in particular— only I was just thinking how — touchy you were about that little matter of the female."

"Ha! ha!—yes, I see. Ah, you're a sly dog, Wes—by Jove, you are! Well, now, I'll tell you—for as you say, there should be no reserve among friends—and we're friends—eh! Wesley?"

"We're friends," grinned the other.

"Well that, you see, was my wife. Stop, now—that is, you see, she would have been my wife, but the priest or minister that married us, didn't happen to be either a priest or minister. You take, Wes, eh?— ha, ha, ha!"

"I take," quietly rejoined the other; and then added, carelessly, sipping his wine: "A good joke—a capital joke. But, by−the−by, who is this female? and where does she live?"

"O, she?—why, her name's Ellen Douglas, and she lives in Mott street."

"And so she's going to interfere in some wedding of yours, eh?"

"Ha! ha! yes; and that's the richest joke of all. Come, I'll tell you about it. You must know I have been paying my addresses to the fair, and lovely, and angelic Edith Morton, and—But stop—her health first, Wesley, and then to proceed."

And having drank her health, as he termed it, with drunken gravity, Acton proceeded to give the other a short history of Ellen Douglas, and of the most important events which had occurred during their acquaintance, up to the time when he was commanded from her presence, all of which the reader has a knowledge. And then he said, in conclusion, with somewhat awakened energy:

"But she must not interfere in this affair of Edith! No, by —! she must not interfere there! Is there not some way to prevent it, Wesley?" and he gave his confederate a peculiar look.

"*Some* way," nodded Wesley, catching the other's dark meaning.

"Yes," pursued Acton, slowly, eyeing the other steadily, "there *is* a way, and I may yet need your services. If she attempt what she has threatened, I—"

"May put her *out* of the way," chimed in Wesley, in a low tone, as the other paused.

Acton started, his eyes gleamed darkly, and reaching across the table, he seized Wesley's hand and shook it heartily.

"You are a clever fellow," he said; "you see things at a glance that others might never see. By Jove! I was getting drunk just now—but the thought of this affair has made me sober again. Come, as it is not far from here, by Jove, I'll show you where Ellen lives, and on the way we will talk over the matter."

No proposition, at the moment, could have suited Wesley better; for he had deep schemes of his own to concoct; and to know the abode of Ellen, was one of the most important steps towards their completion; therefore he quickly arose and signified his readiness to depart immediately. Acton had more than once insulted him— but he had passed it by, simply because he had scen no opportunity to revenge himself compatibly with his devilish nature. To−night he had called him an insolent dog; and now that he fancied there was a chance for deep and lasting retaliation, he had sworn in his heart to execute it. To what extent he succeeded will presently be seen.

By the time Acton and Wesley reached the abode of Ellen, the former had become perfectly sober—owing, doubtless, to the weakness of the wine and the excited state of his feelings—and already began to regret having made the other his confident; but it was too late now to repent, and so he determined, if possible, to profit by a sorry mistake.

"That is the house," he said, pointing to the building from the opposite side of the street.

"And you design taking the girl there, eh?" queried Wesley.

"Why, that *was* my intention—but, by Jove, I hardly know what to think of it. Ellen has a high temper, and may prove troublesome."

"Pshaw! cannot you manage a woman?" sneered Wesley.

"By —! it shall be so!" cried the other, taking fire at the thought. "I will take her there; and when she is fairly *mine*, I will set them face to face, and show the haughty Ellen another triumph. I hate her—for twice has she made a coward of me—and I would have her see that I have regained the courage of a man, and dare urge her to do her worst. If she attempt to harm me, by —! I'll kill her on the spot, and get off by proving it self−defence— though I would rather avoid so bold a measure, for it would of course make a talk and reach the ears of Edith. But better even that," he added, in the next breath, "than have her go there in person; for I could easily trump up some story

to screen myself, particularly as money can buy all kinds of evidence. Yes, it's settled—I'll do it!" he concluded abruptly.

"Right," rejoined Wesley. "Now I'll tell you how to proceed. You must go back to the place and reconnoiter till I come with a coach, and then I'll manage, with your assistance, to entice the girl into it, and give you farther instructions."

"Good!" said Acton, approvingly. "Be quick, Wesley, and you shall find me on hand;" and the two worthies separated, going opposite directions.

Wesley managed, however, to keep his eye on Acton till he had completely disappeared, and then hastening to the abode of Ellen, he requested to see her on business admitting of no delay. He was kept some time in waiting, but finally gained admission, and was conducted to her apartment. Although a rather advanced hour, Ellen had not yet retired, but was partly reclining on an elegant sofa, guitar in hand, singing a plaintive song, the following words of which sounded mournfully in the ear of Wesley, as, full of astonishment and admiration, both of the apartment and singer, he halted just within the door, gazed around, and listened. SONG. "My hope, alas! is o'er, My sun must set in gloom, And for me, nevermore All refreshing spring shall bloom— For my feet must pass before To the dark and silent tomb. "Shall we meet, mother, dear, When the cord is cut in twain Which doth bind my spirit here, Where no sorrow is nor pain? O say thou wilt be near, And thy child shall live again!

She ceased, and laying aside her instrument, arose and advanced to Wesley, who was still so much amazed at what he saw, as almost to forget his errand. Her pale features, viewed by the soft light of the apartment, he fancied the most beautiful he had ever beheld; and he was already pondering how to address her, when she relieved him by saying:

"Well, sir, I understand you wish to see me on important business!"

"I—I—do," stammered Wesley.

"Say on, then—for it must be important that calls you here at this late hour. If you have much to say, perhaps we had better be seated."

"Not—not much to say," rejoined Wesley, in his blandest tone. "Madam— Miss Ellen, I mean—I hardly know how to begin. I suppose you know Acton Goldfinch?"

Ellen started, her eyes flashed, and her form towered aloft, as she replied, haughtily:

"If you bring a message from him, sir, our conference is ended."

"I bring no message *from* him, Miss Ellen−−but I've come to speak *of* him. He's a villain!"

"How know you that?" rejoined the other, quickly.

"Because I know him well, and have known him long, and because it's of meditated villainy on his part I've come to see you."

"Say on, sir!"

"He's about to bring a lady here, to this house, this night, whom he'll entice away by treachery."

"Indeed, sir! and how know you this?" inquired Ellen, eagerly, changing color and breathing hard.

"Because he told me so himself—or rather, because I overheard him laying the plan."

"Bring her here!—brave me to my face again!" muttered Ellen, striving to keep down her excited passions: "Let him— let him, if he dare!" And then to Wesley: "Well, sir, do you know this female? and who is she? and why come you to me, when you should be doing her a service by warning and defending her as becomes a man?"

"I'll answer your questions as you've asked them," replied Wesley. "This female I know—she's poor, but virtuous— and I come to you, that you may render her a good service and get her honest thanks for it. She'll be enticed away, thinking she's going to another place— but she'll be brought here, and the rest I leave to you. If you want to revenge yourself on a black−hearted villain, now is your chance to do it by protecting her."

"But why do you think I desire revenge? Do you know any thing of my history?"

"If I did'nt," replied Wesley, "I'd never been here on this errand. I know all, Miss Ellen—and I know you've been shamefully abused and wronged, by one who has abused and wronged *me!* (and his eyes gleamed maliciously,) for which I'll be revenged, if it hangs me!"

"And so he has made a boast of my disgrace, has he?" rejoined Ellen, in a low, deep tone, eyeing the other intently.

"Yes, time and again, over his cups; and he laughs at your threats, and drinks toasts to your speedy passage to another world."

For a few moments Ellen stood speechless, gazing upon Wesley with an expression that seemed to freeze his blood, and made him fearful for what he had said. Then she slowly sank upon an ottoman, bowed her face upon her hands, and groaned as one suffering the extreme of bodily pain. Wesley did not venture another remark, till again looking up, with truly haggard features, she broke the gloomy silence, by saying:

"And who is this new victim? You have not yet told me who she is."

"Why she's a poor orphan girl thatcame to this city, some time ago, with her mother and brother, expecting to get money from a rich uncle here. But she and they were disappointed, I believe, and the old woman took on and died about it; and she and her brother, as I understand, have had a rather hard time to get along. Not more than three hours ago, her brother was arrested for forgery—and of the peril she's in, I've already told you."

"Her name?" almost shrieked Ellen, springing up so suddenly that Wesley involuntarily took a step backwards.— "Her name?" she cried again, starting forward and seizing the astonished attorney by the arm, who looked as if he doubted her sanity. "Speak!" she continued, vehemently: "tell me the name of this girl!"

"Why, perhaps I should be−−"

"Nay, her name? her name?" interrupted Ellen, stamping her foot impatiently. "Is it Courtly? Do you speak of Edgar and Virginia Courtly?"

"What! you know them?" rejoined Wesley, all amazement.

"Ha! it is so—it is so!" cried Ellen, almost frantic with passion. "The wretch! the villain! the monster!—and he dares assail her virtue—his own flesh and blood, as it were! Ham like, he should be cursed to all posterity, and die the death of a brute—unwept, unpitied, and unremembered, save with loathing! O, I could tear him in pieces for the thought! Let him but harm a hair of her innocent, unprotected head, and by the Justice Seat of Heaven, I swear to follow and drag him to an early grave, and to endless perdition! His own cousin!—his father's sister's child! O, Heaven! what a wretch!"

"But he don't know she's his cousin," put in Wesley, as the other paused.

"Indeed! are you sure?" cried Ellen, catching at the thought.

"Sure," answered the other.

"And do you think this knowledge would make any difference with him?"

"Think it would."

"I have it, then!" said Ellen, triumphantly. "Let him bring her here, and if he have one iota of a man's soul in his breast, he shall, ere he leave this house, be made to curse himself as the meanest thing that walks the face of the earth. And Edgar dragged to prison!" she continued, looking straight at Wesley: "Oh, there is foul wrong somewhere, which the guilty shall yet tremble for! God help the right, and shield the innocent from hell's own dire inventions! And how soon will Virginia be here?"

"Soon," was the answer.

"Go, then, sir; and if you have aught to do with this dark scheme, help it to succeed. Your part—if, as I fancy, you have one in the game—shall be winked at, for the important information you have given me."

"I've told you before," replied Wesley, "I scek revenge on Acton Goldfinch; and besides, the girl is a sweet creature to look at, she never wronged me, and I'd save her from harm."

"Go, then, and rest satisfied, that once here with his fair cousin, you shall be revenged on Acton, and Virginia shall escape scathless. Go, now—for I have plans of my own to perfect, and would be alone."

"I obey, Miss Ellen," answered the attorney, respectfully; and bowing he departed.

So soon as she was once more by herself, Ellen rang a bell; and to the domestic who answered it, she said, in a commanding tone:

"I would speak with Madame Costellan."

The servant withdrew, and in a few minutes Ellen was joined by the person whose presence she desired—a handsome female, richly dressed, and scarce turned of thirty years. With her, Ellen held a short but eager conference, the nature of which it is needless for us here to disclose.

CHAPTER XVI. THE ABDUCTION.

Hurrying to the nearest coach−stand, Wesley sprang into the first vehicle he came to, and bade the driver urge his horses to Elizabeth street, as if life and death depended on his speed. When the carriage stopped at the place designated, he leaped out in haste, and was immediately joined by Acton, who said, in a low tone:

"Curses on your laziness, Wes! I have been waiting till the marrow of my bones seems froze. Had you delayed five minutes longer, I should have been cosily making love to that pretty seamstress up there, and warming myself by her cheerful fire."

"And you'd have spoiled all by doing so," replied the other; "and my plan wouldn't have been worth repeating."

"I don't know about that. I think the girl would have been perfectly satisfied with such a good looking gallant by her side;" and again he stroked his chin, as was his wont when egotism led him to compliment himself. "But I didn't do it, Wesley, you know; and so for the plan at once—for I am very impatient to be off."

"Well, you must remember and follow my instructions to the letter, or all's up with us. In the first place, you must be very civil to the girl—must not even ask her her name—and only speak when she questions you, and then only to answer her."

"What! and must I not make love, eh?"

"Pshaw! be done with your nonsense. The girl thinks she's going to be taken to a friend's house, a long ways off, which she never saw nor the friends either."

"Good! I like that—it is capital. But what *is* her name, Wes?"

"Hush! You must of course take a long ride before you come to Mott street; and no matter what she asks or asserts, you must pretend you know all about it, and answer to please her."

"Good again—that I can do."

"May be she'll think she knows the place, and that it isn't her friend's house; but you must swear it is, you know, and say the resemblance is great and so on."

"I understand."

"And then, when you've once got her under cover, why you know what to do better than I can tell you."

"Right there, my diamond!"

"Your own name, for the present, is Mr. Wallace, and you're a particular friend of the Mortons."

"What Mortons?" inquired Acton, quickly, in an altered tone.

"O, hang it! any Mortons to suit her."

"Bravo!—ha, ha!—I take."

"And that's all. Now I'll go and bring her down to you, and you can tell the driver where to go."

Saying which, Wesley separated from Acton, and ascending the stairs, knocked at Virginia's door. In a moment it cautiously opened, and the latter, all pale, and tearful, and seemingly heart−broken, stood before him. A sight of her disconsolate appearance, and the remembrance of its being caused by his own villainy, somewhat touched the callous heart of even Nathan Wesley, and he muttered to himself:

"If it wasn't I know no harm 'll come to her—curse me if I'd go on with this affair any farther! As it is, she'll think me a scoundrel, and so will Ellen. But no matter; I've been so considered all my life, and might as well have the game as the blame."

Then addressing her:

"Well, Miss Courtly," he said, "the coach is at the door, and Mr. Wallace waits with it to conduct you to the Mortons, who'll be happy to see you as soon as possible."

"You have seen them, then?" said Virginia, eagerly.

"Have seen them."

"And what said they of my brother?"

"Why, that you needn't give yourself any uneasiness, Miss Courtly—that he'd soon be free."

"Thanks! thanks, sir, for your kindness! Oh, poor Edgar! how much he has to suffer! And then to sleep in a prison!"

"I beg pardon, ma'am," interrupted Wesley, who was fearful of a scene, and impatient to take himself off: "I

beg pardon— but the coach is waiting, and Mr. Wallace bade me ask you would hurry, as it is already late."

"I will be ready in a moment," returned Virginia; and hastily covering the fire, putting on her bonnet and shawl, she blew out the light, locked the door, and accompanied Wesley down stairs.

The coach was standing ready, with the door open; and assisting Virginia into it, Wesley motioned Acton, who stood at a little distance, to approach, when he simply introduced him as Mr. Wallace.— Then seeing him seated by Virginia, he shut the door and sung out to the driver that all was right. Crack went the whip, and away rolled the carriage, to the great satisfaction of the attorney, who, watching it out of sight, shook his fist after it, and muttered:

"You called me an insolent dog to−night did you, Master Acton?—and your father says he'll make his money save him! By my soul! I'm neither a dog nor a fool, as you both shall find out to your cost before many days;" and chuckling inwardly at some schemes of his own, he turned away and directed his steps to Mott street.

Stationing himself nearly opposite the lodgings of Ellen, Wesley rather impatiently awaited the arrival of the vehicle containing the cousins. And sorely was his patience tried; for it was a cold night, and a full hour before the carriage made its appearance. But it came at last, stopped at the right place, and immediately the figure of a man sprang from it and assisted a female to alight. The latter looked around curiously, and then Wesley heard her say:

"Why, is this Calvin Morton's?"

"Calvin Morton's!" exclaimed Acton, in astonishment; and then remembering Wesley's instructions, he quickly added: "Ah—yes—O, I had forgot. Yes, this is the place—this is Morton's.

"Strange!" said Virginia, glancing round and over the way, to the very spot where her poor mother had breathed her last. "It all looks very familiar to me, and I could almost make oath I stand in Mott street."

"Yes," said Acton, hurriedly, and rapping heavily on the door—"there is some resemblance, I own. How tardy servants are," he continued, for the purpose of engaging the other's attention till he could get her within the house. "I am sometimes completely out of patience, waiting their slow motions. Ah, here ls one at last!" he added, as he heard the rattling of bolts and chains; and almost at the same moment the door opened slightly, and a voice from within said:

"Who's there?"

"It is I—Mr. Wallace," answered Acton, loudly; and then in a hurried whisper, too low to reach the ears of Virginia, added: "Acton Goldfinch, with a lady. Open quick, and call me Wallace!"

The door immediately swung open, and Mr. Wallace was politely invited to enter.

"This is the lady of whom I went in quest," he continued, slyly winking at the attendant. "Show us up stairs, and (winking again) send Mrs. Morton to us at once." Then watching his opportunity, he whispered in the attendant's ear: "Conduct us to the Green Room, as we call it, and send your mistress after a little, and tell her my name is Wallace, and hers Morton. I have a beauty to tame, you see. Isn't she pretty?"

The other nodded and smiled.

"And how is Ellen?"

"Not well."

"Curse her! she always was getting sick, and so I've picked up something better. But mum! Not a word to her of this!"

Then joining Virginia, Acton said he had just been giving the servant a few instructions, and forthwith conducted her into a very handsomely furnished apartment, though possessing nothing of the gorgeousness of Ellen's, from which a door opened into a bed−room, of which this was the ante−room or parlor. On the center−table stood a globe lamp, which sent forth a soft, pleasant light, and a cheerful fire was burning in the grate. Placing a couple of chairs before the latter, Acton requested Virginia to remove her bonnet and shawl and be seated. Scarcely had she done so, when the door opened,and the mistress of the house, familiarly known as Madame Costellan, entered. Acton rose and introduced her to Virgina as Mrs. Morton, but did not introduce Virginia to her, for the simple reason he did not know her name himself, owing to the cunning precaution of Wesley, who rightly judged such knowledge would ruin his scheme; for base as Acton Goldfinch was, he had a family pride, and would just as soon have meditated the cutting of his own throat as treating his kinswoman in this scandalous manner.

But circumstances had completely deceived him in this matter. In the first place, his plotting father had never told either of his children that the Courtlys were in the city—in fact, he never at any time mentioned the name of

Courtly in their presence—and hence, neither dreamed of having indigent relations so near. In the nextplace, Acton had seen Virginia for the first time when she was procuring work, as already recorded; and struck with her beauty, and believing her an ordinary seamstress, had made the insulting advances which were checked by Dudley, whom he knew as an honorable young man, and therefore little cared to meet under such humiliating circumstances.— He had apparently departed an entirely different course to the one pursued by Dudley and Virginia, but, notwithstanding, had kept them in view and traced the latter to her own quarters. Returning home, he had related his adventure to Wesley, whom he had long before discovered an adept in the arts of villainy, and offered him fifty dollars if he would find a way to place this girl in his power. Wesley, ever ready to gain money without any scruples as to honesty, soon reconnoitered the premises, and found, much to his surprise and gratification, it was the abode of Edgar and Virginia, for whom he had been searching since their removal from Mott street. This fact he at once made known to the millionaire, but concealed from Acton, well aware that to inform him the girl was his own cousin, would be to lose himself the fifty dollars, besides a little quiet revenge, which he had determined on from the first, in order to wipe out old scores. As chance would have it, and as he partially expected, Wesley was enabled to kill two birds with one stone; for the arrest of Edgar gave him an opportunity to entrap Virginia, in what manner the reader has already seen. At first Wesley had thought of nothing more than to gain his reward and revenge, by getting Acton to abduct his cousin, and leaving him to his own chagrin, mortification and disappointment when he should become aware of the fact, which he doubted not would occur in time to avoid serious consequences. But when Acton again insulted him, he determined to be more deeply revenged, and therefore, guided by circumstances, took the course already described.

Wearing different habiliments—never having scanned his features closely, and her mind, too, being otherwise occupied— Virginia had not as yet recognized in Acton the individual who once insulted her.

Having thus, we trust, explained every thing to the satisfaction of the reader, we will again take up the thread of our story.

On being introduced as Mrs. Morton, Madame Costellan bowed to her guest, eyeing her closely the while, and then advancing, offered her her hand and bade her welcome. But she had a part of her own to play, under the directions of Ellen; and turning to Acton, she whispered a few words in his ear, and both left the apartment together. Scarcely had the door closed behind them, when it again opened quickly, and Ellen Douglas, entering in haste, flew to Virginia, her features very pale and her step nervous with excitement. Surprised, yet pleased to see her where she least expected, Virginia started to her feet, with a smile of recognition, and extending her hand, exclaimed:

"You here, Ellen Douglas?"

"Rather let me say, you *here*, Virginia Courtly!—alas! poor girl! you little dream where!" said the other, hurriedly.

"What mean you?" asked Virginia, alarmed at Ellen's tone and manner.

"That you are in the snares of a villain, who, but for the treachery of a confederate, might soon have had another damning sin added to his long catalogue, already stretched beyond God's mercy."

"You alarm me!—you speak in riddles— I cannot comprehend!"

"Poor girl! you little know you are beneath a roof which covers none but guilty heads."

"And are the Mortons, then, so base?"

"The Mortons!" cried Ellen, in her turn astonished; "what Mortons?"

"Is not this the house of Calvin Morton, to which my brother, who has just been dragged to prison for a crime he never committed, bade me instantly repair?"

"Calvin Morton!" exclaimed Ellen, still more astonished: "Are you then acquainted with him or his family?"

"I am not—but Edgar is. Good heavens! what do you mean, Ellen? Am I not beneath his roof?"

"I would to God you were! No! you are beneath the roof that has long sheltered me—within a stone's throw of where your poor mother died."

"Merciful God!—do you speak truth?— you set my poor brain in a whirl of bewilderment!"

"No wonder, girl, if you fancied yourself secure at Calvin Morton's. You have been deceived, Virginia—wofully deceived— and by the same villain who first deceived me—whom I once loved but now hate— your own cousin—Acton Goldfinch."

"Impossible!" gasped Virginia, too much astonished, alarmed and bewildered to say more.

"All true as holy writ! It was Acton Goldfinch that brought you here—but by what juggler's art I know not. Tell me how it chanced, and I in return will tell you what I know. Be quick, or we may be interrupted before my plans are completed!" and hurriedly Virginia and Ellen related to each other the prominent events of the night.

"You are supposed," said Ellen, in conclusion, "to be a poor, unprotected girl, and are brought here for the worst of purposes— that Acton Goldfinch may triumph over me. But I have him, and he shall sneak from this house like a whipped cur!— or," she added, with a wild, vindictive glare, "he shall hence on a journey that sends no travellers back. Calm your agitation — act as though nothing had occurred to annoy you−−let him draw himself into his own devilish snare. Fear not; all is arranged; no harm shall come to you. He knows you not yet— but he shall, and to his sorrow. I will be near you−−so fear not! Hark! I hear steps. I must conceal myself. Remember! be calm and firm!" and Ellen sprang into the adjoining apartment, leaving Virginia half frightened out of her senses, just as the other door opened and admitted Acton Goldfinch.

"I beg pardon for keeping you so long waiting alone!" he said, blandly, searching in vain on both sides of the lock for the key, which the wise precauton of Ellen had removed. "Curse it!" he muttered to himself, as he closed the door and sprung a bolt, which might prevent ingress if not egress; and then turning to Virginia, he added, with a smile, and in the softest tone he could assume: "Mrs. Morton wished to see me on a little private business−−but I fear my absence has made the time tedious. Ha!" he ejacuulated, for the first time marking the agitation of Virginia, and coming close to her; "what has happened to make you tremble so, and look so pale?"

"I am not well," she answered, shuddering and turning away her head.

"Nay, sweet girl," he said, placing one hand carelessly on her shoulder, "do not turn away from one who loves you."

With the bound of a tiger springing upon its prey, Virginia leaped from her seat, and with heaving bosom and flashing eyes boldly confronted her cousin. As she did so, she for the first time became aware that he who now stood before her was the same who had once insulted her.

"Ha! I know you now," she said, indignantly. "This is not the first time we have met. Go! I would not see your face again. Go! and send my friends to me."

"I am your friend," rejoined Acton; "the best friend you have in the world.— See here," and he proffered her a well filled purse.

Crimson with shame and indignation, Virginia looked him defiantly in the eye for a moment, and then said, with assumed composure, and in a tone peculiar for its determined distinctness:

"Go, sir, ere I call those here who will chastise you for a scoundrel!"

Acton laughed.

"Do not think to intimidate me, my pretty one," he said: "I have tamed many a one as wild as you. Come! let me swear to you I love you."

"And swear falsely, villain!"

"No, on my honor, truly! I love you, and you alone; and it was to tell you my love I brought you here."

"Here!" echoed Virginia, in pretended surprise, carrying out the instructions of Ellen. "Did I not come here at my own request?"

"Not exactly."

"How so? Is not this the house of Calvin Morton?"

"Calvin Morton!" exclaimed Acton, turning pale, and his whole manner changing. "Do you then know Calvin Morton or his family?"

"O, no!" answered Virginia; "but I have understood he is a great lawyer, and my brother wished me to see him."

"O, yes," rejoined Acton, greatly relieved, "he is a great lawyer, and to−morrow I will take you to him, and will go bail for your brother besides—that is," he added, "if you will not treat my love with disdain. I have deceived you in bringing you here, I admit; but then you will recollect it was done for love and forgive me— will you not, my little beauty?"

Virginia replied not; and Acton, fancying he had made some impression, proceeded in a still softer and more musical strain:

"O, if you did but know how ardently I love you—how I have pined for your sweet presence ever since I first beheld you— how I have sworn to prize and adore you above all others—I am sure you would let your beautiful

eyes, in which there is a heaven of blue, look pityingly upon me and bid me hope! Come, dearest, sit thee down, and let me breathe my tale of holy love into, I trust, a not unwilling ear!" and he approached to take her hand.

"Off!" cried Virginia, playing her part; "you do not love me!"

"By heavens, I do! By all things bright and beautiful, on earth or above earth— by all the beaming stars, which are no match for your sparkling eyes—I swear to you I love you, and only you—that I never loved before, and never will again!"

"Then if you love me, you will do what I command."

"Any thing, my angel!—only name it, and it shall be done."

"Stand aside, then, and let me pass, and do not attempt to follow," returned Virginia, resolutely, taking a step or two toward the door, as if to quit the apartment.

"Nay, not that—any thing but that!" cried Acton, springing forward and intercepting her. "You must not leave here so soon."

"What, sir!—dare you stop me? Begone, I tell you, or I will alarm the house!"

"Well, then," answered Acton, with a smile of triumph, "I may as well inform you, that your alarming the house, as you call it, will avail you nothing, since it is well understood here that you and I are lovers. None, I assure you, will interfere, even should you cry your lungs hoarse; so make your calculations accordingly."

"But I will pass!" persisted Virginia.

"Nay, you shall not!" cried Acton, catching hold of her; "and for the attempt, even, I will have a kiss, if I die for it."

Virginia gave a piercing scream, and struggled violently to escape—but in vain.

"Be quiet, do!" said Acton: "I tell you I will have a kiss, and resistance is useless;" and as he struggled to make good his boast, Virginia screamed again.

At this moment a third figure, unseen by Acton, glided swiftly to his side, and the voice of Ellen sounded in his ear.

"Wretch!" she cried; "guilty wretch! what do you with the innocent more?— Have you not damned your soul enough already?"

"Ha!" exclaimed Acton, turning fierceupon the intruder, almost overpowered with surprise and rage: "What do you here, interfering with my affairs?"

"I come to protect the unprotected—to guard the innocent—to right the wronged and curse the guilty! For shame, vile wretch that you are—base miscreant—for shame! Down on your knees and sue for the pardon of her who is your equal in birth, as she is your superior in virtue so much as Heaven is of Hell! Is it not enough that you would wrong and have wronged those who are no akin to you, but you must bring your hellish deeds home upon your own relation−−your father's sister's child?

"What is the meaning of this?" cried Acton, all amazement.

"It means, vile dog! that you have this night enticed away, for a base purpose, your own poor cousin, Virginia Courtly; and that but for a more honest villain than yourself, you might have been guilty of a crime for which slow death on the rack were the only adequate punishment!"

"My cousin!" exclaimed Acton, looking at Virginia. "Impossible! This is some trick to deceive me! I have no cousins in the city—the Courtlys are in Baltimore."

"On my part," returned Virginia, "there is no deceit. As sure as your name is Acton Goldfinch, mine is Virginia Courtly; and as sure as you are the son of Oliver Goldfinch, I am the child of his late sister, and your own cousin by nature, though I shame to own it, and would to Heaven I could sunder the tie of consanguinity."

"Hear you that, most monstrous of monsters?" hissed Ellen in bis ear. "Go! take your worthless body hence!—crawl away like a thrice−beaten cur!—and the next time you attempt to triumph over me, entice your own sister to be your companion, and be sure you have neither confidants nor confederates!"

"By —! there is such a thing as goading me too far, Ellen Douglas; and though I played the coward twice to you— mark me! I will never do it again: so beware, ere you crowd a desperate man too far!"

"You fancy yourself desperate and no coward?" asked Ellen, quickly, with a singular, almost unearthly gleam in her dark eye, which she fixed piercingly upon Acton's.

"I fancy myself both," replied Acton: "so be careful!"

"Now will I prove you," she cried, triumphantly. "Here are two vials, (holding one in each hand) both alike,

and both contain the deadliest of poison. If you are desperate, and not a coward, now is the time to wipe out your disgrace. I dare you to the trial! Drain you one, I will the other;" and she reached both toward him, that he might take his choice.

At first Acton turned pale and took a step back, as if aghast at the idea. The next moment a malicious smile of triumph flashed over his features and sparkled in his eyes; and seizing one of the vials, he threw out the cork suddenly, and crying, "I accept your challenge," placed it to his lips.

Quick as lightning Ellen imitated the movement, and would have drank, but for Virginia, who, with a scream of terror, sprang forward and dashed the poison to the floor.

"Here is the other," said Acton, coolly, reaching his own vial toward Ellen. "I was only trying to see if you were in earnest."

Ere Ellen could reply, there came a heavy rap on the door; and springing for ward she threw it open. To her surprise, a fine, noble−looking gentleman, accompanied by two roughly clad individuals, entered, one of which latter stepping up to the astonished Acton, laid a hand heavily on his shoulder, saying gruffly:

"Acton Goldfinch, I arrest you!"

At the same time the foremost, approaching Virginia, breathed her name in a low, tender voice. She started, looked at him eagerly, blushed, hesitated, and then yielding to a powerful impulse, threw herself forward, and was caught half fainting in the arms, and tenderly strained to the wildly beating heart of—Dudley.

CHAPTER XVII. THE HAPPY DELIVERANCE.

Not more astonished was Virginia at the sudden entrance of Dudley and the officers of police, than was Ellen herself— for these new−comers formed no share in her plot, which only concerned a few inmates of the house, with whom she had so arranged, that, at a given signal, they were to rush in and witness the chagrin, rage and disappointment of Acton; and, in case he meditated violence, prevent him doing injury.

In fact Dudley did not appear by any preconcerted arrangement, but by one of those singular yet common−place accidents, which, happening at an unlooked for and important crisis, seem strange and mysterious, and almost force one into the belief of a special Providence. He had been in the lower part of the city on business, and was on his return home at a rather advanced hour, when the fancy struck him that he wished to see Edgar—we will not say that he did *not* think of Virginia, but leave the reader to his own inference—and he therefore shaped his course accordingly, trusting to good fortune to find the party he sought still astir.

As he came in sight of the house, a coach was standing before the door; and almost at the same moment a female entered it, followed by a gentleman,and then it drove away, leaving a third party behind. Dudley would have thought nothing of this, but that he somehow fancied the female was Virginia Courtly, and that the manner of Wesley—whom he well knew as a sort of attorney of Goldfinch, and whom the light of a lamp under which he now passed enabled him to recognize— had something in it calculated to arrest attention; for he shook his fist after the carriage, and muttered words, the import of which Dudley could only judge from his actions was of a threatening nature. To say the least, there was something very singular in all this, time and place considered; and perceiving a man standing in the door of the lower story, Dudley hastened to him, and inquired if he knew the persons who had just driven off in the carriage. The man replied that the lady was a tenant of his, whose brother had just been arrested for forgery and taken to the Tombs; but that the gentleman who accompanied her was one he had never before seen.

As a matter of course, the intelligence of Edgar's arrest for so startling a crime as forgery, fell upon Dudley with stunning force, and for a few moments he stood as one bewildered. Then bethinking himself of Wesley, who he fancied must know all about it, he darted away to overtake him, leaving his informant to stare after him and wonder whether or no he was in his right senses. Turning the corner where he had last seen Wesley disappear, Dudley hastened on for a square or so, when he again came in sight of him, moving along at a very leisure pace. As he drew near, and was in fact about to accost him, he discovered that the attorney was in one of those deep reveries, when the mind, turned upon itself, takes no cognizance of outward things, and was muttering, but loud enough for Dudley to overhear:

"Yes, by heavens! I'll do it; and then he may make his money save him if he can. I've had this matter on my conscience long enough; and after I've forced him to buy my silence, I'll to —" Here the words became indistinct, though the speaker grumbled to himself for some time afterwards. At length Dudley heard him say, as if in conclusion: "But first to see this madcap fairly caught in his own trap."

The effect of this on Dudley was to alter his first determination, and, without letting himself be seen, keep the attorney in sight, rightly judging from his words and manner there was some dark scheme afoot, a knowledge of which he might never gain by showing himself too soon. Accordingly when Wesley stoped in Mott street, before the house where Ellen resided, Dudley screened himself, so that he could, unseen by the other, not only watch all his his motions, but note every thing taking place around him.

Here his patience was much tried by long waiting, and he was just on the point of throwing up his office of spy and accosting the attorney as to the meaning of his singular manoeuvers, when the carriage, containing Acton and Virginia, halted nearly abreast of him, and he heard the dialogue between them as they entered the house. There was no longer doubt in his mind as to who they were—for well he knew them both—and remembering their first meeting, when he had interfered to save Virginia from insult, he felt almost certain the latter was now the victim of some damnable plot. His first impulse was to spring forward to her rescue, but prudence counselled the wiser course of being positive he was not mistaken in the matter, and then going armed with the strong majesty of the law. He therefore turned on his heel, and the next instant stood confronting the astonished Wesley, who would scarcely have been more surprised had a specter arose in his place. Seizing the attorney with a grip that both

pained and startled him, he said, in a low, eager, emphatic tone, pointing with his other hand toward the house opposite:

"Who are those I have just seen enter?"

"How should I know?" replied Wesley, trembling.

"Villain! you do know!" rejoined Dudley, firmly, but still in a low, deep tone; "and if you do not tell me on the instant, I will have you arrested by the night−watch and dragged to prison!"

"By what authority?" asked Wesley, attempting to assume an easy assurance he was far from feeling.

"By the authority of that law, sir, which punishes most severely a foul conspiracy like this. Nay, do not seek to evade me by inventing falsehood. It will not pass. I have long been watching you, and know enough already to put you in limbo. Speak quick, make a clean breast of it, and you may go—otherwise I will give you into custody."

Thus menaced, fearful of the consequences if he remained obdurate, anxious to escape and at the same time deepen his revenge on Acton, the trembling attorney only stipulated that he should not be called in question, and then in a few words hurriedly put Dudley in possession of the whole scheme of his confederate, his designs upon Virginia, and the part he had himself played to prevent the accomplishment of his fell purpose. So eagerly spoke both, that the time consumed was scarce five minutes, ere Dudley had gained all be then cared to know; and bidding Wesley go home, as he valued his own safety, he turned away to seek means for punishing the offender, and rescuing one who had, for some time, occupied no small share of his thoughts.

As chance would have it, the coach was still in waiting, and the driver, who had delayed departure on some business of his own, was just in the act of mounting his box. Hailing him, Dudley bade him remain a few minutes; and then hurrying away, he summoned a couple of the watch, informed them what had transpired, and requested their assistance—which being readily granted, he, in their company, appeared upon the scene of action at what time and in what manner the reader has already seen.

Thither let us again repair.

Overcome with astonishment, fear and rage, it was not until Virginia, half−fainting, had been placed on a seat by Dudley, and the room been tolerably well filled with the inmates of the house, drawn hither by alarm and curiosity, that Acton found sufficient command over his voice to render his words intelligible.

"Villian!" he cried at last, addressing himself to Dudley; "this is the second time you have crossed my path, and, by—! you shall rue it!"

"Keep your threats for those who fear you," retorted Dudley in a calm tone; "and beware what villainies you attempt in future, or it will not be the last time you will find me a stumbling block in your guilty course."

"O, that I were free!" shouted Acton, making as if he would spring upon Dudley, were he not restrained by the officers.

"If so you like, gentlemen," returned Dudley, addressing the latter, "set him free; and if he want justice and chastisement at my hands, he shall have both, to his full satisfaction—I only protesting, that if I am forced to soil my fingers on so mean a coward as one who has sought by the basest arts to degrade a lady to his own level—that lady his lawful cousin—I do it merely to show him he now stands in the presence of his master and superior."

Saying which, Dudley folded his arms on his breast, and fixing his eyes steadily upon Acton's, gave him such a look of cool, calm, resolute defiance, that the gaze of the latter quailed before it and fell.

"No, no, gentlemen—we can't have any quarreling here!" now spoke up one of the watch.

"Have no fear," replied Dudley, sarcastically; "the youth is perfectly harmless among his own sex;" and he turned away to speak with Virginia.

"By my soul, you shall eat your words some day!" replied Acton, fiercely, whose courage, like that of many others, always rose as the danger diminished.

"Look at him!" cried Ellen, tauntingly, pointing at Acton with her finger, and addressing those around her. "Is he not a brave youth and proper, to steal away his own cousin by treachery, for his own foul ends? Look at him—mark him— that is Acton Goldfinch—son of the great millionaire, Oliver Goldfinch—who is, I have learned, the first in his profession of a hypocritical villain. By my faith! he has a hopeful pupil in his own son;" and she concluded with a hysterical laugh, that thrilled the nerves of all who heard it.

Even Acton himself, who was gnashing his teeth in rage at her taunts, suddenly changed countenance when he heard that laugh, and glanced toward her a startled expression, in which something like pity could be traced. As he did so, he saw her stagger, and fall, and heard the females around her cry that Ellen Douglas had fainted.

Mortified, abashed, ashamed of himself, Acton now quitted the room in company with the officers; and as he did so, he saw Ellen borne behind him to her own apartment, in a state of unconsciousness.

As slowly he threaded his way to the gloomy Tombs—reflecting upon his past career, his disolute course and deeds of villainy—the pale specter of Ellen Douglas seemed to rise up before him,with a wobegone visage, and point to him as the author of her misery—her sad voice, in humble entreaty, seemed sounding in his ear—and for the first time in his life, perhaps, Acton felt the bitter stings of a conscience touched with remorse.

"Are you able to ride, Virginia?" asked Dudley, in a low, tender voice, as soon as the room had become partially vacated. "If so, we will at once away, for this is no place for such as you."

"But whither shall I go?" interrogated Virginia, bursting into tears. "I have no home now; and my poor brother, God help him! is in prison."

"Nay, do not weep, Virginia—I pray you, do not!" pleaded Dudley, in soothing tones. "Your brother shall soon be restored to you—for he has friends more powerful than he thinks—and like you, I believe him innocent. He is doubtless the victim of some foul conspiracy; and rest assured he shall yet triumph, while his enemies plunge into the pit they have dug for him. I have my suspicions of the author of this black scheme; and if I find them verified, he shall wish he had never been born. But come! if you feel able to ride, we will no longer tarry here."

"But whither will you take me?"

"To the widow Malcolm's, or Calvin Morton's, whichever you prefer; and I, being acquainted with both parties, will insure you a warm reception at either place."

"To the latter, then," said Virginia, "if it will not incommode them and you too much—for thither dear Edgar bade me repair."

"Speak not of incommoding, Virginia," said Dudley, earnestly, while a warm, enthusiastic glow overspread his features, "for I would go to the ends of the earth to serve you!"

"I thank you!" faltered Virginia, blushing and giving the other one sweet look from her soft blue eyes, that thrilled his soul as never look had done before. And then she added quickly, as if to cover a rising embarrassment: "But I must see Ellen before I go, and thank her for her kindness in protecting me!"

In this Virginia was disappointed; for on inquiry, she learned that Ellen, having partially recovered from her swoon, was now delirious, and would not recognize her.

"Poor child of grief and misfortune!" sighed Virginia, as she turned away, and, accompanied by Dudley, quitted the house.

The coach which had borne her hither was still standing at the door, and entering it again, but with a very different companion, Virginia rode away, with a heart much lightened by a strong feeling of protection and hope, the first she had experienced since Edgar's arrest.

On their way to the Mortons, Dudley and Virginia conversed freely−−he detailing the manner he had been brought to her rescue— and she, all she knew of the imposition which had caused her to need his assistance.

"That rascally attorney had more to do with this affair than I thought," said Dudley, as Virginia explained the stratagem he had used to entice her away; "but he only serves a master whom I may yet make tremble for his black−hearted deeds. The very fact of his being there at the time of arrest, shows plainly that Oliver Goldfinch is the master−worker of the plot, doubtless contrived to ruin you and Edgar, so that none may be left to bring his former villainies to light. But he has over−shot himself in this matter; and will find, to his cost, that he has roused a spirit that can and will be as bold in the cause of right as he dare be in that of wrong!"

It was past midnight when the coach drove up before the door of Calvin Morton. Save a light in the hall, all appeared dark and gloomy; and Dudley, as he boldly rang the bell, doubted not that all the inmates were locked in slumber. But in this he was mistaken; for scarcely had the echoes of the bell died away, ere he heard quick footsteps along the hall, and the next moment the door was thrown open, and Calvin Morton himself, with a book in his hand and a pen in his mouth, stood before him.

"Why, bless my soul! is this you?" he said, in his rapid, impetuous manner.— "Come in—come in! Heaven save us all! I trust nothing alarming has occurred? Your mother is well, eh?"

"Quite well, I thank you, Mr. Morton," replied Dudley, glancing at the coach significantly.

"Eh! what!" said Morton, following the other's glance with his own. "Who is in there, eh?"

"One who needs your kindest protection, as she amply deserves it."

"God bless her, then, she shall have it!" rejoined Morton, emphatically.

"A word in private first," said Dudley; and drawing the other aside, out of earshot of Virginia, he hurriedly narrated the leading events of the night, beginning with Edgar's arrest, and ending with his own rescue of Virginia from her cousin.

"So, so−−the foul fiend seize them that play the devil's game, say I! The old one plans, and the young one executes. A hopeful pair, truly. Heaven help and God bless him! poor Edgar has been sent to prison! Well, well, it shall work out his own salvation; for when the devil prompts too much, you know his pupils often lose most where most they think to win. I am glad to see you on the right side, Cla—−"

"Hush! a word in your ear!" interrupted the other.

"O, yes−−certainly, Mr. Dudley—any thing to oblige. I see you are sly; but no matter; we all have our whimsicalities. Why, bless my soul! here I am rattling away, and yonder sits the maiden, waiting as patiently as a bird in a cage;" and he darted down the steps to the carriage, exclaiming, as he reached out his hand to Virginia:

"My dear Miss Courtly, I don't know that we ever met before−−but I knew your lamented father, and a gentlemen he was— I know your brother, and a most noble young man he is−−I have heard of you; and so pardon me, if I eschew all formality, consider ourselves acquainted, and welcome you here as I would a long absent daughter."

"I can but thank you," replied Virginia, her eyes moist and voice faltering, at the frank and hearty kindness with which the other received her.

"Why, Heaven bless you, sweet creature!" pursued Morton, as he assisted her to alight and conducted her up the steps of his dwelling, "what more could one ask than thanks from such pretty lips, unless it were a taste of their sweetness!— But pshaw! compliments are not in my line; and so I'll leave them and you to my friend Ma—Dudley here, while I go and call Edith."

"Stay!" said Virginia, earnestly, touching his arm as he was moving away; "do not, I beg of you, disturb any one tonight, on my account! I fear I have proved too troublesome already."

Why, Lord bless your modest soul!" replied Morton, with warmth, smiling cheerfully upon his guest, "I see you don't know us yet, or you wouldn't talk of being troublesome to those who are indebted to your noble brother that this house is not decked in the sable weeds of mourning. Why, Edith has done nothing but talk about you all day, and would grieve herself sorely, should I let you sleep here without her knowledge. Conduct her into the parior—a−−Dudley—you know the way−−and I will soon join you."

Saying which, Mr. Morton hastened forward, threw open the parlor door as he passed, and disappeared up a flight of stairs at the far end of the hall. Scarcely had Dudley complied with his request, and seated his fair charge and himself, ere the other again made his appearance, saying Edith would soon be with them.

"And now," he concluded, "as I have important business that must be attended to before I sleep, I trust to your good sense to excuse me. Good night, Virginia," he added, taking her hand and pressing it warmly; "I shall see you, I trust, at breakfast, and will immediately take what steps I can to release your brother, who, I doubt not, is in prison by means of a foul plot. Dudley, let me see you early, to concert our plan of operations. Good night again—God guard us all!" and bowing he withdrew.

In a few minutes Edith glided into the parlor, with a step so light that neither of her guests heard her till she stood before them. With a graceful bow and smile of recognition to Dudley, she at once sprang to Virginia, and seizing her hand, kissed her affectionately, and bade her welcome to her new home, which she trusted would always be one to her. In return, Virginia thanked her warmly, with tearful eyes; and in a moment, as it were, these two artless beings felt they were friends for life.

"No one—not even yourself, dear Virginia," said Edith, *naively* , "can feel more deeply grieved for your noble brother than I; but father says the charge against him is false, and I believe him; for surely, if ever a man was incapable of crime, it is he."

Virginia, unable to repress her emotion longer, burst into tears; while Edith, with true affection, hastened to console her.

"Grieve not, my dear sister," she said,— "for you shall be a sister to me,—to−morrow, trust me, will set all right. "And Acton, too—I have heard of his baseness, and have torn him from my heart as I would a viper from my bosom. Oh, the wickedness of those to whom we look for ennobling virtues!—but they will not always prosper; and Retribution, with a heavy hand, will surely overtake them at last. Let us put our trust in a Higher Power, and with an easy conscience, fear not the machinations of the evil minded. Sin ever carries its own

punishment, and sooner or later the guilty must feel it."

"Nobly spoken!" chimed in Dudley, rising to take his leave; and then, motion ing Edith aside, he whispered a few words in her ear. Edith smiled, glanced slyly toward Virginia, and rejoined:

"I will remember, Mr. Dudley."

"Do so," said Dudley, "and put me under an obligation. Cheer up your fair guest, Edith, and count on seeing me early in the morning. Good night to both, and pleasant dreams;" and bowing he departed, sprang into the coach and was driven home.

"You are fatigued, dear Virginia," said Edith, as Dudley left, "and need repose. Come, you shall be my guest for the night;" and she conducted the latter to her own splendid apartment, where for the present we leave them both.

CHAPTER XVIII. DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

In the elegant mansion of Oliver Goldfinch, on the third story, separated alike from the members of the family and the servants or domestics of the house, Nathan Wesley had his own sleeping−apartment. It was a small room, plainly but neatly furnished, containing a bed, wardrobe, secretary, and a few books, scattered many of them carelessly about, and such other articles as the attorney fancied both convenient and useful. Here, at an early hour on the morning ensuing the night of events just detailed, the lordly millionaire, with his toilet half made, was pacing to and fro with rapid steps, his features expressive of vindictive passions excited to a pitch little short of frenzy, on whom Wesley, just startled from a sound sleep, and partly risen in bed, still rubbing his heavy eyelids, was staring with a sort of drowsy wonder, that had in much of the ludicrous.

"Up, sluggard!" shouted Goldfinch, looking fiercely at the other, and seeming by his manner undetermined whether or no to use violent measures to bring him speedily to his senses. "Up, villain! and give an account of your last night's treachery! Where is Acton, my ?"

"How should I know?" replied the attorney, in some trepidation.

"How should you know?" repeated Goldfinch, sneeringly; "because the devil should know what becomes of his victims!"

"Then *you* ought to know, without asking me," was the impudent reply.

"Villain!" cried Goldfinch, completely beside himself with passion, springing forward and seizing Wesley by the throat: "bridle thy saucy tongue and give straight answers, or I'll tear it from thy foul mouth to feed my dogs on! Where is Acton, I say?"

"I don't know," replied the other, sullenly, as Goldfinch released his hold.

"Liar! you do know! Where did you leave him?"

"I didn't leave him at all. He left me, to run off with a woman."

"And you enticed him into the scheme."

"No I didn't" contradicted Wesley, bluntly. "He enticed me to assist him."

"And then you betrayed him."

"But he insulted me first," muttered the attorney.

"Wretch! I have a mind to strangle you for your treachery! As if he could insult you—mean worthless dog that you are—almost unfit to do his menial services! And what think you came of your baseness?"

"I don't know," answered the other, doggedly.

"No, nor you don't care," rejoined Goldfinch.

"Nor don't care," grumbled the attorney, too low to reach the other's ears.

"Well, I will tell you what became of him, base ingrate!" pursued Goldfinch, vehemently. "He spent the night in prison! In prison, do you hear? Think of that, sir! Acton Goldfinch, my son, in prison, in company with common thieves and vagabonds, and all through your infernal villainy!"

"Where I'll put the father soon," muttered Wesley to himself, with a devilish grin of triumph lurking around the corners of his mouth.

"Cease your grinning!" shouted Goldfinch, his features distorted with frantic rage, as he glared ferociously upon Wes ley, who, springing up in bed and hurrying on his garments, withdrew to the farther side, as if in fear the other would do him violence. "Cease, I tell you!" pursued Goldfinch, advancing toward him, "or, by —! I'll make it the grin of death.— My son in prison, through the machinations and treachery of you, whom I picked up in the streets of Baltimore, little better than a beggar, and raised to the exalted position of attorney and confidant: think of that, villain! Not half an hour since, I received a message from Acton, accusing you, and praying me to, come to his relief! I came up here to chastise you, and if I do not, ere I leave, you may thank your lucky stars! Acton in prison—my family disgraced—what will the world say?"

"Say that he deserves it," replied Wesley, who, though afraid of the other, could not restrain a malicious propensity to irritate him still farther.

Goldfinch made no direct reply, but clenching his hand, he came close to the bed and raised it as if to strike.

"Stop!" cried Wesley, fixing upon him a demoniacal look of defiance, that, enraged as he was, made him

hesitate.— "Stop!" he repeated, placing one hand in his pocket, as if to draw a concealed weapon. "You've laid hands on me once already: do so again, and by the blood of the murdered! I'll send your spirit after his!"

"Well," rejoined Goldfinch, lowering his fist and turning very pale, evidently fearful the other would keep his oath should he attempt violence, and, at the same time, desirous to impress Wesley with the belief he had only changed his design for one still more severe: "now since you have mentioned that, mark me! If Acton comes to harm, through this baseness of yours, I'll have you hung, if it sinks my fortune to do it!"

"Will you?" grinned Wesley. "Now mark me, Oliver Goldfinch, and don't forget one word I say! You've been talking largely of what you'll do, and what you've done, and now I want you to listen to me! You say you picked me up in the streets of Baltimore, little better than a beggar, But you're very foolish; for if you kill me, of course it will be proved on you, and you'll have to swing for it. Better give the twenty thousand and save yourself."

"Never!" exclaimed the millionaire, stamping his foot violently. "I will not be so imposed on! Down on your knees, villain! and swear, by all you hold sacred, to keep my secret—or, be the consequeces what they may, you shall never quit this apartment alive!"

As he said this, Goldfinch made a bound forward to seize the attorney, but the next moment recoiled in dismay, as the click of a pistol sounded ominously in his ear.

"Turn about is fair play," cried Wesley, following up the hasty retreat of the other with a pistol leveled at his head. "Open that door now, and give me free exit, or, by —! you're a dead man before you can say your prayers!"

"I yield," returned Goldfinch, biting his nether lip till the blood sprang through; and he unlocked and threw open the door.

"How about the money?" querried Wesley, carelessly playing with the weapon, to the endangerment of the other's safety. "Are we to part as friends, or how?"

"If we part in life, Heaven send we part not as foes!" answered Goldfinch.— "We have both been too hasty. Come down and you shall have a check for all you ask; and then we must see what can be done with Acton and young Courtly."

"Well, since you've got reasonable," said the other, impudently, his late success having greatly exalted him in his own estimation," I will honor you with my company."

"You are very condescending," rejoined Goldfinch; and the two descended to the library—a large square room, on the second story, well stored with books of every description.

Pointing Wesley to a seat, Goldfinch opened his secretary, wrote a few lines, and handed the other the paper.

"This it all right," said Wesley, glancing over it—"with the exception of one thing," he added, returning it.

"What is that?" asked the other.

"I want you to give it to me before witnesses. No Edgar Courtly games, you know."

The sudden but marked change in the countenance of the millionaire, showed he he had something of the latter kind in his thoughts, but he said quickly:

"Certainly, certainly—you shall be satisfied;" and he rang for the servant, who, so soon as he appeared, he bade hasten all the other servants and his daughter, if she had risen, to the library.

All appeared save Arabella; and in their presence, Goldfinch placed the check in Wesley's hand, saying it was a gift from him to the other of twenty thousand dollars, and he desired all to bear witness thereof. He then dismissed them, and turned to Wesley. "Now," he said, "you are bound to me. I have fulfilled my part of the agreement, and claim your services hereafter on all difficult points. In the first place, what is to be done with this young Courtly?"

"Let him go," replied Wesley.

"How, sir!—after all our trouble to get him there?"

"Can't help it; but you see, in the first place, it will be very hard to prove the forgery, which can only be done by false witnesses, even if he had no friends— but next to impossible now, since he's got, by some sorcery or other, that I can't understand, two of the most powerful ones I know of."

"Who are they?"

"Calvin Morton and Clarence Malcolm."

"Indeed! is it so?" cried Goldfinch, with a start. "So, so—then we must not appear against him—for even Satan himself could not outwit this Morton. And besides, being thrown off my guard last night, like a fool, I fairly betrayed myself, by telling Malcolm I had given Edgar a check for a thousand dollars; and since he is so much

interested, of course he would come forward as a witness. At first I thought, with your help, we might outswear Clarence—but if Morton has taken hold of the matter, we might as well let it drop as it is. But, Wesley, (and the scheming man glanced warily around and spoke low,) could not you contrive some plan to rid us of him, as you did of —"

"Hist!" interrupted Wesley, starting up and looking fearfully around. "Never mention his name again to me!—never, never!—I've had enough of him already."

"Well, well, let him go. You understand what I mean!"

"I understand."

"And is there not some way, think you?"

"Well, I'll consider on it."

"Do so, my good Wesley. Only hit upon some plan to rid us of him, and I will double the amount already given."

"But why do you want him out of the way?"

"Why? Because I both fear and hate him. He has dared to threaten me to my face—and no man shall do that without feeling my revenge."

"Well, as I said before, I must consider on it. I'll see what can be done," he continued, giving the other a very peculiar look, "and then you shall hear from me."

"That is right," rejoined Goldfinch, grasping the attorney by the hand. "Let us be friends henceforth, and that little affair of this morning be forgotten. Remember— another twenty thousand. And as for Acton—why hasten at once to Malcolm, make my most humble apologies for what happened last night, plead youthful indiscression for my son, say he is sorry for it, that it was in a great measure your own fault, beg him to be lenient, and, in short, get his promise not to appear against him. That done, he is safe; for the other witnesses, if there are any, can be easily bought off. Now hasten, good Wesley, and return soon and let me know the result; and besides, think over in the meantime what can be done with this Courtly. Our cards have been rather unskillfully played of late, and this cursed nephew is deep at work undermining my stainless reputation, so that we must move cautiously in the matter. If we can only get him silenced—trust me, the sun shall again brightly beam through the clouds that are lowering upon us. Do your part, good Wesley, and leave the rest to me. Now away and report me soon;" and bowing, with a glance of triumph on his countenance, which Goldfinch fancied augured success to his own cause, the attorney quitted the apartment.

"Now diamond cut diamond," pursued Goldfinch, in an exulting tone, as soon as Wesley was out of sight. "Now then, I have them both! Wesley shall make way with Edgar, like a short sighted fool that he is, and then good Nathan Wesley shall swing for his pains, while I will laugh in the triumph of security that I am master of my own secret."

"Will you?" grinned Wesley to himself, who, instead of instantly departing, had lingered by the door with his ear to the key hole. "Will you?—ha, ha!—and you will make your money save you! O yes, most certainly;" and shaking his check with an air of defiance, and chuckling at his own thoughts, he glided silently down stairs, and the next moment was in the street.

CHAPTER XIX. THE EXAMINATION.

About half an hour later in the morning, Calvin Morton was pacing the floor of his library with a hasty step and an anxious countenance, the latter expressive of fear mingled with hope, doubt weighed against faith.

"Pshaw!" he said to himself, "it isn't possible! I could not be so deceived; and yet if it should prove true—But no! no! I will not so wrong him. I would he were come, that I might know the result of his interview. Ha! perhaps that is he!" he added, as at the moment he heard a coach drive up to the door.

The lawyer was not long kept in suspense; for almost the next moment he heard rapid steps along the hall, and then the door was flung suddenly open and Dudley entered.

"Well, you have seen him?" said Morton, quickly.

"I have."

"And how fares he?"

− Page 99.]

"As well as could be expected under the trying circumstances. He was delighted to see me, and I thought would never cease shaking my hand and expressing his boundless gratitude."

"You delivered my message?"

"I did."

"Well?"

"And he vowed, by all he held sacred, that a child unborn was not more free from such a crime, even in thought, than he."

"I knew it—I knew it!" almost shouted Morton, fairly dancing around the room in an ecstacy of delight. "God be thanked! I knew he was innocent! And what does he think of it?"

"That it is a base plot of his uncle to crush him. The check for a thousand dollars—"

"Yes, yes, I know all about that."

"He found yesterday, after he saw you, and had it cashed."

"Ha! yes—now I see—and his uncle arrests him for forging it?"

"So he thinks."

"But can he prove Goldfinch gave it to him?"

"Yes, I will swear to that."

"Then we are safe; and the old scoundrel shall find, ere long, it is imprudent to play carelessly with edge tools. Well, what about Acton?"

"I thought Edgar would go demented, when I explained the infernal plot against his sister, and how I had succeeded in arresting his cousin in the very act of his villainy. He declares I must appear against him, with what other evidence I can find, and that he must be pushed to the extreme of the law. I replied I would consult with you, but that I was fearful it was one of those aggravated cases which the law will not reach. There can be nothing proved save deception—for Virginia herself admits she went willingly, under the supposition she was being taken here— and I know of no law that will reach such a case. What think you, Mr. Morton?"

The lawyer mused seriously a moment, and then replied:

"For a case of deception, such as you represent, the law has no penalty; but methinks this may be taken on another ground. Remain a moment—I must first question Virginia."

Here Morton absented himself about ten minutes, and then returning, said:

"We have him now, if we prefer the charge of false imprisonment—for he locked the door on Virginia, and by force detained her against her will. This can be proved by Ellen Douglas, who was in an adjoining apartment and witnessed all. In an aggravated form like the present one, this is a serious offence, and he will do well to escape imprisonment."

"Which Heaven grant he may not do!" rejoined Dudley; "for if all I hear of him is true, it is time his infamous career received a check sufficient to startle him into a long needed reformation. But as I am to appear against him, I suppose it is high time I was there."

"True; the Recorder holds his court early; and should his turn come, and there be no witnesses present, he will

be discharged."

"Then I will go at once. But as regards Virginia?"

"Why, she must along with you.— Stay! I will inform her at once, and Edith shall be her companion. You will remain to Edgar's examination also, at which I will endeavor to be present myself;" and the lawyer hastened out of his library.

In less than five minutes he returned, accompanied by Virginia and his daughter, both bonnetted and shawled for instant departure. Dudley greeted each warmly, and immediately conducted them to a splendid barouche standing at the door, attached to which was a noble span of black horses, and, holding the reins, a black driver in livery.

Assisting the ladies into the vehicle, Dudley was in the act of following, when he heard his name pronounced in a low tone; and looking round, to his surprise and indignation, he beheld Nathan Wesley.

"I've been seeking you some time," said the latter, "and would like a few minutes' conversation."

"Another time, then," replied Dudley; and springing into the carriage, he gave some directions to the driver, who, cracking his whip, drove off in haste.

Wesley gazed after him for some moments, with a crest−fallen countenance; then muttering something in a low tone, he ascended the steps and rang the bell. Inquiring for Mr. Morton, he was shown into the library, where he remained in eager conference with the lawyer for more than half an hour, when both came forth together, and the latter, ordering his carriage, rode swiftly away, while the other sauntered off leisurely in a mood of deep abstraction.

Meantime Dudley and his companions reached the police−court, just as Acton was being brought forward for examination. His features were very pale and somewhat haggard, as though he had experienced a restless night of mental torture. As Dudley entered the court−room, in advance of Virginia and Edith, Acton gave him a look of hate and malicious defiance; but perceiving the next moment who followed, his features crimsoned to his forehead, his countenance fell, and he finally hung his head in very shame. And well he might! to behold his own cousin, whom he had so shamefully abused, in company with her to whom he had paid his devoirs, before whom he would have appeared the most honorable of his sex, and to whose hand he had already boasted of having a claim, much to the annoyance of at least a score of discomfited suitors. It was a punishment far beyond that of any prison, to be so exposed at such a time; and could he have had his wish at that moment, the stone walls of the mighty fabric beneath which he stood would have crumbled to pieces and buried him under their ruins.

"Well, sir! what is your name?" said the sharp, clear, stern voice of the Recorder.

"Acton Goldfinch."

"Your occupation, sir?"

"A gentleman at large," replied Acton, somewhat pompously, thinking such a course would best cover the disgrace he felt in being so arraigned and questioned.

"Umph! hardly at large now," rejoined the other, dryly. "Well, sir, what brought you here?"

"My legs."

"Ha! sir, you are impudent! Have a care, young man, or I will commit you for contempt of court. Has any one present a charge to prefer against Acton Goldfinch?" he asked, looking around.

"So please your Honor, I have," answered Dudley, stepping forward.

"Well, sir, your name, residence and occupation?"

Dudley drew close to the Bench, and gave satisfactory replies, in a low tone. He was then sworn and told to proceed with his accusation; which he did—stating clearly and concisely under what circumstances he had found the prisoner. Virginia being next called upon and put under oath, told her own story briefly, confirming the words of Dudley. The Recorder mused a moment, and then said:

"As the lady went willingly, I do not think I can find this a criminal offence, although one worthy of the severest censure."

"So please your Honor," returned Dudley, "I do hereby accuse Acton Goldfinch of detaining Virginia Courtly against her will."

"Ha!" rejoined the magistrate, "is this so? Were you so detained, Miss Courtly?"

"I was."

"This alters the case materially. Have you any proof of this?"

"One Ellen Douglas was a witness to it."

"Let Ellen Douglas come forward."

"I beg leave to say, your Honor," spoke up Dudley again, "she is too ill to attend court. I have seen her this morning, and she is unable to quit her apartment. But if your Honor like, her deposition can be taken."

"It is scarcely necessary at this examination, unless the prisoner desire it. Let the officers who arrested Acton Goldfinch stand forward and state what they know of this affair."

The watchmen appeared, and being sworn, gave in their evidence, which, so far as it went, corroborated what had gone before. The Recorder mused again a short time, and then said, addressing Acton:

"Mr. Goldfinch, as the matter stands, I shall be under the necessity of binding you over to the next term of the Court of Sessions. You will give bail in the sum of one thousand dollars, or be remanded to prison."

At this moment the father of the accused came rushing into the court−room, much excited; and glancing from one to another, with an expression of mortification and dismay, mingled with a look of defiance as his eye fell upon Dudley, he exclaimed, in a hasty, pompous tone:

"What is this?—what is this?"

"Silence, sir!" cried the Recorder, frowning. "Is there any one present who will go bail for Acton Goldfinch?"

"I will," said his father; and inquiring the amount, he proceeded to give bonds for his son's appearance at the proper time and place.

Acton was now at liberty; and bestowing a glance of hate upon Dudley, who returned his look with perfect composure, he hurried from the court−room without speaking a word.

"This is your doing, sirrah!" said Goldfinch, coming close to Dudley, and fairly hissing the words in his ear. "Do not flatter yourself I will easily forget it."

"Rather say your own doing, in teaching your son so little the character of a gentleman," replied Dudley, calmly, but haughtily. "As to your forgetting or remembering, both are alike immaterial to me;" and turning his back on the other, he coolly walked away.

Goldfinch glared after him with a look in which all his worst passions seemed blended. Then turning, his eye fell upon Edith, and his whole manner and appearance changed, from that of a fiend incarnate, to an humble, obsequious, affable, smiling gentleman.

"How fares my fair Edith this morning?" he said, bowing politely, and speaking in his blandest tones: "and how is her good father?"

"We are usually well, I thank you," Edith answered, somewhat coldly.

"This is a very painful affair to a fond father's feelings," he pursued, in a low tone—"this youthful folly and indiscretion of Acton. I grieve sorely that my son should be tempted to such imprudence, by one in whom I had placed the utmost confidence. You must bear in mind, my dear Edith, that it was not a scheme of his own planning, and that he was drawn into it by the machinations of another. But it has taught him a painful lesson, which he will never forget. He already regrets it as much as myself; and you may rest assured, on the word of a father, he will never be guilty of the like again."

"I trust not," rejoined Edith.

"It rejoices me, sweet Edith, to see you take sufficient interest in him to be present at his examination. There," he added, as, coloring deeply, she was about to reply: "There, there—I see—no excuse: I will spare your blushes. But who is this pretty companion of yours?" and he glanced towards Virginia, who, on his addressing Edith in a low tone, had modestly withdrawn out of ear−shot, and now stood regarding him, with heightened color, and an expression in which maidenly timidity, sadness and curiosity were strangely mingled. "I have rarely seen a more lovely countenance."

"Or a sweeter owner," rejoined Edith. "Shall I introduce you?"

"O, with pleasure, Miss Edith."

There was a smile of triumph on the features of the latter, as she advanced to her companion, and, taking her by the hand, said:

"Miss Virginia Courtly, allow me to present you to your uncle, Mr. Oliver Goldfinch, the father of Acton, who had the kindness, no later than last night, to steal you away by treacherous arts, and basely misuse your confidence."

Had an earthquake at that moment shook the Tombs to ruins, it would have added nothing to the astonishment

and dismay of Oliver Goldfinch. As Edith began to speak, he was just in the act of bending forward, with a smile on his hypocritical features, and his hand partly extended to greet his new acquaintance; but as her first words caught his ear, he started back, his whole countenance changed, became as pale as death, and then as quickly flushed with bewildered confusion. For a moment he stood regarding her as one spell−bound, and then muttering a low, deep oath of disappointment, turned on his heel and rushed from the court−room.

"Let the prisoner, Edgar Courtly, be brought forward for examination," said the sharp, clear voice of the Recorder at this moment; and both Virginia and Edith became very pale and tremulous as they heard the words.

"Give yourselves no alarm, my friends," said Dudley, instantly joining the maidens; "for Edgar Courtly, believe me, will come off triumphant."

As he spoke, Calvin Morton entered the court−room and advanced to the party with hasty steps.

"Heaven save us all!" he exclaimed: "I trust I am not too late!"

"Just in time for the examination of Edgar," replied Dudley, "but too late to witness the discomfiture of his uncle."

"Ha! yes—I met him coming down the steps," rejoined Morton, "and, from his manner, I almost fancied him insane.— What has happened?"

Edith hastened to explain.

"Well, he will be worse confounded and discomfitted than this ere long," replied her father, "or I am very much mistaken. I have him now," he pursued, with sparkling eyes: "I have him now, the hypocritical villain! Virginia, you shall have justice!"

At this moment Edgar Courtly entered the court−room, attended by an officer, and all eyes eagerly turned upon him. He was very pale, and evidently much excited; but there was the proud look of conscious innocence on his noble countenance, and his head was erect, and his step firm and bold. On seeing him, for a moment Virginia half supported herself against the agitated Edith, and the next could hardly resist the impulse to rush forward and throw herself into his arms. As Edgar beheld his friends, his features lighted with a look of joy and hope, and his feelings became powerfully excited.— Subduing them as much as possible, he made a cheerful bow of recognition to each; but the warm, tell−tale blood deeply crimsoned his fine, manly features, as he encountered the soft, gray eye of the lovely Edith fixed upon him, with an expression of sympathetic tenderness, while a close observer might have seen that her own fair countenance brightened with an unwonted glow.

"Remain where you are for the present," said Morton to his daughter and Virginia; and advancing with Dudley to Edgar, each shook his hand warmly, and bade him be of good cheer.

"Edgar Courtly," said the Recorder, glancing over a paper in his hand, "I perceive you are arrested at the instance of Oliver Goldfinch, on the accusation of forgery. Let the prosecutor stand forth."

"He is not present, your Honor," replied Dudley.

"If there is any one here who has the charge of forgery to prefer against the prisoner, Edgar Courtly, let him or her stand forth!"

Not a soul moved. The Recorder repeated his words. Still no one stirred, and the silence was so deep you could have heard the fall of a pin.

"Once more, and for the last time," said the magistrate, as he again repeated his words. Then finding the result the same as before, he added, hastily: "Our time is too valuable to be trifled with. Mr. Courtly, you are discharged."

Scarcely was the last sentence uttered, when, with a cry of joy, Virginia sprang forward, and was caught in the arms of her brother, and their tears of happiness mingled. Then Edgar received the congratulations of his true friends—but heard nothing that thrilled more sweetly to his very soul, to be treasured there as "a joy forever," than the simple sentence uttered by Edith, as, her delicate hand locked in his, she fixed her mild, gray eyes tenderly upon him, and said, earnestly:

"I knew—I knew you were innocent!"

"Come," said Morton, "this is no place for us. Our carriages wait below. Edgar, you shall with me and Edith. Cla— Dudley I mean—we will trust Virginia to your gallantry. Sorry to part brother and sister at such an interesting time— but can't help it. I have something important to tell you all—but not until we reach home."

No one of course objected to an arrangement so consonant to the feelings of each; and Edgar, offering his arm to Edith, while Dudley did the same to Virginia— preceded by Morton, who jocularly remarked he was one too

many—the whole party quitted the Tombs, and descended the long flight of stone steps with very different feelings from what they had experienced in making their ascent.

"Yonder," spoke Edith, in a low tone, pointing down before her, slightly shuddering, and pressing closer to the side of Edgar: "Yonder it was you saved my life."

"The happiest act I ever performed," was the low, earnest reply.

Entering the splendid vehicles which stood in waiting, each party signed the other a cheerful adieu, and then off went the horses at a gay, proud trot, as if conscious they bore away lighter hearts than they had brought hither.

The ride was not long, it is true; but four of the company fancied it the most delightful they had ever experienced.

CHAPTER XX. THE DAMNING DEED.

The communication which Morton had to make, was one of great importance to Edgar and all interested in his welfare, and was the result of his interview with the treacherous Nathan Wesley. What this communication was, it is not our purpose here to reveal; suffice, that it altered Edgar's previous arrangement of taking up law as a profession.

A week rolled away, and both Edgar and Virginia remained the honored guests of the Mortons. Dudley was a daily visitor, and always found a cordial welcome; but from none a more heart−felt one, perhaps, than from Virginia. In company with him, her brother and Edith, she took daily rides or strolls through the city, and appeared to enjoy herself as much as it was possible for one who had so recently been bereaved of an affectionate and beloved parent. But with herself and broth er, the sad thought of their poor mother would intrude itself upon them in their happiest moments, and cloud the sunshine that otherwise had lain upon their hearts.

But leaving those who form the bright parts in this our picture of life, we must return to Acton Goldfinch. We have said that one of his strongest passions was that of vanity; and never had this received so powerful a shock as at his examination, when he was not only confronted with his cousin whom he had basely treated, but also with one in whose eyes he would have stood a paragon of virtue, and who, as he now saw, being the companion of the other, must necessarily know much of his dissolute and even guilty career. As soon as bonds had been entered into for his appearance, he quitted the Tombs, feeling himself abashed, humiliated and disgraced. With a clouded brow and hurried pace, he made his way homeward, plotting in his own dark mind what steps to take to make even a feint of maintaining his honor, by retaliation on those who had been the means of exposing him. That Wesley had played a double−game, he felt well convinced; and his design was to seek him out first, upbraid him with treachery, and should his suspicions prove correct, let his mode of revenge be the result of succeeding circumstances.

As chance would have it, he met Wesley on the steps of his father's mansion— both having arrived from opposite directions at the same moment—and seizing him by the collar, he accused him at once of having betrayed him, and threatened his life on the spot should be dare to deny it. But notwithstanding this, Wesley did deny it, with all the brazen effrontery of which an accomplished villain like himself was capable. He did more. He not only denied having given even a hint of the matter to a living soul, but he openly accused Clarence Malcolm of being the cause, and said that he had, by some unaccountable means, played the spy upon them—overheard, he presumed, their secret conference—had been and warned Ellen Douglas, and then lain in wait to entrap them; and wound up by swearing roundly, that going to Mott street to see how the affair would terminate and be at hand, in case he (Acton) needed help, he had been chased by the watch set on by Clarence, and had barely escaped a night's imprisonment by out−runnlng them.

To this story of course Acton did not give full credence—knowing the matchless ability of the attorney to forge a truth−like lie on any and all occasions where it suited his humor or purpose—but as he had no evidence to combat it, he was obliged to let it pass current: besides, his anger now having a more worthy and important subject on which to vent itself, he concentrated his whole soul upon devising means to punish the principal aggressor.

"This hated Malcolm," he said, bitterly— "how shall I revenge myself on him for his insults?"

"Challenge him," suggested Wesley, who, whatever might be the result, fancied Acton would get the worst of it, or at least become deeper sunk than ever in the mire in which he was already floundering.

"Ay, that is it!" cried Acton. "Challenge him I will, and you shall be my second, Wesley!"

And challenge him Acton accordingly did; but his answer was what might have been expected from one of Clarence Malcolm's upright, fearless, noble nature and should serve as a model for all such as, placed in similar circumstances, have the manly courage to do right, without regard to the opinions of a few empty−headed coxcombs, whose sole valor consists in fighting bravely, in imagination, before a parterre of sentimental ladies.

The note ran thus.

"Sir:—I regret you have made it a necessity for me to inform you I am not the hot−brained, mad−cap fool you take me for. That I neither love nor fear you, you may rest assured; and also, that when I require a target to shoot

at, I shall not gratify your false vanity by selecting your person therefor, and thus exalting you in your own estimation to the dignified position of a hero. Our correspondence ceases here. All letters sent by you, henceforth, will be returned with unbroken seals.

"Clarence Malcolm, "*Of Malcolm Place*."

"To Acton Goldfinch, "Of No. —, — Street."

This was severely cutting to Acton, and so he felt it, and swore he would have revenge; and had the parties soon met, doubtless something serious would have been the consequence; but as it was, some two or three days reflection served to dampen the ardor of the challenger for an encounter with one from whom he could only reasonably expect to come off second best.— In fact, the whole nature of Acton seemed to have undergone a remarkable change, even in this short period. From a gay, dashing, rollicking, piquant fellow, he had suddenly become morose, taciturn and gloomy, holding little communion with any thing save his own thoughts. He strolled through the city as usual, visited his old haunts of gambling and dissipation, and often drank and played himself—yet with such an abstracted mood, such indifference as to success, and with so much silence and reserve, that his old associates often rallied him upon his gravity, and swore he must have the occupation of a Methodist parson in serious contemplation. But their jests and jeers moved him not, their remarks on his changed appearance fell unheeded, and their questions remained unanswered.

Thus matters continued for a week, without showing any visible change in Acton after the first two days, though both his father and sister strove to break his gloomy depression of spirits—the former by agreeing to see him safely over the coming trial, only cautioning him to be more prudent hereafter—and the latter by promising to overlook, and endeavoring as much as lay in her power, to remove the disgrace he had put upon the family, and set him right again with Edith.

In truth, Arabella loved her brother with a strong sisterly affection—perhaps from his nature being so different from her own— perhaps from a natural yearning of the heart for something to cling to and entwine itself around, as the vine does around the tree its supporter—and rarely to him displayed that haughty pride she did towards almost every other. But pride, as we have said elsewhere, was her ruling passion; and setting this aside, Arabella had fewer faults than many of her sex who have been upheld as models of perfection. With her, unlike her father, there was no duplicity—no artifice, to make herself appear better than she was—no masking for the occasion; but all was plain, straight−forward, frank and artless; and if she was not at all times courteous, she was at least ever honest in the expression of her opinions and sentiments. There was a wide difference between her pride and the coxcombvanity of her brother; for where hers ennobled, his debased; where hers made dignity, his excited ridicule; where hers upheld truth and honor, his gloried in craft and deceit; where hers required the inner sanctuary of her heart to be pure in the sight of Heaven, his only wanted the outward person to be attractive in the eyes of the world: in short, where hers applauded and sustained true virtue, his revelled and sunk in vice. Arabella was proud, and Acton was vain, and we have drawn the distinction as we understand it.

And to do Arabella justice, we must say she was, for the most part, right at heart, and would not intentionally do a wrong action. Though she might be led into error in the heat of passion, she would sincerely regret it in moments of cool reflection, and, if possible to do so without wounding her haughty pride, would ever make the proper reparation. When she so scornfully told Clarence his statement concerning her father's ill−treatment of his kinspeople was false—that it was a base, willful, malignant slander—she believed she spoke the truth: not that she thought him seeking to deceive her, but that he himself had been deceived. The assertion of the Courtlys being in town at all, was as much as she could credit; and it was not until the exposure of Acton's abduction of Virginia, and the knowledge of Edgar's arrest at the instance of her father, the news of which fell upon her like a thunderbolt, that she began to admit to herself there might be some truth in Malcolm's report, and some concealed wrong which reflected severely on her father. Then, had there been an opportunity to make Clarence reparation, without too much humiliation, she would have embraced it, and recalled her hasty expressions. She would also have flown to Virginia, and stood her friend and protector, only that she knew she was now safe from farther insult, and felt how humiliating would be the result to herself, in case her motives should not be properly understood and appreciated.

But to return to Acton.

A week passed away, and found him, as we have said, a constant visiter of the gambling hells and houses of dissipation. The reform so greatly needed, was still as much wanting as ever. He was changed, but not for the

better; for at heart the demon of his nature was silently doing his work, and gradually leading him on to that fatal step in his already guilty career, which was destined to plunge him down, down—far down—into the dark gulf of lasting shame and endless remorse.

Throughout the day preceding the night when we again introduce him, he had seemed much disturbed in mind, and had drank very freely—so much so, that at an early hour in the evening, he quitted one of the many drinking saloons with which Broadway abounds, with an uncertain step. It was a clear, cold, star−light night, and reeling against a lamp−post, he paused and cast his eyes upward to the shining host, as if in serious meditation upon the thousands of distant worlds thus revealed to his unsteady gaze. But he mused not on them—for dark and gloomy thoughts were flitting through a brain made feverish by the cursed cup, which contains ruin, insanity and death! At this moment two persons passed in eager conversation, and the mention of his own name arrested his attention.

"An unpleasant fix, surely," said one, "to run off with his own cousin, and get so cozened himself. They say it was all a contrived plan to get him into an ugly scrape, and that Ellen was at the bottom of it all. She had sworn to have revenge on him, by making an exposure, and took this means to do it. By my faith, I should little like to be caught the same way, and have all my love intrigues made known to the girl I was about to marry!"

"And I suppose Miss Morton rejects him?"

"Of course, and that is why he looks so disconsolate." Poor fellow!—ha, ha, ha! By my faith, I should think it would teach him a little prudence in his amours hereafter!"

"But do you think Ellen Douglas will appear against him?"

"Think so? I know it. Do you think she would let such an opportunity slip?— Not she. She will send him to Sing−Sing, if her evidence is sufficient to do so."

"No, by —! she won't!" swore Acton, deeply, as the voice of the speaker now died away in the distance. "So! I am the laughing stock of the town, as I expected. And this is *her* triumph! By my soul, it shall be a short one!" and somewhat sobered by the cold air, and the rousing of his worst passions, he drew his cloak, which had partly fallen from his shoulders, around him, and, turning into a by−street, disappeared.

Half an hour later, a person so closely muffled in a cloak that only his eyes were visible, rapped at the door of Madame Costellan. To the woman who answered his summons for admittance, he handed an English crown, and requested permission to enter unquestioned. The temptation was strong, and after looking at him intently for a moment, the other gave a knowing wink and threw open the door. The stranger passed in, and with a hurried step ascended to the next story, where, finding the door of Ellen's apartment ajar, he entered without knocking, and immediately closed, locked it and withdrew the key. Then glancing around the apartment, with a nervous, eager look, and seeing no one present, the figure moved stealthily to a door at the right, which communicated with an elegant bed chamber of suitable dimensions, and pushing it slightly open, reconnoitered the ground before proceeding farther. Satisfied, apparently, that all was right, he swung the door back with some force, and walked in with a bold, determined air.

This apartment was furnished in keeping with the larger one, with a splendid wardrobe, toilet−table, dressing−chair, bed, &c., on the last of which, her pale, thin features partly revealed by the dim light which stood on the center−table, reposed Ellen Douglas, now sleeping that feverish sleep which is often the result of mental anguish and bodily ailment, and all unconscious who stood by her side, gazing upon her with a darkened brow and lips compressed. The slumberer was evidently dreaming of that eventful period when all her fresh and tender passions were called into action, ere her now guilty soul had trod the dark paths of sin and misery— when she was beautiful in innocence— the gayest of the gay and the happiest of the happy—for she murmured, in tender, pleading, touching accents:

"Nay, mother, you wrong him by such suspicions! I tell you he is all that is noble and manly; and O, mother, I love him! See! see! what a beautiful present he has given me, mother! It is a massive diamond ring—and it is to be our wedding ring. O, mother, he is so rich, so handsome, and he loves me so! Nay, now, you shall not chide me! I tell you my Acton is all that is noble, honorable and generous, and I will not listen to aught said against him!"

On hearing these words, the intruder, who still remained muffled in his cloak, became violently agitated, and sinking upon a seat, bowed his face forward upon his hands and groaned. The groan started Ellen, without awaking her to consciousness, and apparently changed the current of her thoughts; for the next moment she turned over quickly, partly sprang up in bed, and pointing with her finger, as chance would have it, toward the figure in

the cloak, exclaimed, vehemently:

"There! there! do you not see him there? the base villain—the monster—the devil incarnate! I tell you beware of him!— for his sight is poison—his touch the seal of death! Avaunt, thou fiend in human shape!—avaunt! No, no, girl," she continued, hurriedly, "he shall not harm you! Me he has ruined, but you he shall not harm! No, sweet Virginia, you are safe, and he shall suffer for his baseness, so sure as there is a God of Justice!— What! your cousin? Heavens! how strange! Ha! you want proof, eh?—proof? Well, I am ill now, but as soon as able I will appear against him."

"Never!" cried the intruder, springing to his feet with an oath, letting the cloak fall, and disclosing the features of Acton, now frightfully distorted with angry passions. "Never!" he fairly shouted, drawing a dagger from his bosom. "By all my hopes of security, there shall be one witness the less!"

His voice awoke Ellen to a full consciousness, and beholding him in an attitude so menacing, she sank back upon her pillow with a cry of alarm. For a moment she regarded him with a peculiar look, in which various passions mingled, and then said, in a calm, deep tone:

"What do you here, Acton Goldfinch? Will you not allow me to die in peace?"

"No!" cried Acton, fiercely; "you do not deserve such a death!"

"Monster! begone, or you will drive me mad; and already I feel my poor brain on the verge of chaos. Is it not enough that you have ruined and brought me to this, but you must now appear, Satan like, to gloat in triumph above my dying bed?"

"Prove to me," Acton rejoined, a dark gleam of malice in his now fiery eyes: "prove to me, Ellen Douglas, that it *is* your dying bed, and you shall see my face no more!"

"And this is he whom I have so loved!" cried Ellen, bursting into tears; "for whom I have sacrificed earthly reputation, and perilled my soul eternally! Oh God! oh God! the way of the transgressor is truly hard!"

"'Tis false!" returned Acton; "you never loved me! You thought to share my name and fortune, and played your part to perfection—but you never loved me!"

"As I hope for mercy beyond the grave," rejoined Ellen, solemnly, "I loved you with a pure affection, and only thought of your position so far as it might exalt you and make you happy."

"Then why did you turn against me in my hour of trouble?"

"I did not. It was you who plotted against me, to cast me off forever, and put another in the place, which, in God's sight, was truly mine. You had resolved to wed Edith Morton!"

"And you to prevent it?"

"Yes, I resolved to prevent it, and trust I have."

"And this was your love?"

"Surely so; for if any one had a right to your hand, it was I—I who had sacrificed so much for you, and borne so patiently with your many failings and false vows. I had a right to expect you would give me your hand, if not your heart—nay, even felt I had a right to demand it."

"And is it possible you could be so ignorant of the world, as to suppose I would bestow my name upon one who had disgraced her own?"

"Villain!" cried Ellen, with all the vehemence her weak state would allow, starting up in bed, her eyes flashing fire, and her pale countenance disturbed by many contending passions: "Why do you come here, at this time, to taunt me with being the creature of your own devilish arts? If I disgraced my name, it was you who made me, and on you the sin shall deeply recoil! Ay," she added, with prophetic power, "it shall recoil upon you through all time!—and the demon Remorse shall gnaw at your heart's core, and, like the fabled Vampire of old, suck your blood drop by drop!—and you shall curse the hour that gave you existence! Even now I see, in your pale, haggard features, the first fruits of your guilty course. Already you are a criminal in the eyes of the law, and are meditating another deed of the darkest import! Nay, look not so fiercely upon me, Acton Goldfinch! and clench not your weapon with such a nervous grasp! I can read in your dark countenance that you came here for the worst of purposes! Strike, then, while the devil prompts, and put the crowning act to your wickedness! Think not I fear you, or longer fear to die! Better death than life for one like me! I cannot live disgraced, without hope. See here! I bare my breast to your gaze. Here is my heart—a heart that beat the truest love for you, till your own unrighteous acts wrought a fearful change.— Place your steel here and drive it home; and as you have been the author of all my misery, be my delivering angel from a world of wo! As with you my dark career began—with you let it end!

So may we part forever!"

The tone and manner of Ellen, as she said this, was firm and decided. There was no tremor in her voice—no agitation aparent; and as she concluded, she again sank back, and fixed her eyes, in which was a cold and seemingly unearthly lght, steadily upon his. Acton looked at her fixedly a short time, and seemed undecided what course to pursue. In truth, he began to doubt if she were in her proper senses. At length he said:

"If you loved me, as you have so often affirmed, why were you not always true to me?"

"As God is my judge, Acton Goldfinch, and as I hope for His mercy hereafter, I solemnly declare to you, I have ever been as loyal to you as if bound by the laws of man in the holy covenant of wedlock!"

"Then why did you plot with others against me?"

"I never did. I heard of your meditated design upon a lovely creature, whom I would protect with my heart's blood, and I determined to thwart it, and shame you into repentance."

"And was the dragging of me to prison a proper way to shame me into repentance?"

"That was none of my planning, and took me as much by surprise as yourself."

"How went the report abroad, then, that it was all a plot of your own to get revenge?"

"Of that I know nothing."

"And why have you made it your boast that you will appear against me at the coming trial?"

"I have never so boasted."

"Perhaps you will have the face to deny that you ever had intention of so appearing."

"No, you mistake. I shall deny no such thing. If I am summoned as a witness, and it is in my power to get before the court, I shall be there, and give true evidence of all I know concerning your infamous proceeding in that affair of your cousin."

"And you dare tell me this to my face?" cried Acton, with a burst of indignation.

"Dare?" echoed Ellen, with emphatic scorn: "Why talk to me of dare? I dare do right, if I have done wrong; and I would to God you had the same courage! But I have said enough. Go! I am weak and ill. Go! your presence here burdens my sight."

"Promise me you will not appear against me, and I will go," replied Acton.

"I will not promise. On that point I am resolved. You have run too long a guilty course, and well deserve some punishment."

"Look at me!" cried Acton, brandishing his dagger aloft. "Look well! I am a desperate man, Ellen; and, if goaded too far, would not stop short of a nameless crime! Now promise me, or—"

"Never!" interrupted Ellen. "Acton Goldfinch, you are a coward; for none but a coward would steal in upon a weak, defenceless woman, and with the air and language of a common cut−throat, seek to awe her into silence, or extort from her a promise against her will. Begone, sir! and never enter my presence again!— With the fierceness of a tiger, you combine the courage of a mouse! Begone, sir! or I will call for aid."

"It shall be your last call then!" cried Acton, foaming with rage. "You have dared and maddened me beyond myself. Take that!"

As he spoke he sprang forward, and, scarcely conscious of what he did, struck a fell blow with his dagger. A deep groan sounded in his ear. He started back, all aghast, and a cry of horror escaped his lips. He beheld the white linen of the bed red with blood! He looked on his dagger, and saw its luster dimmed with blood! Upon his hand, and beheld it bloody also! It was the warm life−blood of her who had so loved him, and had sacrificed for him her own happiness! He turned his eyes upon her once more, and saw her already gasping in the death struggle! He strove to call her by name, but he could not speak. He strove to rush to her, but he could not move. He strove to shut the horrid sight from his eyes, but they were rivetted there—there, upon the bloody work of his own hand! Oh! what an age of misery−−of woful misery— of hell itself—was in that awful moment. Blood upon the bed; blood upon his dagger; blood upon the floor; blood upon his hands; all—all was blood!—an ocean of blood it seemed to the horror−stricken, fear−stricken, conscience−stricken Acton Goldfinch.

"Great God!" burst at last from the lips of the murderer: "Great God! what have I done! Wo, misery, remorse, and hell itself, are henceforth mine!"

"I forgive you," said a feeble, gurgling voice, the last that ever passed the lips of the poor, ill−fated Ellen Douglas.

"No! no!" cried Acton, wildly: "Not forgive! Say you curse me!—curse me eternally — forever — for this

damnable deed!"

At this moment there came a loud knock at the outer door of the house. It aroused the murderer to a sense of his danger.— He gave one hurried glance round, and darted into the other apartment, the door of which he unlocked in eager haste.— From this there was a hall which led to a window overlooking the back yard. He rushed to this, threw it up frantically, and, all reckless of consequences, leaped out. He struck the ground unharmed, and the next moment had cleared a high board fence and was in a dark alley. He paused one moment to decide upon his course. In that moment he heard an awful shriek— the first that told his crime was known. With a groan, wrung from his very soul, he turned and fled: fled from his crime, from justice, from light: fled fast and far into the darkness of the night: fled from all but himself, his conscience, and his God!

CHAPTER XXI. THE INQUEST.

It was between eight and nine o'clock in the evening, that Edgar and Dudley, arm−in−arm, were strolling up Park Row towards Chatham street, in close conversation.

"And could you not prevail on her?" asked Dudley, in connection with something that had gone before.

"No," replied Edgar. "She said she could not bear the thought of mingling again with those, who, having no stain upon their characters, would withdraw from her their countenance, and point at her the finger of scorn."

"But she should go where she is not known."

"So I urged her, but to no effect—she contending, that to feel her own degredation in such society, would be more than she could bear, and for which even death would be a glad substitute."

"Poor girl! from my soul I pity her.— Such a noble, generous nature, to come to such disgrace and degradation! What should be done with the villain that so wrongs a woman, Edgar?"

"He should serve out the balance of his days between the four walls of a prison."

"So think I; for I look upon it as one of the worst of crimes—one of the grossest outrages of which a man can be guilty. And yet the law, Edgar, laughs to scorn our opinion, and holds the seducer innocent. Society, too, gives its sanction to the foul deed; and the pampered villain goes boldly through the world, in a gay, dissolute career, strewing his path with blasted names, broken hearts and ruined souls. We make laws for the poor, Edgar— for those, who, born in wretchedness, without hope above their birth, can, at the best, but eke out a miserable existence. We make laws for them, and we press them home closely—execute them with a diligence, eagerness and fidelity worthy a better cause. For them we make no allowance—they being supposed to inherit immaculate virtue, from which if they fall, they fall as Satan did from Heaven, without any temptation but their own evil passions. Born in degredation— schooled in vice and misery—debarred all the exalted enjoyments of learning and knowledge—scorned, oppressed and down−trodden by those, who, clothed in broad−cloths and silks, bow their souls to the shrine of Mammon, the while their knees press the richly carpeted floor of God's holy church—they are still supposed to know all the technicalities of the law—to be above all the vices and errors of mankind— to be, in short, the noble instruments whereby to exhibit the majesty, justice and righteousness of man's civil code: for let one suffer never so much, the law says it is right; let one starve himself, and see his poor family—his dear wife and little ones begging and dying for the bread which he has not to give— and the law says it is right; but let him, driven to desperation, maddened with famine and mental anguish—let him take so much as a handful of meal to protect his life and the lives of those dearer to him than his own—and then the majesty, and justice, and righteousness of the law says it is all wrong; that it is a heineous crime against community; and forthwith the offender is seized, dragged to prison, tried, convicted, and sent away, a condemned criminal, to serve out his term in a sink of hell's own vice; while his family starve, and die, and turn to dust, for the proud, the arogant, the pampered, the courted, the flattered, the almost lordly robber of female virtue to trample on with scorn! Oh, most truly is there

"`Something rotten in Denmark.'"

"You draw a strong picture," replied Edgar; "and deeply I regret I cannot gainsay its truthfulness. But the world is daily progressing to a better state; and though we may not live to see it, the time will surely come, when man can live without taking what is not his own; and when the act we both so heartily condemn, will become a crime in the eyes of the law, with a penalty attached commensurate with its wickedness."

Conversing thus, the two friends entered Chatham street; and continuing their course till they came to Mott, they turned down the latter to visit the unfortunate Ellen—Edgar with a view to cancel the debt he owed her, and also, if possible, prevail upon her to leave her present abode and retire forever from criminal associations.

"What wretchedness exists on every hand!" said the latter, as slowly the two friends pursued their way along the narrow, squallid, and dimly lighted street.— "And yet," he added, with a sigh, "it is but a few days since my poor mother, my sister and myself were inhabitants of this gloomy region."

"Oh, how you must have suffered!" replied Dudley, sympathetically. "I do not wonder your poor mother died−−I only wonder you and your sister had nerve enough to bear up against so dark a fate. To those born and bred here—who have never known nor ever expect any thing better—it is a paradise, compared to the misery you

experienced, from its contrast to those days when almost boundless wealth was yours. But, thank God! you have met with a happy deliverance, and soon, I trust, will be able to resume your proper station. There is an old adage, that `bought experience is the best, if we do not buy it too dear;' and your suffering here, may be of advantage to you hereafter, by bringing home to you forcibly the necessities of the poor, which are too apt to be overlooked by the wealthy. What a field is every where open to the opulent philanthropist, to give hope to the forlorn and happiness to the wretched; and how much more noble are his labors in the sight of God—how much more exalted should he be above his fellows—than he who rides the hero of an ensanguined field, and with his own arm carries death before him—makes the wife a widow, the child an orphan— and leaves mourning and lamentation to follow in his train! And when at last he is laid upon the bed of death, and feels his life slowly but surely ebbing away— knows that his spirit is about to separate from its mortal tenement, and take its flight to the eternal world, bearing with it all the deeds, good and ill, it has done in the body—how cheering and refreshing, to turn his eyes back upon the past, and behold the path, once full of thorns, that he has strewn with flowers, and think that the blessings and prayers of those he has rescued from destruction, will precede him to the Mercy Seat of the Most High and gain him pardon for the minor errors of frail humanity! O, if the rich did but know wherein lieth their true happiness, and would but give heed thereto, thousands upon thousands would be daily snatched from the dark haunts of misery, vice and crime, and sent upon their way rejoicing— the world would be redeemed to its pristine happiness—and the glorious Millenium, foretold of old, and for which all good Christians watch and pray, would truly come to make a second Heaven of earth!"

"You are most eloquent in a good cause, friend Dudley; and I heartily concur in all the sentiments you have advanced, and sincerely trust the time is not far distant, when the philanthropist shall be considered the true hero—when nations shall settle their disputes by arbitration instead of battle—when the poor, oppressed, and down−trodden wretches that now every where exist, shall no longer be found, but in their stead happy and intelligent beings—and lastly, when the warrior, as an object of antiquity, shall excite more wonder than admiration.— But see! we have reached our destination. Yonder," added Edgar, in a faltering voice, pointing across the street with an unsteady hand: "Yonder it was, in that most wretched hovel, surrounded with the dregs of misery, my poor sainted mother took leave of all she held dear on earth!"

As he spoke, he turned away to hide his emotion, and rapped loudly on the door of Madame Costellan's dwelling.— Almost immediately after, the rattling of chains and bolts was heard, and the door, as usual, opened but slightly—sustained in its position by a short, heavy chain, linking it to the casing, that the person within might have an opportunity of knowing the number and wants of those without before admitting them—and a female voice inquired who they were and what their business. Edgar replied by giving his name, and stating that he had called with a friend to see Ellen Douglas.

"I think she's got company," was the rejoinder; "but I'll go and see;" and closing the door behind her, the two friends heard her hasty steps along the hall.

Scarcely a moment, as it seemed to them, elapsed after this, ere they heard a piercing scream from the room above their heads, followed immediately by another and another, more wild and frightful still, and then by the noise of many feet, as of others rushing to ascertain the cause of alarm.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Edgar; "what can be the meaning of this?"

"Something frightful, I fear, has happened," replied his companion.

Presently the two friends heard an agitated rattling of the chains and bolts at the door, and then it swung wide open, and the same female who had first given Edgar admission, now stood before them, pale, bewildered and terrified.

"What has happened?" cried Edgar, as he sprang within.

"Oh God! sir," gasped the attendant, with a look of horror, "poor—poor Ellen Douglas!"

"Well, well—what of her?"

"She's been foully murdered!"

"Murdered?" fairly shouted Edgar.— "Murdered? Great God! poor Ellen murdered?" and he rushed up stairs in frantic haste, followed by Dudley.

As they reached Ellen's apartment, they encountered some half−a−dozen females, among who was Madame Costellan herself, and two or three of the opposite sex, some half frenzied, and all looking bewildered and terrified.

"Oh, gentleman," cried Madame Costellan, rushing up to Edgar and Dudley— "such a terrible thing to happen in my house! Look there, for God's sake!—oh, look there!" and she pointed towards the inner chamber, and hid her face in her hands.

Edgar and his friend sprang forward, and soon beheld what froze their blood and sickened them with horror. Upon the bed, bathed in her own heart's blood, which had run down the snowy sheets and puddled on the floor, reposed the earthly remains of the beautiful Ellen—beautiful even in death—with her fair hands, all stained with gore, crossed on her bosom, as if to staunch the wound in her left breast, and her features calm and composed, and almost dazzling white, save where they were spotted here and there with the red current of life. On the floor, all sanguine from hilt to point, lay the fatal instrument used in this hellish work; and just beyond it a man's cloak, one slight portion of which was dabbled in the blood of the owner's victim. It was, all−in−all, a sight to pale the features and move the heart of a stoic, and make the sensitive soul sicken, shudder and recoil, and is too dark a picture for us to portray more vividly.

"Great God!" ejaculated Edgar, shutting the horrid scene from his sight with his hands: "what a foul murder! Alas! poor, erring, but noble hearted Ellen Douglas— thy earthly misery is over now!"

"Who hath done this damnable deed?" questioned Dudley, turning to those who pressed hard behind him. "Who was with the unfortunate deceased when this happened?"

"As I hope for mercy, no one to my knowledge!" cried Madame Costellan, in wild agitation. "Oh, gentlemen," she continued, greatly alarmed for the consequences that might ensue to herself and household should the affair become public, and appealing to each and all—"for Heaven's sake! do not let the report of this get abroad, or I shall be ruined!"

"Peace, woman!" rejoined Dudley, sternly. "You know not what you ask. As if we could be privy to a foul murder, and suppress the tale! Where is she who gave us admittance?" he continued, in a tone of authority.

"Here—here—I—I—am, sir," stammered the terrified domestic, coming forward.

"Who was here with poor Ellen Douglas but a few minutes since, of whom you spoke when we inqiured for her?" questioned Dudley.

"Why—why—sir—I—I—" stammered the woman, sinking upon her knees before Dudley, in an attitude of entreaty, as if she fancied he had the power to pardon or condemn her: "I say—'pon my soul! if it's the last words I've got to utter—I— I—didn't think any harm, I didn't—I—"

"Up, woman, and answer my question, or you will be suspected of having a hand in the murder yourself!" interrupted Dudley, sharply.

"Well, sir—well, sir—" continued the other—"a man came to the door, and gave me this gold piece to let him in— and say nothing—and I—I—did it; but−− but without thinking the least bit of harm— 'pon my soul! if it's the last word—"

"Who was the man?" interrupted Dudley again.

"I couldn't see his face, sir, for the cloak which he held round it: but—but by his eyes, sir, I guessed it—it—was Acton Goldfinch."

Both Dudley and Edgar uttered exclamations of surprise together, and gave each other a look, expressive more of bewildered belief than doubt.

"Good God!" groaned Edgar—"this is more terrible still!"

"O, you daring good−for−nothing!" cried Madame Costellan, now rushing forward to the still kneeling domestic and dealing her a blow on the head with her fist. "Out of my house, and get you gone forever! Oh, you have ruined me! you have ruined me!"

"Peace, woman!" commanded Dudley, stamping his foot on the floor. And then to the domestic: "Stir not from here for your life! You shall not be harmed. Let some one hasten and summon the coroner immediately."

"I will go," said Edgar, darting through the crowd, down the stairs and into the street, the door to which had been left unfastened by the agitated and frightened servant.

In less than half an hour Edgar returned, bringing the coroner and his jury, who at once proceeded to hold an inquest on the body of the murdered Ellen Douglas.

It is unnecessary for us to enter into farther particulars. On examination, it was found that the steel, striking upon one of her left ribs, had glanced and entered the heart of poor Ellen in an oblique direction, thus speedily terminating her existence. Each member of the ill−fated house was then closely interrogated, as were also Edgar

and Dudley—but from none save the domestic, who gave her name as Sarah Farling, was there elicited any important evidence. She having now become somewhat calm, being assured by the coroner no harm could accrue to her, told her story in a straight−forward manner; and mainly from her testimony, the jury, after a short consultation, returned the verdict:

"That the deceased came to a violent death, by means of a wound inflicted by a dagger, supposed to be in the hands of Acton Goldfinch."

Ordering the remains of Ellen to be properly laid out and prepared for interment, and securing the cloak and dagger for farther evidence, the coroner, after an examination of the premises, especially where the open window showed the murderer had made his escape, quitted the house, accompanied by the jury, Edgar and Dudley. Proceeding to the nearest magistrate, a writ was sworn out against Acton Goldfinch and placed in the hands of an officer for his apprehension, while the two friends bent their steps homeward, with what feelings we leave the reader to imagine.

[1] Pennsylvania has already come out boldly, and made seduction a criminal offence, punishable with heavy fine, and imprisonment in the penitentiary; and it is the ardent desire of the humble writer of these pages, to see every state in the Union follow her noble example.

CHAPTER XXII. THE GUILTY IN TROUBLE.

It was far advanced toward midnight, and in her own handsomely furnished apartment, with a book in her hand, which she seemed intently perusing, sat Arabella Goldfinch. The lamp, on a center−table by her side, was already growing dim, and barely served to relieve the more obscure portions of the chamber from utter dark ness; but, faint as it was, its pale beams seemed to gain additional strength as they fell upon the white, marble−like countenance of the haughty beauty. At length Arabella paused in her reading, let her book fall listlessly in her lap, and resting her elbow on the table and her forehead in the hollow of her hand, appeared to be absorbed in deep thought. While thus occupied, she heard a gentle tap on the door; and supposing it to be her waitingmaid, she said:

"Come in!"

Her surprise was great, therefore, when, instead of the person she expected, her brother entered and hurriedly shut the door behind him. There was something frightful in his look and manner; for his features had assumed a ghastly, almost livid hue—his lips were ashy and tremulous, though compressed—his eyes strained, bloodshot and rolling—his step eagar, stealthy, frightened and uncertain—his voice harsh, sepulchral and fearful—as, advancing toward her, he glared cautiously but wildly around, and, seizing her arm with a grip that drew from her an exclamation of pain, said:

"You are alone, sister?"

"To be sure I am, Acton," she replied, starting to her feet in alarm. "For God's sake! what has happened, to make you look and act thus, like one demented?"

Acton did not reply; but he gave her one awful look of agony—such an expression as one would expect to behold on the faces of the damned—and then staggering to a seat, sank down, buried his face in his hands, and uttered a groan that seemed to wrench his very soul.

"Great God! what is the meaning of this?" cried Arabella, greatly terrified. "Speak, Acton!—speak! and tell me what has happened?"

"The earth has become an ocean of blood!" groaned rather than spoke her brother, with his face still hid in his hands.

"Speak understandingly, or I shall doubt your sanity!"

"Do! do!" shouted Acton, starting to his feet suddenly, and revealing his face, now awfully distorted and haggard. "Do doubt it, Arabella!—say I'm mad!—swear I'm mad!—for I am mad—mad as the maniacs men cage! My brain—my poor brain burns with fire unquenchable—my eyes see blood—and my ears ring with the words of mortal forgiveness, and the curses of a conscience whose torments shall be forever and ever!"

"Merciful God!" screamed Arabella: "his reason has deserted him truly!"

And seizing the cord connecting with a bell in her waiting−maid's room, she was about to ring, when Acton, springing forward, grasped her hand, saying, in a low, eager, emphatic tone:

"Call no one here, as you value your life!"

"What means this strange manner of yours?" Arabella now asked, in a clear, distinct, unfaltering tone, fixing her dark eyes steadily upon his, in the way she had understood maniacs were the most completely subdued.

"It means," he groaned, "that I have a hell in my breast, and a hell in my brain?"

"Speak! I charge you, Acton!—what have you done? Ha! see!" she added, almost wildly, "there is blood upon your hands! Oh! Acton, my brother—Acton, my brother—for God's sake, relieve me of this suspense, and say you have done no farther crime!"

"Where do you see blood?" cried Acton, fiercely, looking wildly upon his hands, which he turned over and over, rubbing each hard against the other. "Where do you see blood, Arabella?" he continued, now holding them out for her examination.

"I do not see it now—it is gone," she replied.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed hysterically; "it is gone, is it?—gone from your eyes, but not from mine: I see an ocean of it!"

At this moment the street bell was rung violently, accompanied by a heavy rap on the door. Acton heard it, and for a moment stood as one petrified with horror. Then bounding forward, he seized both the hands of Arabella,

pressed them hard, and cried piteously:

"Save me! save me! Quick, quick, dear Arabella—save me! They come to drag me to prison!"

"You are guilty of some foul crime, then?" gasped the other. "That blood— that blood—"

And sick with horror, she could utter no more, but sank, half fainting, upon a seat.

"Ha!" cried Acton, "I hear voices. They are coming: they inquire for me. For the love of Heaven and eternal mercy, tell me what I must do, Arabella!"

The latter started to her feet, gave her brother a strange, peculiar look, in which shame, horror, fear, pity, pride and resolution confusedly mingled—the two last being the last in ascendancy—and then stamping her foot to make her words impressive, exclaimed firmly:

"Be a man! Seat yourself—be calm— and, if guilty, let not your looks betray you! Sit down!—there is a book—read!"

"They are coming," faltered Acton, as he tremblingly complied with the instructions of his sister.

Arabella seated herself and listened. She heard steps upon the stairs, and confused speaking. Presently she could distinguish her father's voice in what seemed angry expostulation.

"I tell you this is uncivil rudeness, to disturb my house at this time of night, in this manner. Acton has, I presume, been abed and asleep these two hours."

"We must do our duty, nevertheless," was the reply; "and the sooner we find him, the sooner we leave you. Is this the room?"

"No, yonder—this is my daughter's," replied Goldfinch.

"Go you to that, then," said the other, apparently addressing a third person. "I see a light here and will examine this;" and as he spoke, there came a loud rap on the door.

"Be calm!" whispered Arabella to her terrified and half−distracted brother; and rising, she walked boldly to the door and threw it open.

"I beg pardon!" said the sheriff, (for he it was,) as he met the calm, cold, haughty stare of Arabella; "but I am seeking Acton Goldfinch."

"Yonder he sits, sir," nodded Arabella, as if displeased at so unceremonious an interruption.

"It is my unpleasant duty," said the sheriff, advancing to the side of him he sought, and placing a hand on his shoulder, which fairly quivered at the touch, "to arrest you for the crime of murder!"

"Murder?" screamed Arabella, staggering against the wall, no longer able to mask her feelings.

"Murder?" echoed her father, clinging for support to the casing of the door. "Oh God! can this be so?" he groaned. "Oh, Acton, why do you not contradict it?—say it is not true?"

But Acton made no reply; and the other officer entering at this moment, the sheriff bade him come with them, as they had no time for delay. Acton arose, partly reeled forward, and then seeming to gather new courage, passed out of the room without speaking.

As soon as he was out of sight, Goldfinch moved slowly forward to a seat, where he sunk down with a groan of mental anguish— a groan wrung from the very soul of one who had made others suffer the like without the slightest compunctions of conscience. And oh! what terrible thoughts were now passing through the mind of this dark man, loaded as he was with hidden crime, but who had thus far appeared to the world at large as the true embodiment of all that was noble and virtuous! And what schemes of proud ambition did he feel were now dashed to the earth, by one fell, annihilating blow! His son—in whom so much of the pride, ambition and fondness of even a mercenary father centered— to be dragged to prison, from his own stately roof, and there tried like a common felon—perhaps be condemned and executed for a heinous crime, which he tacitly acknowledged by not openly refuting! And then the disgrace—the lasting disgrace—that would attach to even himself, as the father of a murderer! Would not men shun, rather than court his company, and, with all his wealth to support his dignity, point him out as an object more worthy of commisseration than emulation? And then that wealth—the all he had to rely on−−that wealth, so basely gained, and which, by having supported his son in a dissolute career of vice, was already bringing upon him its own retri bution—how soon might that be snatched away by the strong arm of right and justice, and he himself be left pennyless, and friendless, to his own guilty thoughts, in the cell of the criminal! Fortune, so ever propitious before, now seemed to frown darkly, and tell him his outwardly brilliant, but inwardly dark career, was about to close in ignominy! In his pride of wealth and position, he had boasted he would make his money save him; but now, since so many of his plans had failed—since those he hated and had

striven to crush had escaped his snares and were soaring above him−−now he felt how impotent was the boast; and that so far from saving, his ill−gotten gains might prove a mill−stone round his neck to drag him down the dark gulf of perdition! Oh, harrowing to the soul, and black as the midnight cells of Erebus, were these thoughts, as they rapidly chased one another through his heated and half−maddened brain!

And well mayest thou doubt, and tremble, and lose confidence in thy own dark resources, thou vain, proud, scheming hypocrite! for already the sharp sword of Justice hangs over thy guilty head, soon to fall and sever the last hope that supports thee!

For some minutes Goldfinch remained buried in his own reflections, and then starting suddenly to his feet, called Arabella. But all unconscious of the call, or even of her own existence, Arabella, partly resting against the wall and partly extended on the floor, lay in a death−like swoon. Alarmed for his daughter, Goldfinch now rang the bell and shouted for his domestics. In a short time all the occupants of the house rushed into the chamber, their faces the picture of excitement and dismay; and crowding round the suffer, some chafed her hands, some her temples, and some applied salts, while others looked on bewildered.

Perceiving signs of returning animation, Goldfinch ordered her to be placed in bed, to have the family physician sent for immediately, and all to withdraw save her own waiting−maid. At length Arabella slowly opened her eyes, and giving her father and maid a stare of wonder, suddenly raised herself, and glancing eagerly round the apartment, in a low, eager voice exclaimed:

"Acton—my brother—where is he?"

"He has just stepped out," replied her father, making an effort to appear composed.

Arabella looked at him steadily a moment, with the expression of one endeavoring to recall something that has slipped the memory. Then her features gradually assumed a look of heart−touching anguish; and placing her hands to her throbbing temples, she slowly fell back on the pillow, and murmuring, "Oh, my God! my God!" sunk into a state of apathy bordering on unconsciousness.

When the physician came and examined her, he shook his head dubiously, and, to the anxious inquiries of her father, replied that hers was a case beyond the science of medicine, and that he could only recommend the most careful nursing and the avoidance of all topics productive to her of excitement.

"Her reason," he concluded, "totters on its throne, and quiet for a few days will either restore or make her a confirmed maniac."

On hearing these words, Goldfinch, without trusting his voice in reply, rushed almost franticly to his own apartment, and locking the door against all intrusion, there passed an hour of such agonizing wretchedness, as might, in some measure, atone for his guilty career.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE MURDERER AND THE MURDERED.

News of the horrid murder of poor Ellen Douglas, and the arrest of Acton Goldfinch for the crime, flew like wild−fire over the city, and created the wildest excitement and consternation—insomuch, that citizens of all professions left their business, and collected in groups at the corners of the streets, on the pleasure grounds, and in all public places, to talk the affair over in low, eager, mysterious tones, ex press their own opinions, and listen to comments from others. To fan the flame of popular excitement and put money in their own pockets, several of the daily journals issued extras, setting forth the affair in the wildest shape of exaggerated romance, and giving a minute and sicken−detail of how they *supposed* the horrid deed had been perpetrated; and though each differed essentially from every other, yet all were received and swallowed with eager credulity by an excited populace, ready to gulp down any thing that would strain their wonder and feed their morbid passions.

And even had the press been silent, there was enough of the wild, startling and romantic in the affair, as it flew from ear to ear, to put the city in unusual commotion. In the first place, the father of the murderer, as a princely millionaire, was generally known by reputation, if not personally; and the murderer himself had moved a bright particular star in the highest circles of aristocracy and fashion. Connected with this, the story at once got abroad of how he had treacherously seduced poor Ellen, (who was now represented as all that was once lovely, pure, amiable and high−minded,) by a sham marriage, and that being on the point of alliance with one of the oldest, most respectable and opulent families in the city, and fearful of cxposure, had sought to hide his disgrace with the most heinous and damning of crimes. This the reader knows was not strictly correct—as Acton was aware the exposure he so much dreaded had taken place—but of this the mass was ignorant, and consequently surmised as nearly correct as the public generally does in such cases. With the majority of the citizens, or those inferior to him in point of wealth, Acton was destined to receive no sympathy—but, on the contrary, their most bitter curses; and so excited were the vindictive passions of the lower orders, that but for a doubly strong and well armed police, they would have mobbed the Tombs, broken into his cell, and dragged him forth, a victim to their wild fury. As it was, not only Centre street, but all the avenues leading to the Tombs, were blocked up at an early hour in the morning, by a furious multitude, eager to be present at his examination, or gain the first intelligence of what was taking place. Even the house of Madame Costellan was surrounded by a dense mob, of both sexes, all ages and colors—drawn thither by that same vile curiosity which leads persons to witness an execution—and in consequence,a strong body of police was required to be in constant attendance throughout the day, to protect the premises and guard the body of the deceased.

It is not our intention to give a detail of either the examination or trial of Acton Goldfinch, as our space is limited, and other matters, more important to cur purpose, must be brought forward ere we close.— Let it suffice, then, that the former occupied two sittings of the magistrate, and that a large array of witnesses were summoned before the court, whose evidence, collectively, was sufficient to cause the prisoner to be indicted for willful murder. The Grand Jury, too, returned a true bill, and his not being a bailable case, Acton was remanded to prison, to take his trial at the spring term of the court of Oyer and Terminer.

During the prisoner's examination, his half distracted father was present, and exerted his wealthy influence to the utmost to get him clear; but this was a case of too strong circumstantial evidence for his purpose; and he was forced to retire from the field—which he did, cursing his own natal hour and the impotence of his ill−gotten gains. It was the last desperate struggle in his wicked career, made on the very verge of his own terrible overthrow and ruin, of which more anon.

Meantime, Edgar and his friends came forward and offered their services to consign to dust the mortal remains of the poor, ill−fated Ellen Douglas. Permission being granted by the authorities, they set about their mournful task; but so great was the excitement, and the desire, excited by curiosity, of hundreds of strangers to be present, that the police were forced to interfere, and it was judged advisable to bury her in the night—which was finally done—Edgar and Virginia accompanying the deceased as chief mourners, and dropping a tear upon her humble grave, at the recollection of her many kindnesses to them and the thought of her awful and untimely fate.

It was a solemn sight, and powerful moral, to stand, with flaming torches, in the dead hours of night, around the open grave of this child of sorrow, cut down in the bloom of life, and behold her coffin lowered into the cold,

damp earth, with which its frail tenant soon must mingle, dust to dust, to come forth never more till the sound of the Last Trump should summon it to another life and final judgment; and remember, withal, that she, erewhile, was as pure, and lovely, and happy as any present; and, but for one fatal error, less her fault, perhaps, than her misfortune, might even now be exulting in life, and pride, and hope, and joy—the admired and loved, extolled and honored of a wide and brilliant circle of light−hearted friends. It was a sad and dismal scene, and one calculated to impress itself on the beholder so deeply, that time, with all its events and changing circumstances, might never erase its solemn and awful vividness!

"Alas!" sighed Morton, as, with his wife on one hand and his daughter on the other, he stood on the verge of Ellen's last earthly home, and heard the hollow sound of the earth rattling on her coffin: " *A*las! what a creature is man!—here to−day and gone to−morrow—now in the joy, pride and exultation of happy life—now in the cold, dark embrace of death, with weeping friends around, taking the last parting look of all that was once so dear to them. How wise is the Great Infinite, in shutting from us all knowledge of the future, that we may the better live in and enjoy the present—or, with the shining shield of hope for our defence, do battle bravely against the `ills we have.' Poor Ellen!— poor, ill−fated, untimely Ellen Douglas!— child of misfortune `more sinned against than sinning'—little could she dream, in the flowery days of happy youth, that her first years of blooming maturity would find her thus! Oh! what a powerful and painful lesson, to guard us all, my friends, against the first fatal step from virtue and honor! She is gone, and thus we bury her forever from our sight, trusting to God's mercy she finds that happiness beyond the grave which sinful earth denied her. God help us all!—we know not whose turn it next may be to follow her! Let us go;" and slowly the small procession moved away and silently departed to their several homes.

CHAPTER XXIV. HYPOCRISY AND CRIME.

It was the fourth day from the arrest of his son for his last great crime, that Oliver Goldfinch sat beside the bed of his daughter, holding one of her hands in his, and gazing upon her features—now white as the driven snow, but seemingly composed— with a countenance haggard, and pale, and full of sorrow and anguish.

"And how do you feel to−day, my child?" he asked, with a tenderness hitherto foreign to his nature.

"Better, I thank you, father," was the low, calm reply.

"I am rejoiced to hear it, Arabella; for since Acton is gone, you are my only solace."

"O, I am so happy to know he came off clear of the foul charge; for I was fearful he had been led, in the heat of passion, to do some rash act; and when the sheriff came to arest him, I thought my brain would consume and fly from me, it felt so heated and light. But where think you he has gone, father?"

"I do not know," replied the other, turning away his head to conceal his emotion— not so much for the deception he was practising, as for the deep regret that the story he had told his daughter could not be verified and Acton be at liberty.

"But he will come back soon, father?"

"I trust so, Arabella; though the excitement is still so great, on account of even suspicion attaching itself to him, that for the present perhaps he had better remain away."

At this moment the negro Jeff entered the room, and handed Goldfinch a card.

"Where is he?" asked the latter, as he glanced at the name.

"In de parlor, Massa."

"I will be down directly. Or stay— perhaps I had better invite him up here. It is our clergyman, Arabella—the Rev. Stephen Parkhurst."

"Show him up," answered Arabella— "I shall be pleased to see him."

"I will do it myself," said Goldfinch to the negro; and he arose and left the room.

In a few minutes he returned, in company with the reverend gentleman, a man of middle age, with gray hair, and a countenance somewhat remarkable for its placidity, and a sweet, benevolent smile which lingered over it. His appearance was very prepossessing, for his very look showed you he was at heart what he openly professed, a true Christian. He greeted Arabella warmly and kindly, and immediately entered into a conversation with her, which lasted some quarter of an hour, during which he gently urged upon her the importance of putting her trust in One who was able to support her through every and all trials that she might, in the course of human events, be called upon to undergo.

"When most sorely afflicted," he said, in conclusion, "we should remember we are chastened by the hand of God for some wise purpose; and instead of weakening by doubt, we should rather strengthen our reliance by faith, that all is done for the best, and that He, in His mercy, will either safely deliver us from adversity in this life, or, what is of still more importance, bear us safely over the dark `valley of the shadow of death.' It is in our hours of trouble, when every thing seems conspiring to crush us, that we most feel the need of Divine aid; and I trust, my daughter, whatever may be your afflictions— and God only knoweth what they will be—you will rely solely upon Him, and come out in the end purified and sanctified, so as by fire, and fitted for that glorious Mansion beyond the shores of time, which he has prepared for all who love Him and keep His commandments."

Saying this, Mr. Parkhurst turned to the father of Arabella, and drawing him aside, said, in a tone too low to reach the ears of the invalid:

"My dear brother, I grieve to see you so sorely distressed. It is a terrible thing to have a beloved son, in whom the hopes of a fond father's heart are centered, arraigned at the solemn bar of man for a crime that makes humanity shudder; and deeply, from my very heart, do I sympathise with you in your awful affliction. But God alone, my brother, knoweth what is best; and I humbly pray He will send you Christian fortitude sufficient to carry you through all your terrible trials!"

The scheming man of wealth groaned.

"It is very hard to bear up, my dear brother," pursued the divine, in a consolitary tone, "when we see those we love snatched away from us by some fortuitous circumstance; but I humbly trust, in this, your trying hour, you

will bring religion to your aid, and endeavor, through much prayer, to become reconciled to God's wise dispensation."

Again the hypocrite groaned; and after looking upon him compassionately, a moment, the other went on.

"But with you, my brother, it is different from those of the world, who have, in similar afflictions, no hope to depend on. You, I trust, are a Christian, and have the holy courage of those who passed through martyrdom unflinching. You have professed the holy religion of Jesus Christ—"

"No more—no more!" interrupted Goldfinch with a groan, and a shudder that trembled through his whole frame; and covering his face with his hands, he kept it some moments concealed from the other.

How did his hypocrisy stand him now? Where was the Christian resignation he had openly professed? Where the Christian hope on which he should have been relying? How stood his conscience in this trying moment? Was it perfectly at ease—or did he feel its remorseful stings?

But Oliver Goldfinch was not yet changed at heart. His fears of the storm already gathered over him and about to burst in fury, alone made him quail. Dissimilation was in his nature yet. It was his evil genius, which ever stood ready to prompt him wrongly. And it came to his aid now; for withdrawing his hands, he continued, meekly:

"My dear Brother Parkhurst, what you have said is true. There is consolation for those who have proper faith in Divine mercy; but, at the same time, I must own, perforce, I am `of the earth earthy,' and in my worldly moments have doubtless committed many errors, for which I must atone by sincere repentance. Still I will endeavor not to despair in this trying hour, but rely upon the mercy of Him whom I have openly professed to serve, and trust, as you say, that I am chastened for a wise purpose."

"We all have our errors," returned the other, "and must needs have our moments of repentance; but it truly rejoices my soul to see you bear up with so much Christian courage."

He was on the point of proceeding farther, but the opening of the door, and the entrance of the negro in haste, with an anxious look on his countenance, interrupted him. Advancing at once to Goldfinch, the black whispered a few words in his ear. The other started, and turned deadly pale. Then rising from his seat, in some trepidation, he asked to be excused a few moments, and quitted the room, followed by the black. Some five or ten minutes elapsed, when the negro returned and whispered in the ear of the divine, who immediately rose, and saying to Arabella he would presently return, followed the messenger down stairs. In the parlor he found the host, pacing to and fro, with anxious looks and a trembling step, while at a little distance were seated two coarsely habited individuals, who seemed carelessly surveying the gorgeous furniture of the apartment and the splendid paintings adorning the walls.

"My dear brother," spoke Goldfinch, in an agitated voice, drawing the clergyman aside, "misfortune, it seems, never comes alone. I am in trouble. By what mistake, or by what foul means, I know not, but I now stand arrested for the startling crime of forgery, and must perforce away at once and answer to the calumnious charge."

"For forgery, say you, my dear brother?" exclaimed the other, in astonishment.

"Even so."

"But you are innocent?"

"As you are, my worthy friend. I do not understand it. It is, probably, some base conspiracy of my enemies, if I have any—which I am not aware of—to seize me at a time when public opinion, on account of this dreadful affair of my son, is ready to go against me, and so blast my reputation and crush me, if not with proof, at least with vile suspicion, which is but little better. But I am innocent, and shall in the end come out triumphant—though, as I said before, I must away now and answer to the charge. Oh God!" he groaned, "what is to come next?"

"This is very unfortunate," rejoined the clergyman, looking hard at the other, "and very mysterious. I am all bewilderment. What is the world coming to, surely, when man arrests and drags to prison his fellow man for a crime of which he is innocent! But fear not, my brother! Rely upon the strong arm of Jehovah, and you shall have justice done you."

The hypocrite groaned again—perhaps at the thought that the last words of the other might be verified, and that he would have justice done him, which at present was what he most feared.

"Come," spoke up one of the officers, "we can't delay any longer."

"A moment," rejoined Goldfinch; and then turning to Mr. Parkhurst, he continued: "But poor Arabella!—the news of this would kill her. You must not let her know the real state of the case, till it becomes unavoidable; but tell her I have been called away on a matter of great emergency, and you know not how soon I may return. This

you can do, without making a false statement, which of course I do not require nor expect. All knowledge of Acton must also be kept from her, till she is fully recovered; and, most important of all, my dear friend and brother, (and Goldfinch grasped the clergyman's hand, looked earnesrly and pleadingly in his eyes, while his voice became low, and tremulous, and very pathetic,) whatever may happen—and Heaven only knows what will—should, in fact, my enemies triumph, and I not be able to return—you will be kind to my daughter?—you will see that she does not suffer?—in a word, you will be a father to her, my brother?"

"I will," replied the other, solemaly, while tears of sympathy started to his eyes: "I will. But, surely, you do not apprehend—"

"Say no more!" interrupted Goldfinch, in an agony of mind that drew cold drops of perspiration to his forehead. "Say no more! Be kind to Arabella! God bless you! Farewell!" and giving the clergyman another heartly grip of the hand, he turned abruptly away, and signified to the officers he was ready to depart.

With a firm step, and a countenance now composed and serene—though within the passion−fires were wildly consuming and ready to explode, like those in the bowels of the earth just prior to a terrible eruption—Goldfinch calmly led the way to a carriage in waiting, which he entered with the officers, and was driven away, to take his preliminary trial before a magistrate for one of the boldest and most ingeniously executed forgeries on record.

CHAPTER XXV. THE FORGERY.

When Oliver Goldfinch appeared before Alderman Croly and beheld the parties present, he became so violently agitated that it was only by a great effort he prevented himself from sinking to the ground. What he saw at a glance, told him too well that his long guilty career had now come to a frightful terminus. Before him, apparently awaiting his arrival to complete their triumph, stood Morton, and Dudley, and Edgar, and, most dreaded of all, with a Sardonic grin on his ugly features, his own vile tool, the treacherous Nathan Wesley.

To understand the nefarious scheme of which Goldfinch was the author, it will be necessary for us to give in substance Wesley's testimony. Being put upon oath, with the understanding that he was to be considered as state's evidence, and consequently exonerated in the eyes of the law for his own part in the dark transaction, he told his story in such a bold, unhesitating, straight−forward manner, that all present felt convinced, no matter what had been the tenor of his life heretofore, he now at least spoke the truth.

He began by stating that some five years previous, mentioning the exact date, the accused had found him, at a time when, driven nearly to desperation by poverty, he was ripe for almost any scheme that would put money in his empty pockets, and had commenced by asking him what he would do to be rich, and ended by unfolding to him a dark plot, and offering him a fortune if he would venture to become one of the principal actors therein. This plot was no other than forging or altering a will of his own brother−in−law, Ethan Courtly, who, he stated, was about to set sail for Europe, from whence it was his (Goldfinch's) intention he should never return alive. The will, in the first place, was to be drawn up in due form by a lawyer, and then, to prevent the possibility of detection, was to be copied entire by Wesley, and the copy be presented to the principal and witnesses for signing. This was accordingly done; when Goldfinch, taking possession of it, for the purpose, as he said, of having it recorded, passed it over to Wesley for alteration. This alteration consisted in extracting, by means of a chemical process, such portions of the will as bestowed the bulk of the property upon the wife and heirs of the deceased, and supplying the place thereof with such language as would make Goldfinch the principal inheritor.

This being effected in a manner almost certain to escape detection—from the fact of the hand−writing of both the alteration and original being the same—Goldfinch, the better to blind all parties, had the boldness to have the forgery recorded the day previous to the embarkation of Ethan Courtly. Of this vile transaction, Wesley stated, in conclusion, there was only one other who had any knowledge. This was the lawyer who drew up the original will, and who,having by chance overheard a private conference between the witness and the accused, and being discovered ere the important secret had escaped hrs possession, soon after mysteriously disappeared.

"In other words, he was murdered, I suppose?" said the counsel for defence.

Wesley shuddered and turned pale, as he replied:

"I didn't say that."

"No, but your language implied as much."

"So please your Honor, and you gentlemen," said Goldfinch, with a gleam of malice on his countenance, "I do here boldly accuse Nathan Wesley of committing most foul murder, and beg you will have him arrested forthwith!"

"One case at a time," replied the magistrate.

"As matters are, I demand that my client be liberated at once!" rejoined the lawyer. "Surely, your Honor cannot think of detaining him on the flimsy evidence ot a witness who has already owned to the commission of a capital offence?"

"It's a lie!" cried Wesley, much excited. "I haven't owned to any such thing; and I'll be—if I do, either!"

"Silence, sir!" exclaimed the magistrate; "and when you speak again, make use of more respectful language, or I will have you imprisoned for contempt of court. Is there any other evidence to be brought forward touching this forgery?"

"I will bring evidence to impeach the present witness," replied the counsel of Goldfinch.

"All in good time, my friend," rejoined Morton, with marked emphasis, and a peculiar glance of deep meaning toward the other. "Before proceeding farther, your Honor, I would have an officer dispatched for this will, that we may examine it and compare it with the description given by the witness."

"It shall be done," replied Alderman Croly; and he beckoned to an officer in attendance, with whom he held some conversation, in a tone too low for the others to hear.

At this the features of Goldfinch assumed a sickly, cadaverous appearance of despair, while the countenance of Wesley, and more especially his small black eyes, displayed a look of malicious triumph.

"You'll find it," said the latter, "in a private drawer of the secretary, which stands in the library."

The officer soon after passed out of the room; but ere he did so, Morton whispered a few words in his ear, and then resuming his seat before a table, commenced overlooking some manuscripts. For a moment deep silence prevailed, and the magistrate was on the point of inquiring if any more witnesses for the prosecution were to appear, when the door slowly opened, and a pale, emaciated, ghostly figure stood in the entrance, and rolled his protruding and glassy−looking eyes steadily over those present, until they fell upon Wesley, where for a time they remained stationary, with a look well calculated to freeze the blood of one given to belief in the supernatural.

And most astonishing was its effect upon Wesley in the present instance—insomuch that every eye became fixed upon him. On the first appearance of this ghostly object, the attorney looked towards it with a careless, indifferent air.— Then he slightly started, and his features began to pale. Then his eyes enlarged and protruded, his nostrils expanded, and his lower jaw slightly dropped ajar. But it was not till the cold, glassy, unearthly−looking eyes of the figure fastened upon his, that his terror reached its height.— Then did he become a frightful picture.— With his hand raised in an attitude of horror— his eyes apparently starting from his head—his hair fairly standing on end—his mouth wide open—his breath suspended— every feature of his countenance distorted with fright and rigid as marble—with cold drops of perspiration pressing through the pores of his skin, and a slight tremor running through his frame—he remained, for a brief time, the perfect embodiment of guilty fear. At length he found his voice, and fairly shrieked:

"Man or devil—living or dead—of earth, heaven or hell—I'll speak to you! Who are you?"

"Whom you cast Into the sea," replied the apparition, in a deep, hollow, sepulchral voice.

"Great God!" shouted Wesley, springing up frantically: "can the sea give up its dead before its time?" Have you come to drag me to judgement?"

"Do you own to the horrid deed?" was the sepulchral rejoinder.

"Yes! to any thing—so you'll quit my sight forever! Hell can't have more terrors, and I'd rather be hung than see your ghost again."

"Then behold me your accuser in the living flesh," replied the figure, advancing into the room; "and thine above all others, thou man of crime!" he added, turning to Goldfinch, who was by this time almost as much a picture of horror and dismay as Wesley himself.

"This, your Honor," said Morton, addressing the magistrate, who was all amazement, "is another witness whom I have taken the liberty to introduce in this manner, for the purpose of observing what effect it would have upon the guilty. This, sir, is Alanson Davis, the lawyer who drew up the original will of Ethan Courtly."

The reader of course has not forgotten the invalid, whom Edgar found and had conveyed to the hospital, although for some time he has been apparently overlooked. His malady, as the physician stated it would be, was for some days very severe, so much so that his life was despaired of. But good medical attendance and careful nursing turned the important crisis in his favor, and from that moment he began to amend even more rapidly than was anticipated. This was doubtless much owing to his strength of will and desire to be abroad. So fast did he recover, that just previous to the murder of Ellen, Morton and Edgar were admitted to see him, when he was able to state concisely what he knew of the forgery of Goldfinch. This, combined with Wesley's disclosure, which he had made on the morning he was closeted with the lawyer, was evidence sufficient to proceed against the hypocrite; and Morton had only waited till Davis was able to leave the hospital, before making the arrest.

With this explanation we will again proceed.

As soon as Wesley had sufficiently recovered from his fright to understand that Alanson Davis stood before him in *propria persona* , his look of fear changed to one of joy; and springing forward, ere the other was aware of his purpose, he threw his arms around him and fairly shouted:

"Imprison me—hang me—do what you will with me—I don't care for consequenses now; for though I'm a villain, I'm no murderer; and since I've told all I know of my dark deeds, which he (pointing to Goldfinch) put me up to, I've got an easy conscience again, which I wouldn't exchange for the wealth of the Indies. O, sir! (to Davis) if you only knew how I've been troubled day and night in thinking over what I did to you, you'd may be have

some compassion. But you don't know any thing of it; and can't till you do something like it yourself; and so I don't expect any leniency, though I throw myself on your mercy."

His plain, common−place, earnest, impetuous words, produced an effect on Davis, which, in all probability, a strain of polished eloquence would not. It showed that the attorney was sincere in his repentance, and not, as he had expected to find him, totally depraved. There was the germ of something better in his nature than the fruits had thus far given evidence of; and being a man more ready to forgive an injury, than do a wrong himself, he thus replied:

"Far be it from me to press too hard a repentant man. What I have suffered through your misdeeds, though, God and myself only know. But as I hope to be forgiven for my own errors, I am willing to forgive those of another when I can justly do so. You, Nathan Wesley, have been a bad man—a man of guilt and crime! But as, unknowing of my existence, you have taken the preliminary steps to bring the guilty prompter of all (here he glanced at Goldfinch, who was grinding his teeth in rage and despair,) to punishment, I will take it as evidence you intend to become a better man. Only convince me, by subsequent acts, that your repentance is sincere, and I solemnly promise never to bring an accusation against you."

"You do?" cried Wesley, with a look of cestatic delight. "Well, if I don't do it, then, may I be hung higher than Haman, and the carrion−eaters tear off my vile flesh piece by piece."

The statement which Davis made, under oath, before the magistrate, in substance confirmed the evidence of Wesley. But there were some dark matters, which his own inclination and the promise he had made to the latter forbade him to touch upon, which we hasten to lay before the reader. It has been said that Davis overheard a conversation between Goldfinch and Wesley, which placed them both in his power. It occured in this wise: Goldfinch had procured Davis to draw up a will for Courtly, in the presence of the latter; and as soon as it was done, he (Goldfinch) had taken possession of it,and,under the pretext that proper witnesses were wanting, had delayed its being signed at the time, but had requested the lawyer to call again at Courtly's office at a certain hour after nightfall. Davis, mistaking the hour, called previous to the time mentioned, and finding the door ajar, and no light within, entered and took a seat to await the parties. Soon after Wesley and Goldfinch came in together, and locking the door, proceeded to discuss their plan of operation; from which it appeared that a copy of the will, drawn up by Davis, had just been made by Wesley, and was to be presented to Courtly for signing previous to the appearance of Davis, who was to be met by Goldfinch and informed that Courtly had altered his mind in regard to the original instrument, and had had another drawn up since that suited his purpose better. By this means the lawyer was to be deceived in regard to the whole affair, and his testimony rendered worthless in case the forgery should ever have a judicial investigation.

Having at last arranged every thing to his satisfaction, touching the alteration of the will, and how Courtly was to be prevented from returning, &c., Goldfinch struck a light, and, to his horror and dismay, discovered that his dark secret was in the possession of one who would, in case he escaped, be sure to betray him.— Great evils require powerful remedies; and a cold, calculating man of crime is in general prepared for all emergencies. It was so in the present instance; for drawing a pistol, Goldfinch placed it to the head of the lawyer, threatening his life if he stirred or made the least noise; and then, in a tone too low for the latter to overhear, held a hurried conference with Wesley. This over, the scheming man turned to Davis, and informed him his choice lay between instant death and his secret and sudden departure from the country.

"There is a vessel," he said, "outward bound, which sails to−morrow morning at daylight. If you will consent to be blind−folded and conducted on board of her, swearing solemnly to keep our secret till a thousand miles are between us, you shall have life, liberty and a fortune. Refuse this, and a speedy death is yours!"

Davis was not long in deciding, and of course chose the least of the two evils. To be brief, a bandage was instantly passed around his eyes; and completely muffled in a cloak, with the point of a dagger resting on his heart, and the assurance that an attempt to call for aid would cause it to be buried to the hilt, he was escorted by Goldfinch and Wesley to the water, where a skiff being procured, he was placed in it, and rowed away by the latter, while the former returned to town.

For a couple of hours he was thus borne along upon the waters, until the noise of the city had died away in the distance, and the steady strokes of the oarsman, and the ripling of the light billows against the boat, were the only sounds audible. Suddenly the oars ceased; and thinking himself near the vessel, Davis was on the point of addressing Wesley, when the latter careened the boat, and with a vigorous shove plunged him headlong into the

water. As he fell, the bandage slipped off, and he could just see the other rowing rapidly away, and the lights of the town far in the distance. He called to Wesley, and begged him, for the love of Heaven, not to leave him thus to die—but of course his entreaties were in vain. Being a good swimmer, Davis now struck out boldly for a small island about a mile to leeward; but ere he made two−thirds of the distance, he found his strength failing him rapidly. For tunately, he espied a log floating near which he managed to gain in a state of great exhaustion; and clinging to this, he floated away on the current, which was setting hard toward the open sea. In this manner he passed the night, and the next morning found himself at least ten miles from land, and still floating seaward.

But it is not our design to detail his adventures, which of themselves would fill a volume. Suffice, then, that ere another night set in, he was picked up in a state bordering on unconsciousness, by a vessel bound on a trading voyage to the coast of Africa. This vessel was afterwards wrecked on that coast, and all aboard of her save Davis and another, perished. These latter might as well have been dead; for they were made prisoners by the blacks and subjected to the most brutal treatment. In fact, the companion of Davis was after wards murdered before his eyes, and his own life only preserved by a whim of the chief of the tribe, who fancied it would become his dignity to have a white slave.

In this captivity Davis remained for three years, when he effected his escape and fortunately got on board a vessel bound for the Indies. Thence he sailed to Livverpool; and finally, after a great many perils and viscisitudes, landed in New York where, being seized with a fever and thrust out of doors, he was found by Edgar as pre viously related.

On examination of the Courtly will, the alternations mentioned by Wesley were readily discovered; and notwithstanding the original writing had been extracted in the manner stated, still, on very close in spection, here and there a word, or a part of a word, faintly traced, could be detected. This, combined with the testimony of Davis and Wesley, was overwhelmin evidence against Goldfinch, and he was accordingly committed to the Tombs to take his trial at the next sitting of the criminal court.

Incarcerated in the gloomy cell or prison; alone with his own guilty thoughts; abandoned by all who had once fawned around and flattered him; his previous deeds viewed alike with horror and contempt by the virtuous; his reputation and prospects in life blasted forever; his own children withdrawn from him by the strong hand of fate—the one a murderer, within the same strong walls that barred his own liberty, and about, it might be, to end his career on the gallows—the other a poor invalid, now left to the protection of strangers, perchance to finish her days in a mad−house; without a single hope to cheer the heavy hours that now rolled by more tardily than ever years had done before; the pale, thin specter of his deeply wronged and almost murdered sister continually before his mental vision: with all this to oppress him, Goldfinch now gave himself up to the wildest despair, a thousand times wished he had never been born, and would have put a quietus to his own existence, but that his guilty conscience trembled at the solemn thought of what might be his final doom in the great Hereafter.

Now it was he saw and felt the fickle−heartedness of worldly friends—of those who fawn upon and hang around the rich while fortune is propitious, as the bee clings to the flower till its honey−sweets are exhausted—for of all his numerous acquaintances, including those he had looked upon as intimate associates, only some two or three called upon him in prison; and these, with the exception of one, more apparently for curiosity than friendship's sake.

The exception was the Rev. Mr. Parkhurst, the man of all others Goldfinch most wished yet dreaded to behold. The clergyman, good soul, was deeply grieved; and though he was now aware he had been grossly deceived in the prisoner—whom he looked upon as a guilty being, who, while enacting the vilest deeds, had doubly perilled his soul by masking all under the semblance of holy religion—still his was a Christian spirit to overlook and forgive, and humbly hope and pray to see the tree give forth better fruits. He still urged upon Goldfinch the importance of faith in God, and reliance upon His mercy for par don of his many sins and transgressions, and begged him to seek that consolation in sincere repentance, which now, in every other manner, would be denied him.

Goldfinch listened him through, with what patience his harrassed mind would allow, and then, without attempting dissimilation again, abruptly changed the subject to his daughter, the one which now bore the hardest upon his half distracted senses. But it was little consolation he received from the answers of the clergyman. Arabella had heard of her father's arrest, and that her brother was still a prisoner; and the effect had been to completely upset her reason. She was now an unconscious guest of Mr. Parkhurst, who, having no children of his own, promised to look faithfully to her welfare; and, in the event of her mind becoming sane, would, with her

consent, adopt and make her heir to the little he possessed.

In the course of a month from his arrest, Oliver Goldfinch was arraigned at the bar of justice to take his trial for the crime of forgery. Meantime a great sensation had been excited throughout the city and country, and the press in all quarters of the Union, and even in Europe, was teeming with details of the singular affair of both father and son, from the highest circles of aristocracy and fashion, being incarcerated in the same prison, at the same time, for two such flagrant outrages against the law of God and man.

As the day of trial drew near, great efforts were made, by interested persons, to get the witnesses for the prosecution out of the way, by heavy bribes and threats of assassination—but all to no purpose.— Both Wesley and Davis appeared, and amid a court−room crowded almost to suffocation— while thousands without were forced to depart with their curiosity unsatisfied— gave in their testimony. The trial was not a long one; for the evidence was direct and positive—the will showed for itself—the prosecution summed up briefly—and though the counsel for the prisoner attempted to impeach the witnesses and made a labored defence, yet so rapidly was all carried through, that on the third day the judge gave his charge to the jury, who retired for half an hour, and brought in a verdict of " *Guilty*."

The prisoner, pale, emaciated, and breathless with fearful excitement, heard the awful word of condemnation, and sank down with a groan of agony that for a time seemed to deprive him of consciousness.

The judge, after proper deliberation, proceeded to make some very appropriate remarks on the heinousness of his crime; and winding up with the observation that he considered it a very aggravated case, sentenced Oliver Goldfinch to fifteen years hard labor in the state−prison. He was then, more dead than alive, remanded to his cell, to await his turn to be taken hence to serve out his term of sentence among the vilest of criminals.

Before he left the city, the forger requested an interview with his daughter, who had, meantime, regained her reason, but was still in feeble health. Arabella— more like a specter than her former self— accompanied by the Rev. Mr. Parkhurst, who had done all in his power to restore her, and soften, by Godly counsel, her overwhelming affliction—waited upon him in prison, where, for an hour, father and daughter were closeted together. When Arabella came forth, it was with a tottering step; and being conducted to a carriage, she was conveyed to her present home, and again placed in bed, where she remained, her spirit hovering on the verge of eternity, for a period of several weeks.

Goldfinch was also, at his own request, granted a parting interview with his guilty son; and when the jailor came in to separate them, he found both lying upon the floor and locked in each other's arms. They finally parted as two beings who fondly love, but expect never to behold each other again in mortal life; and the separation was such, that, hardened as he was in all manner of prison scenes, the jailor could not restrain a tear of pity at the awful doom they had justly drawn down upon themselves.

The next morning, heavily ironed, like a common felon, the once proud, courted, opulent and philanthropic, but hypocritical and guilty Oliver Goldfinch, was borne from the city, a condemned criminal, to expiate, according to the law he had violated, his daring offence against the welfare of community.

Farther, for the present, we shall follow him not, but leave him to justice and his fate.

CHAPTER XXVI. THE LOVERS.

It was just after the close of the trial of her uncle, by which the law had decided that the immense possessions of her father had been wrongfully withheld from herself and brother, and when she had in a manner exchanged her humble state of poverty and dependence for that of a brilliant heiress of great wealth, and knew that her hand would now be eagerly sought for by thousands, who, a few weeks previous, would have looked upon her with pity and contempt—it was just at this period, we say, when she had every inducement to be vain and proud—had vanity or pride formed a part of her nature—that Virginia Courtly, still an honored guest of the Mortons, who would not listen to aught touching her departure, sat alone with Dudley, in the splendid parlor of the lawyer's elegant mansion, her fair features very pale, and her soft blue eyes fixed with a look of earnest surprise upon the one by her side, as if he had just uttered a sentence whose meaning she did not distinctly comprehend. The eyes of Dudley were looking tenderly into hers; but there was a crimson hue on his cheek, a tremor in his voice, and an embarrassment in his manner, as he said:

"Yes, Virginia, I repeat, that for your sake and that of your noble brother, I am rejoiced to know you both will soon come in possession of an immense fortune; but still it makes me rather sad than otherwise to think of it."

"And wherefore, Mr. Dudley, should you be sad?"

"Why, with wealth, you know, come great expectations; and it sometimes happens, that those who have been friends in poverty, suddenly become estranged when fortune raises one above the other."

"Why, surely, you cannot so wrong me, as to suppose the mere acquisition of wealth will alter my deep feelings of friendship for you?"

"Do not say wrong you, Virginia, (and his voice faltered to pathetic tenderness,) for I would not wrong you for the world! Neither can I conscientiously say I think your friendship will be less sincere and ardent, when you have become the heiress of half a million, than at this present moment; but, Virginia, (and his tone became low and tremulous,) you are aware, doubtless, there are sometimes aspirations in the heart that reach beyond mere friendship, and deepen into the stronger and holier sentiment of love; and when this is the case, where there is a great disparity of position, he or she who stands the lowest in the scale, can only hope tremulously, or with a hope full of doubt, and fear, and bordering on despair."

As he spoke, with his eye fixed intently upon her, the gaze of Virginia sank modestly to the ground, her features flushed and paled alternately, and her respiration became somewhat irregular, showing that his words had a power of meaning beyond what they clearly expressed. After looking at her a moment, Dudley, in a low, tender tone, resumed:

"There was a time, Virginia—ere in my mind there came a foretokening shadow of the events which have since transpired, and by which, as every one can foretell, you are destined to take an exalted position in society—when I gazed upon you with a delight—a rapture—which, though I was then able in a measure to mask, I have not language now to describe—and when I fondly looked forward to a no distant period, and fancied that, as an humble individual, I could ask your hand as an equal, and fear not the rivalry of more wealthy suitors."

"And has that time passed?" inquired Virginia, with a deeper blush, and in a faltering voice.

"Perhaps not wholly; but you know, as well as I, that as an heiress of half a mil lion, you are a match for the most brilliant spirits of the age, and can have a host of admirers at your feet, who, if they cannot equal you in fortune, can go so far beyond him who has nothing but a name—"

"And shall I," interrupted Virginia, now raising her eyes, sparkling with animation, to those of Dudley—"shall I, for these puppets of the world—these butterflies of fashion—relinquish the friends that came nobly forward in my hours of adversity, and raised my drooping spirits, when they were sinking under the treble weight of poverty, grief and despair, and taught me there was something still to live for—to hope for—that human nature was not all corrupted and depraved—shall I, I say, because fortune has chanced to smile upon me once more, now prove myself ungrateful, without nobility of soul, and forget the latter and embrace the former—who would, but for my money, turn from me with contempt— simply because in the worthless dross of this world (worthless beyond what we need ourselves, or use to the benefit of our fellows,) we are nearly equal? No, Heaven forbid! What is their wealth to me, if I have enough of my own? Oh! I have suffered too keenly the pangs of destitution, to prize

those who look with scorn upon the poor; and would rather have one noble, generous, sympathising soul by my side, though needy as Lazarus, than be surrounded by the most brilliant array of the hollow−hearted world, though every glance from them bestowed my weight in gold, and every smile became a diamond fit for the crown of an emperor!"

"Nobly spoken!" cried Dudley, with an enthusiastic gleam of delight. And then his countenance seemed to change, as by some painful recollection, and he immediately added, in a subdued tone: "But all who are rich are not hollow−hearted. There are some, who, having almost boundless wealth at their command, seem to seek only the means of spending it to the best advantage of their fellow beings, and who, in every act of life, study to exalt themselves and ennoble others. Of this class there may be congenial spirits, who will seek your hand, and who are possessed of every requisite to make you happy. And this reminds me, Virginia, that I have a charge to execute for a friend, whom I esteem as my own life; and who, having seen you at various times, believes you the very paragon of excellence. But read this, and doubtless you will more fully comprehend my meaning;" and he handed Virginia a letter, beautifully folded and sealed and stamped with care, on which her own name was delicately traced in handsome characters.

Virginia opened, glanced over it quickly, marked the name at the bottom, and then, with a heightened color, re−perused it more leisurely.

"This is strange!" she said, as she finished the epistle: "this is very strange!— Are you uware, Mr. Dudley, what this billet contains?"

"Nothing, I trust, offensive—or I shall never forgive myself for being the messenger of conveyance," replied Dudley, earnestly.

"No, it contains nothing offensive in reality; aud yet I would it had never been written."

"And wherefore, Virginia?"

"Because I must disappoint the hopes of the writer. It is, in a word, a declaration of love from Clarence Malcolm, and an offer of his hand."

"And will you refuse to accept both, when I assure you they are made in all sincerity?" asked Dudley, coloring.

"I have heard much of Mr. Malcolm," replied Virginia, "and believe him all that is generous and noble, and, as your own most intimate friend, must ever hold him in high esteem; but you must remember, withal, I have never seen him; and even if I had, and had found him as near perfection as mortal man can ever become, must still have rejected his suit."

"On what grounds?"

"That I cannot give my hand where my heart is not."

"But an acquaintance with each other might excite a mutual passion."

"Never, Mr. Dudley; for she who truly loves, can love but one."

"Ah, then you love!" sighed Dudley.

Virginia hung her head, with a blush, and was silent.

"And might I venture to inquire," said Dudley, after a pause, in a faltering, embarrassed tone, "who is the fortunate rival of my friend?"

"And can *you* ask that?" replied Virginia, *naively*, turning away her head, and seeming to search for something she had lost.

Dudley started, and his voice was tremulous, but eager, as he rejoined:

"Do I understand aright? Is it possible that poor Dudley is preferred to his wealthy friend? Speak, dear Virginia, and keep me not in suspense? Let me not soar aloft on the bright wings of hope, only to be dashed back on the dark rocks of disappointment and despair! As poor Dudley, I have nothing to offer you but my hand and heart; but if these will suffice, they are yours; and my very existence shall be devoted to add, by every means in my power, to your happiness. Our acquaintance has not been long, it is true; but there are hearts which so harmonise from the very first, that time can add nothing but its own strength of years to an attachment formed for endurance through this life and the after life beyond the grave. In a word, I felt I loved you from our first meeting: and now that I have, perhaps presumptuously, fancied a reciprocity of feeling, I offer you my hand, and ask that you will be mine. Speak, dear Virginia, the single word, that will elevate me to the very pinacle of rapture, or plunge me far down the precipice of regret and disappointment! Speak, dearest—will you be mine!"

Virginia did not reply; but there was that in her appearance and manner—a certain silent language of the heart,

shining out in warm blushes upon her cheek, and raising the pearly tear in her soft blue eye, as tenderly and tremulously it beamed upon his—that spoke with an eloquence exceeding words. Quietly Dudley stole her fair hand, and pressed it to his lips; and then, emboldened by this, drew her gently and unresistingly to his heart, and sealed upon her ruby lips the first holy kiss of eternal love and pledge of union on earth and in the life immortal.

For the space of half an hour there was little or nothing said—for true love is ever the most eloquent in silence—and then Dudley, with an arch smile on his countenance, and in a cheerful tone, spoke:

"And now, dearest Virginia, say you wish Clarence Malcolm joy in his triumph."

"Joy in his triumph!" repeated Virginia, with a look of surprise. "I do not understand you. To what triumph do you allude?"

"His triumph in winning you."

"In winning me, Dudley? I am more at a loss than ever to understand you."

"I see you are, dearest," he replied, dropping gracefully upon one knee, taking her hand, and looking tenderly into her sweet, blue eye. "Dudley no more, then; but in him who kneels at your feet, behold Clarence Malcolm in *propria persona!*"

"You—you Clarence Malcolm?—Dudley and Malcolm one?" cried Virginia, in astonishment.

"Even so, dearest; and now, ere I rise, I must have pardon for having in the least deceived you; though by this deceit I have been rendered happy above my deserts, in knowing I have been accepted for myself alone, and not for my possessions, which are great beyond my wants. When first I met you, I gave my name as Dudley, without a design other than the whim of the moment; but after circumstances induced me to keep you in ignorance of my real appellation, in which I have thus far succeeded, though at the risk, many times, of an exposure from others."

"Does Edgar know of this?"

"He did not till quite recently, when some one calling me by my real name in his presence, I was forced to explain−−though I did it by exacting of him a promise to withhold the secret from you."

"And the Widow Malcolm, then, whom I have so often visited with you—"

"Is my own mother."

"I am all bewilderment. I thought it very strange I never met Clarence, but supposed it purely accidental. Now, methinks, I can recall a hundred scenes when you were on the point of being exposed, and many that looked mysterious to me, though not sufficiently so to excite a suspicion of the real cause."

"Well, dearest, you forgive me!"

"Freely so, on one condition."

"Name it."

"That as Dudley you wooed, and as Dudley you won me, I may still call you by that endearing title."

"So be it, dearest Virginia, and not wholly call me wrongly; for as my mother's maiden name was Dudley, I shall feel myself entitled henceforth to sign myself Clarence Dudley Malcolm, and seal it thus;" and rising from his kneeling posture, he imprinted a second kiss upon the lips of her who was now pledged to him forever.

It was a calm, beautiful, moonlight night, and in the solemn "place of graves"—the sacred sanctuary of those who have "shuffled off this mortal coil" and gone down to that silent, cold, untroubled rest that knows no waking—two forms might be seen moving slowly on together—the one a noble youth in the first vigor of early manhood—the other a maiden in all the sweet, fresh loveliness of the opening rose. Slowly these two beings moved on together, with silent, solemn step, as if their feet pressed the ground with a reverence too sacred to jar the earth above the final sleep of the dead. All was silent here—though the busy hum of the city, whose lights were sparkling not afar, could be faintly heard like the roll of a distant drum. All was still. Not a breeze stirred the blade and plant, that had here grown rank in their summer day, and had fallen crisp and sere beneath the fatal blasts and frosts of chilling autumn and hoary winter. Not a breath rustled the leaves, that, in their day, had made the trees as sylvan bowers, but had long since been stripped of their beauty, and now lay withered and crumbling above the mortal remains of those who had planted and trained their supporters in infancy. The fair moon, riding high in the clear heavens, poured down her mellow beams through the naked trees, upon the crisped plants and blades; upon the faded flowers that had bloomed and decayed above the remains of frail mortality; upon the withered leaves, that now spread a funeral pall over earth's best and fairest—over hearts that had once beat high with hope and joy, or, burning with the passionfires of unrequited love, or failing ambition, or corroding grief, or stinging remorse, had at last been quenched in despair, and smothered in death; upon sculptured marble, that told,

with ostentatious vanity, of the once opulent dust that now reposed beneath; upon plain marble stones, that marked the resting place of those who, having followed a middle course of life, had been quietly "gathered to their fathers;" upon plain mounds of earth, that covered such as had fallen too recently, or too much in poverty, or with friends too few, to have their last homes more conspicuously marked; upon the remains of wealth and poverty, virtue and vice, the good and the bad; upon the quick and the dead the fair moon shone down—here brightening this object to bold relief, there casting that in the gloom of deep shadow—but still shining steadily down, with a silvery, solemn light, as if aware her beams fell upon a spot made hallowed hy the frail dust of those who had gone hence forever.

Slowly the two figures moved on together, in silence, with even pace, past highwrought monuments and common stones— past tombs of high and lowly born—past graves of rich and poor—past light and shade, and every where amid decay: slowly they moved on, till, far aside from where most lay buried, they paused over a small rise of earth that had never yet been green above its mortal tenant. Here the youth took the hand of the maiden in one that trembled with deep emotion; and while with the other he brushed away the dew that, from the fountain of his heart, had gathered in his eye, he said:

"What place so fitting for sacred things as above the remains of one we most dearly prized in life! Here it is, beholding the vanities of all things earthly, we feel least tempted with its deceits, and most sincerely desirous to embrace those pure and holy joys, which, though intangible, are still incorruptible, and, being beyond the power of annihilation, can only by death be changed to a more blissful state of existence. Next to the pure enjoyment of religion, is that of mutual love, pledged by two hearts, that assimilate as the quiet stream and placid lake, to become one and undivided when once united. Edith, (and the voice of the speaker became low and tremulous,) we have been much together— in the short space of weeks, I feel we have known each other for years—the sentiments of my heart are already in your keeping—and here, on the most sacred spot which earth holds for me, I offer you my hand, and with it pledge you my unchangeable, undying love!"

There was a silence, after the voice of the speaker had ceased—a tremulous silence on the part of the maiden—and then, in a solemn, sweet, silvery, artless tone, she replied:

"Edgar, as sacredly, as solemnly, and sincerely as it is proffered, do I accept your hand and heart, and in return yield you a love as true as Heaven, and constant as the needle to its bridal star."

"Above thy mortal remains, witness it, O mother, thou saint in Heaven! and thou, Great Ruler of all! that here we freely pledge ourselves to each other, and stamp it with a seal of more than mortal affection;" and upon the lips of the lovely, trembling Edith Morton, Edgar Courtly imprinted the first holy kiss of their mutual and enduring love.

CHAPTER XXVII. CONCLUSION.

We have stated previously, that it was not our design to give in detail the trial of Acton Goldfinch for the murder of Ellen Douglas—the only one he was destined to have—as Virginia, after hearing of the fate of the latter, had positively refused to appear against him—although, on behalf of the State, her evidence alone would perhaps have been sufficient to convict him. It will therefore only be necessary to our purpose to briefly sketch the proceedings against him and the result.

The day, then, that Acton was put upon trial for his life, was one marked with an excitement almost as intense as when he was first brought forward for examination. The trial itself was long and tedious, and thousands were daily forced to go away with their curiosity, for a sight of the prisoner, unsatisfied—the court−room, from the earliest to the latest hour, being crowded almost to a state of suffocation. The evidence in the case was mainly circumstantial, and in no instance, for the prosecution, positive—the nearest approach to it being the testimony of Sarah Farling, who swore that, to the best of her belief, the person she admitted into the dwelling of Madame Costellan, just previous to the murder of Ellen, was the prisoner—but that it *was* he, she would not positively affirm. The evidence, therefore, on the part of the state, was wholly circumstantial— but so direct and strong, that no one doubted of the guilt of the prisoner, and very few of his final conviction. The cloak and dagger were both brought forward and identified as his property—the tailor who made the one being summoned as a witness, and the merchant who sold the other likewise. It was not only proved that these were the property of the prisoner, but that both were in his possession an hour previous to the awful deed, and the sheath of the dagger was found on his person at the time of his arrest. It was proved, too, he had often made bitter threats against the life of the deceased, and that he had been seen going in the direction of her abode only half an hour previous to the fatal deed. Here, on evidence as strong, apparently, as "holy writ," the prosecution rested.

The defence opened by an attempt to prove the previous good conduct of the prisoner, and impeach some of the witnesses for the state—both of which attempts were little better than failures; and every one had settled it in his own mind that the prisoner *must* be convicted, when lo, and behold! a witness was brought forward, who astounded and confounded all by proving an *alibi*. This was a German grocer, who, under solemn oath, in the face of God and man, firmly and di rectly asseverated, that at the time the murder was committed, the prisoner was in his company, at least half a mile from the scene of the horrid transaction, and that he and the prisoner did not separate for an hour afterwards.

What though the judges and lawyers, the jury and spectators, were all taken aback by this unlooked for testimony!−−what though they believed it false—that the witness had perjured himself!−−yet here the evidence was before them—direct, straightforward, positive, and unimpeached−−and, as such, the jury were bound by oath to take it for literal truth. The judges and jury were here to decide a case involving the life of a fellow being—not according to their prejudices—not, strictly speaking, according to their belief—but wholly, and irrespectively of party or person, according to the evidence adduced on the trial. What though they believed the witness had perjured himself? Their belief amounted to nothing until it was proved against him; and not being proved against him, they were bound to take his testimony; and taking his testimony, were consequently bound by their oaths to render a verdict of acquittal to the prisoner. With the falsity or truth of the grocer's statement they had nothing to do, so long as it was unimpeached before the court. The prisoner, most certainly, could not be in two places at the same time; the prosecution had *not* proved positively he was the person who committed the deed; the defence *had* proved positively he was the person who did not; consequently there was but one way to decide.

In giving his charge to the jury, the judge brought forward all these points in a clear, concise and forcible manner, and concluded by observing, that where there was the least doubt regarding the guilt of the accused, the common law of humanity bade them lean to the side of mercy. The jury then retired; but not until some time the following day were they able to agree, when they returned a verdict of "Not Guilty."

This decision was received with great dissatisfaction by the public at large, before whose tribunal Acton already stood condemned; and so high ran the popular feeling against him, that it was deemed expedient to detain him in confinement till the excitement had somewhat subsided.

Throughout Acton's trial, poor Arabella, who had regained her reason and sufficient strength for the task, was

ever, like a guardian angel, by his side, watching his every look, and cheering him with what feeble words of hope she could summon to her aid. Her features, like his own, were very pale and haggard, and it was evident to all who beheld her, that grief, anxiety and keen despair, were, cancer−like, gnawing at her heart's core, and wasting away her once queenly form.−− Whatever of animosity might prevail against the brother, not a soul, with a particle of humanity in his composition, could view that noble, self−sacrificing, and almost superhuman devotion of the sister, with other than feelings of profound respect and sincere compassion; and many there were who wished him acquitted for her sake. That he was guilty of the crime laid to his charge, Arabella felt well convinced; but in extenuation of the foul act, she sincerely believed he had committed it in the heat of passion, and had deeply regreted it ever since—both of which suppositions were literally true. In any event, he was her brother, had always been kind to her, and was the only being on earth, save her father, she truly loved. Besides, he was now alone in the world, without a sympathising friend, and she could not bear the terrible thought of his coming to an ignominious death. At least she was his sister, she had a right to be with him, and she felt it her duty so to be; and regardless of the opinions of the world, she flew to his side, to stand his steadfast friend, let weal or wo betide.— More dead than alive, she was present to hear the verdict of the jury; and when the final words, "not guilty," were pronounced in an audible voice, she swooned for joy, and in an unconscious state was borne from the court room.

But Arabella's devotion to her brother ended not here. She resolved to share his fortune, whatever it might be; and though the Rev. Mr. Parkhurst tried with all the arguments in his power to dissuade her from it, and offered her a home for life; and though Edgar, who had now come in possession of his father's property, so long and wrongfully withheld by his uncle and her father, proposed to settle upon her an independency; yet all propositions were alike made in vain. She firmly but respectfully declined to accept of elther; and when, soon after, Acton secretly left the city, Arabella was his companion, and went no one knew whither.

And now, the design of the present volume being accomplished, here, for a time at least, ends the history of the family of Goldfinch. The final fate of father, son and daughter belongs to a subsequent period; and it remains for the public to decide, whether the writer of these pages shall ever again call them from obscurity to the stage of action, or allow them, with all their virtues and vices, to rest forevermore in oblivion.

Immediately after the conviction of Oliver Goldfinch, Nathan Wesley left for parts unknown; while Davis returned to his friends in Baltimore, where Edgar generously settled upon him an income of a thousand dollars per annum.

Some two or three weeks from the acquital of Acton Goldfinch, a brilliant array of wealth, beauty and talent were assembled at Malcolm Place, to solemnize the nuptials of Edgar and Edith, Clarence and Virginia; and though every thing was conducted on a scale of sufficient magnificence to excite the envy of the proudest of the *beau monde* , yet so true were Malcolm and Courtly to their noble principles, that the poor of the city long had cause to remember that day with gratitude, as in truth they still have their generous benefactors.

On the second morning after his marriage, Edith handed Edgar one of the leading journals of the city, and pointing with her fair, delicate hand to a prominent paragraph, blushingly bade him read. Edgar did read; and his eyes dilated with surprise, and his heart swelled with pride, at the following brief notice:

"Marriage in High Life.—At Malcolm Place, on the 5th inst., by the Rev. Stephen Parkburst, Clarence Malcolm, Esq.— long and favorably known to the literary world as a leading writer of the — Magazine, and a frequent contributor to various other periodicals, and in private life as a philanthropist, gentleman and scholar—was united in the holy bonds of wedlock to Miss Virginia Courtly, a niece of Oliver Goldfinch, whose trial and conviction, for the forging of a will of her father, by which both herself and brother were long deprived of their rightful possessions, recently excited so much surprise and attention in this city. Also, by the same, at the same time and place, Edgar Courtly, Esq.—a nephew of the said Oliver Goldfinch, but better known to our readers as a gifted poet, under the *nom de plume* of "Orion"—was united to the lovely Miss Edith Morton, only child of Calvin Morton, Esq., a lawyer of great eminence.— The wedding was a brilliant one—all the talent and fashion of the city were present— every thing went off delightfully— and the joyous couples have our most ardent wishes for their future prosperity and happiness."

"God bless you, my son!" cried Morton, stealing up behind Edgar while he was reading; "you were becoming famous without my knowledge."

"Ay, and without my own," returned Edgar, blushing. "Ha! here, methlnks, comes the cause," he added, nodding toward Clarence, who at this moment entered the apartment, accompanied by Virginia.

"Well," answered Malcolm, with a smile, as Edgar explained the subject of conversation, "you know I purchased your poems, and of course felt I had a right to use them as suited my humor. But you are still more famous, Edgar, than you have given yourself credit for. Read these at your leisure;" and he threw down upon the table some half−a−dozen different journals, each of which contained a high ly complimentary notice of himself and friend. Edgar was by no means vain— but he could not drink in so much praise of his humble efforts and remain totally unmoved. The main−spring of a laudable ambition was touched; and mainly to this circumstance, the world has since been indebted for many a beautiful effusion from his gifted pen; while Clarence, under an assumed title, already ranks among the leading writers of America.

And now, kind reader, we feel that our task is accomplished. In the pages preceding, we have endeavored to show you how vice may for a time triumph over virtue; how hypocrisy may take the place of truth, and deceive the world with its false glare; how the innocent and pure at heart may be made the suffering victims of the guilty and vicious; how crime may lie concealed, until, in its very security, it breeds exposure; how retribution, sooner or later, follows guilt, and strikes with a heavy hand the guilty doer; how a deviation from the straight paths of virtue and honor generally leads to ruin and death; how the poor, without friends, may struggle in vain and die unpitied; how good actions may proceed from the seemingly bad, and bad actions from the seemingly good; how the innocent may be accused and arrested as guilty—how the guilty may escape the justice of the law as innocent; how a noble act generally finds a noble reward; how true virtue gives way to no temptation, but bears the ills of life with patience, hoping for a better day, and rejoices triumphant in the end. In short, we have endeavored to sketch a true picture of life as it exists in the crowded city; and though aware that the sketch is faintly lined and faulty, yet if it please, so far as it goes, we shall rest satisfied our humble efforts have not been wholly made in vain. With you, gentle reader, rests the moral of our story; and so, for the present, adicu. THE END.