

The Taxidermist

Fitz Hugh Ludlow

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I.—The Old Maid's Chapter

———Die, if dying I may give
Life to one who asks to live,
And more nearly,
Dying thus, resemble thee!

`Ciel! Zat is ze true heroique! Zat is ze very far finest ting in all ze literature anglaise! Zere have not been made vun more sublime poesie by your immortal Villiams Shakyspeare! Glorieux! Vat a grandeur moral of ze woman who vill vonce die for her love!

`_Once_? I knew a woman who died twice for _hers_.'

The enthusiastic admirer of Longfellow was a French professor in one of our American Colleges, by name Gautier Bonenfant. The person who met his panegyric with such a strange response, was Orloff Ruricson, by birth a Swede, by adoption a New-Yorker, and by trade the proprietor of a Natural History Museum. These two, with myself, were sitting on the west piazza of the little inn at Kaaterskill Falls. All of us hard-working men in the hard-working season; but on this tenth day of July, eighteen hundred and fifty-nine, soaking the dust out of our brains in a bath of sunlight and mountain air, forgetting in company that life was not all one sweet vacation.

Bonenfant and I looked at Ruricson with puzzled faces. Though a good fellow and a wisely humorous one, he seldom said anything whose cleverness lay in a double-entendre.

`Pray, who is that remarkable woman?' said I.

`It is my wife,' replied Orloff Ruricson soberly.

`And she die, von, two, tree time?' asked Bonenfant, with uplifted eyebrows.

`And she died three times for her love,' repeated Orloff Ruricson.

`Perhaps you would have no objection to tell us exactly what you mean?' said I.

`None at all, to _you two_. With this proviso. I know that you, John Tryon, write for the magazines. For aught I know, Bonenfant here, may be a correspondent of the _Constitutionnel_.'

`Mais non! I am ze mose red of Red Republican!'

`Perhaps you are Ledru Rollin, then, travelling in disguise to hunt materials for a book. At any rate, I must exact of both of you a promise, that if a single lineament of the story I am going to relate, ever gets into print through your agency, it shall be represented as fictitious, and under assumed names.'

`C'est fait!'

`It's a bargain!'

`You see, I live by my Museum. And if the public suspected that I was a visionary man, the press and the pulpit and general opinion would run me down immediately. I should be accused of denying the originality of the human race inferentially, through my orang-utang; of teaching lessons of maternal infidelity through my stuffed ostrich; of seducing youth into a seafaring life by my preserved whale. No more schools, at half-price on Saturday afternoon, accompanied by their principal; no more favorable notices by editors `who have been with their families,' for you, Orloff Ruricson!'

`And what I am going to tell you will seem visionary. Even to you. Nevertheless, it is as real as any of the hardest facts in my daily life. Take my solemn word for it.

`When I was ten years old, my parents emigrated from Sweden to this country. At the age of twelve, I lost my father. At thirteen, I was apprenticed to a man who stuffed birds in Dutch-street. At fourteen, I was motherless. At twenty, my term was out, and I began to think of setting up as a taxidermist on my own hook. There! The Biographical Dictionary can't beat that summary of ten years, for compactness!

`I made a very liberal offer to my master; in fact, proposed to take him into partnership. He nobly refused to avail himself of my generosity. Bird-stuffing, even in New-York, was not a very lucrative business, and would hardly support two, he suggested. What did I think of one of the river towns? Albany, or Hudson, or Poughkeepsie, for instance? I did not tell him what; but in reality, I thought so little of them, that within ten days after my indenture was cancelled, I had taken a little nook in the Bowery, with window enough to show off three blue-jays, a chameleon, and a very young wild-cat, (whose domesticity I may, at this day, acknowledge to have

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been slandered by that name,) and sufficient door to display the inscription: 'Orloff Ruricson, Taxidermist and Aviarian Professor.' Even at that day, you see, Bonenfant, we imposters had begun to steal your literary title.'

'Sacrebleu! I do very moshe vish zat ze only ting ze plenty humbug professors now—a—days _stuff_ was ze _birds_!'

'Well, _I_ may have stuffed the public a little, too. At any rate, they patronized me far better than I had any reason to expect. By the time I was of age, I had moved my business one door farther up, to a shop treble the size of the first; and instead of sleeping under and eating on top of my show—case, as I began, I occupied lodgings with a respectable cutler's widow, second—story front of a brick house on Third Avenue, and came down to my store every morning at nine o'clock, like any wholesale grocer.

'I had been installed in my comfortable quarters only six weeks, when a new lodger came to the boarding—house. The first thing that I knew of it, was my beholding, directly opposite me at a Sunday dinner, the most preternaturally homely face I had ever seen. As I took my seat, and opened my napkin, the cutler's widow inclined her head in the direction of the apparition, and uttered the words: 'Miss Brentnall.' I cast a glance and a bow in the same quarter, pronouncing the name after her. 'Mr. Ruricson,' said the landlady laconically, and nodded toward me. 'Mr. Ruricson,' repeated the miracle of plainness, in a voice so sweet that I could not rid myself of the impression that it must be the ventriloquism of some one else. At the same moment she smiled. The smile was as incongruous with the face as the voice; and for that glancing half—minute, Miss Brentnall was a dozen shades more endurable.'

'Cruikshank, acting as collaborator of Salvator Rosa, would fall short of any thing more ambitious than a slight sketch of the woman's unearthly homeliness. I dare hardly attempt to describing her in words, but for your sake, let me try.

'Her hair was like Bonenfant's Republicanism, 'the most red of red,' but without the usual characteristic of that color, silky fineness. In fact, unless you have been through a New England corn—field in the dog—days, and noticed the very crispest of all the crisp tassels which a brazen sun has been at work baking for the month previous; unless you have seen some peculiarly unsheltered specimen, to the eye like dried blood, and to the fingers like dust and ashes, you cannot imagine the impression produced by Miss Brentnall's hair. I really trembled lest our awkward waiter's sleeve would touch it, in serving the vegetables, and send it crumbling from her head in a form of a crimson powder. Her forehead was in every respect immensse— high, broad, and protuberant enough for the tallest man who ever prided himself on his intellect; still, it might have been pardoned, if it had been fair withal, instead of sallow, wrinkled and freckled. A nose, whose only excuse for its mammoth maturity of size and its Spitzenberg depth of color, lay in the fact that it was exposed to the torrid glare of the tresses, depended, like the nest of the hanging bird, between a pair of ferrety eyes, which seemed mere penknife gashes in a piece of red morocco. At that day, I could not swear to the pupils; but a profane man of sensitive mind, might have sworn at them them, for they seemed to be a damp—not a swimming, but a soaked damp—pale blue. Flanking the nose, imagine an inch and a half on either side, of dingy parchment, stretched almost to tearing, and you will get the general idea of the sides of Miss Brentnall's face; I will not travesty the word 'cheeks,' by calling them that. Below the nose, a mouth which would have been deformedly small for a child two weeks old; before that, a chin which hardly showed at all in front, and, taking a side view, seemed only an eccentric protraction of the scraggy neck to which it was attached. Now for the figure. High, stooping shoulders; a long, flat, narrow, mannish waist; the lower extremities immoderately short; immense feet; group these in one person, and you have a form to which I know only two parallels out of the world of nightmare, a German wooden doll, and Miss Brentnall.'

'Diable de laideur! You see zat viz your own eyes?'

'Yes, Bonenfant.'

'And yet you be yourself not vare ugly, after all!'

'So I have heard, Bonenfant. You will be more surprised to feel that this is the case, when you know that I lodged in the same house with Miss Brentnall a whole year. Indeed, she occupied the very next room to mine. I was second—story, front, she second—story back, during all that time; and do you know that I became very well acquainted with her?'

'Ah! It is pos—_sible_ for a gentleman to be vare polite to vare ugly woman.'

'Yes, but from preference, I mean. I could shut my eyes, and hear her voice, or open them at the transient

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moment when she was smiling, and forget that she was homely at all. I discovered that she was the only remnant of a large family; that awakened my pity. In addition, she was very well-informed, thought and conversed well; that aroused my respect. And when, in spite of a face and figure which by poetic justice should have belonged to Sin itself, I perceived that she had the kindest of hearts, and the most delicate of sensibilities, I am not ashamed to confess that I soon became attached to her.'

'Attach? You have fall in love vis zat e-scary-crow? You have married her?'

'Hear me through, Bonenfant, and you will find out. In the present instance, I mean, by the word 'attached,' nothing but a pure Platonic friendship. I do not make acquaintance easily. I visited nobody in New-York at that time. There was no one whose cheerful fireside I could make my own for an evening; and my natural tastes, to say nothing of any other feeling, kept me away from drinking-saloons. Moreover, I had an insatiable longing to make something of myself. I wanted the means for buying books, for travelling, for putting myself into what I considered good society. Accordingly, I often brought home, at evening, the specimens I had been working upon all day, and continued my labors long into the night. While I was busily engaged with the knife or the needle, the gentlest little tap would come at the door, so gentle, so unlike any other sound, that, however absorbed I might be, I always heard it, knew it was Miss Brentnall, and said: 'Walk in!' So, in hopped that eighth world-wonder of ugliness, now with an orange for my supper, now with some pretty ornithological engraving, of which, by the merest chance, she always had a duplicate copy, and whose effect she would like to see on my wall. When she went out, she always forgot to take it with her; and in a few months, my room, through such like little kindnesses, became quite a portrait-gallery of celebrated birds. Sometimes, Miss Brentnall spent the whole evening with me. On such occasions, it was her greatest delight to stand by my table, and see some poor, mused, shrivelled lark or Canary grow plump and saucy again, through the transformations of my art. She called it 'bird-resurrection.' For an hour at a time, she would stay close at my elbow, perfectly quiet, holding a pair of glass eyes in her hand. When I asked for one of them, she gave it to me with all the happiness of a helpful child; and, when at last both eyes were fixed in the specimen, I have seen her clap her hands, and jump up and down. In process of time, she became a real assistance to me. So apt a mind had she, that from merely witnessing my methods, she learned to stuff birds herself; and one evening, when I called 'come in,' to the well known tap, I was surprised by seeing a parrot in her hands, prepared and mounted almost as well as I could have done it myself. It was a little present for the Professor, she said; she had been at work upon it for the last two days. From that time, her voluntary services were in my contant employ, whenever I worked of evenings.

'I was not so ungallant, however, as to let Miss Brentnall do all the visiting. Whenever a lazy fit took me, and I could not have worked, or studied, or walked, if I had been offered ten dollars an hour for these exertions, I always forestalled her coming to my room by going to hers. She had a large rocking-chair, which always seemed to run up to the fireplace of its own accord, and hold out is arms for me, the moment I came in. I would drop into that, shut my eyes, and say, 'Please talk to me,' or 'Please read to me,' with as much abandonment as if I were speaking to my own mother. It never felt like exacting impertinent demands of a stranger, I was so marvellously at my ease in Miss Brentnall's room.'

'Ze man of mose mauvaise honte be not embarrass, I have observe, viz ze vare ugly lady.'

'I don't think it was that, Bonenfant. I used to ask myself if it might not be. But I always came to the conclusion that I should feel the same, were Miss Brentnall the most beautiful person in the world. There was something in her mind, especially as expressed in voice and style of talking, that lulled me when I was most irritable, that lifted the weight of self and pride quite off me for the time being. I knew that we both liked to be together; that was enough: I did not care, indeed I never once thought, how we either of us seemed to any one else.

'I could not help being aware that the other boarders talked about us. Having a pair of tolerably good ears, likewise of eyes, it was difficult not to know that old Miss Flitch, my landlady's half-sister, smelt a match in my intimacy with Miss Brentnall; that she considered it ill-advised, on the ground that I was twenty-one, and the lady at least forty; that she could imagine no possible motive in my mind, except a view to Miss Brentnall's snug little property; that, as a consequence of these promises, she regarded one of us a very mean knave, and the other a doting fool. It was not difficult to understand the meaning of Miss Simmons, an acid contemporary of Miss Brentnall's, possessing all her chances of celibacy, half her homeliness, and one-thousandth of her mind, when, as I took my seat next her at the breakfast-table, she asked me, with a pretty simper, if I had spent the last evening as

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pleasantly as usual. It was difficult to avoid seeing the gentlemen wink at each other when they passed us talking together in the entry; it was also difficult, as I perceive from Bonenfant's face he would like to suggest, not to pull their noses for it; but reflection suggested the absurdity of such a course. This is one of the few objections I have to your native, and my adopted country, Tryon, that notwithstanding the great benefit which results from that intimacy between a man and a woman, in which each is *_mere friend_*, and neither present nor expectant *_loser_*, our society will not hear of such a thing, without making indelicate reference to marriage. Still, I suppose they would have talked about us any where.

Miss Brentnall knew this as well as I, and like me, never gave it a thought after the momentary demonstration which recalled it. We passed one whole delightful year together in the Third Avenue boarding-house. I felt my own mind growing, becoming richer in all sorts of knowledge, freer and clearer in every field of thinking, with each succeeding day. And as for Miss Brentnall, she was so kind as to say, and I knew she sincerely meant it, that to her, all lonely in the world, our friendship was in all respects inestimable. At the end of the year, Miss Brentnall was taken ill. For the first few days, neither she nor I felt any serious alarm with reference to her case. The doctor pronounced it a mild type of typhoid fever. It proceeded, so he said to me in private, more from mental causes than from any tangible physical one. Had she been unfortunate in any way? he asked me. I could only reply that, as her intimate friend, I was unaware of the fact. Probably she read late, then, he suggested. I said that might be. At all events, her mind had been very much overtaxed; what she needed was perfect quiet, good nursing, and as little medicine as possible. Upon his giving me this view of the case, I sought out the most faithful, judicious woman within reach, and hired her on Miss Brentnall's behalf, to stay by her bedside night and day. My own income, from the little shop in the Bowery, was now so fair, that I felt able to repay, in some measure, the debt of gratitude I owed my kind friend for her many contributions to the walls of my lonely room. Accordingly, whenever I lighted on any new engraving or book of art, or any embellishment to a sick-chamber, which seemed likely to attract without fatiguing a strained mind, I brought it up to her in the evening. If I had not been in her debt already, I should have been a thousand times repaid for these little evidences of friendship, by the appreciative delight with which the childlike woman talked of them, for their own sake, and the grateful enthusiasm she bestowed upon them for mine.

The opportunity to be kind and thoughtful was very short. At the end of the third week, the doctor gravely told me that typhus pneumonia was becoming alarmingly prevalent in New-York, and that Miss Brentnall's disease had taken that form. Furthermore, that unless some change for the better occurred in the course of the next twenty-four hours, she would die.

I heard this piece of news without the least outward sign of sorrow. It did not seem possible to me that I could lose this best, kindest friend I had in the world. You will think the reason whimsical perhaps; but, merely because she was not beautiful, I felt as if she would not be taken away from me. 'Only the beautiful die, only the beautiful,' I kept saying to myself all day, in the shop or at the work-table. In the evening, when I came back to the house, I found that two things had occurred. Miss Brentnall's pulse had become feebler, and she did not seem to me so plain as before. Then, for the first time, I began to be afraid.

In the morning the doctor took me into the entry, and told me that his patient might live till mid-night, but not longer. Would I take the painful office of breaking the intelligence to her? 'Yes,' I replied, hardly knowing what I said.

I entered the sick-room. As I came toward the bed, Miss Brentnall opened her eyes and smiled.

'Martha,' said she, in a feeble voice, 'you may go down-stairs, and get me some arrow-root.'

'I shall be dead in a few hours, Orloff. I have something to say to you alone. I am sorry to go away from you. You have been kind to me, Orloff. More than any body else in the world.'

I took Miss Brentnall's poor, parched hand, but could not answer. 'Orloff—kind as you are to me—in the bottom of your heart, you know that I have the most repulsive face you ever saw. Say *_yes_*, Orloff. You *_do_* know it. I have been sure of it, since i was a little girl, six years old, thirty-four years ago, yesterday. I was never sorry for it, more than a moment at a time, *_until a year ago_*. And now you may tell me you see it, without hurting me at all. Pride is past. Say that my face is the most unlovely in the world. *_Say it to me please_*.'

I saw she was in deep earnest, and I brought myself to answer for her sake:

'Well. But your soul is most lovely.'

'I thank you for saying it, Orloff. And now, now that pride is past, I may tell you something which life would

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hide forever, but death wrings out of my very soul. You have been a friend to me, a dear, kind friend, Orloff; but nothing more. I have been something else to _you_. A dying woman may say it. _I have loved you_.'

`For a minute we were both silent, and then Miss Brentnall resumed: `Passionately, passionately. Without once deluding myself; without once dreaming that there was a shadow of hope. Had you been blind; had you been deaf; so that you could never have seen what I am, or heard a word of it from other lips; even had you, under these circumstances, loved me, I would have felt it base to give you, in exchange for yourself, such a thing as I. But you did see, you did hear, and knew that I loved _impossibly_. You came in, now, to tell me that I would not live till to-morrow, did you not, Orloff?'

``I meant to, if I could,' was my reply.

``I had a dream just before you came in. I thought I saw you, and you told me so. Do you know what a strange thing happened, just as you seemed speaking? But you are not angry with me, for what I have said already?'

``Angry? My dear friend, no!' said I instantly.

``The strange thing was this. As you spoke, my deformed face fell off like a veil, and my body, like a cloak, was lifted from me. At the same moment, I had the power of being outside of myself, of looking down on myself, and I was—_very beautiful_. I was not proud, but I was glad. I drank in a whole fountain of peace at every breath. At that instant, I began to float further and further from you; but as I went, I heard, oh! such a sweet voice saying: `Again! Again! You shall meet again!' As you came into the room, I awoke. And I have dared to uncover my soul to you, Orloff Ruricson, because those words are still in my ears. We _shall_ meet again! And when we meet, I shall be beautiful!'

`With all my respect for Miss Brentnall, it was impossible for me not to feel that she was raving. Indeed, from this very belief I took hope. I had seldom heard of cases like hers, in which patients, almost in the very last hour, continued to be delirious. I therefore doubted the doctor's diagnosis, and persuaded myself that, since she had not arrived at the lucid interval preceding death, she was not so near it as he suspected.

`Comforting myself with the assurance that I should see her well again, or at least, that there was no immediate danger, I went down to my shop in the Bowery, leaving orders to send for me immediately, if any change took place in Miss Brentnall.

`After transacting the business of my trade, all day, I came back earlier than usual at evening, greatly depressed in spirits, but without any idea that I had seen my friend for the last time. As I put my latch-key into the door of the boarding-house, it opened. I saw the pale, frightened face of Martha, the nurse. She was just coming out after me. Miss Brentnall was _dead_.

And again I was alone in the world.'

II.—The Flicker's Chapter

There was a quiet funeral where I was the only mourner. There were days of loneliness succeeding, in which it seemed to me that the small isthmus by which I had been living for a year attached to my fellow-men, had been suddenly covered by the rising of a dark, cold tide; that I was an islander again, and the only one.

There was a will to be proved in the Surrogate's Court. Miss Brentnall's nurse and the landlady witnessed it. I thought this strange at first, remembering what a friend the dead had been to me; but my surprise at not being a witness was soon supplanted by the greater one of being sole legatee.

There was a monument to be placed over the dead. To every detail of it I attended personally. I remember how heavy even that simple little shaft seemed to me, how much too heavy for a head that had borne so much of heaviness through life. Then I thought of her expression 'bird-resurrection,' of her perfect faith in the coming of better things; and if the monument had been a pyramid, I would have known that it could not press her down.

It is one of my eccentricities that I fear good-fortune; not bad-fortune, at all. For I have seen so much of it, that it only looks to me like a grimmer kind of father, coming to wake his over-slept son and tell him that unless he leaps from his feather-bed, and that right suddenly, the time for every thing good in life will have gone by. I fear good-fortune, because I am not sure that I shall use it well. It may carry me till it has dwarfed me; I may lie on its breast till I have lost my legs; then whisk! it may slip away from under me and leave me a lame beggar for the rest of my life.

I resolved, therefore, that I would not touch a farthing of my new property until I had become quite familiar with the idea of owning it. It was in stocks when I found it. I converted it into real-estate securities, and as fast as my interest came in, deposited it in the bank. Meanwhile, I supported myself well upon the little shop; bought books, and laid something by.

I was busy one morning at my stuffing-table in the back-room, when the bell over the street-door rang; and running into the front-shop, I found a new customer. He was a private bird-fancier, he told me, and had brought a specimen, which he wished mounted for his cabinet. As he spoke, he slid back the cover from a box which he carried in his arm; and as I looked in, expecting to see a dead bird, a live one hopped out and sat upon my finger.

'I declare that is very curious!' said the gentleman; 'the creature never did such a thing before! I have had it eight months without being able to domesticate it in the slightest. It will not even eat or drink when any body is in the room; yet there it is sitting on your hand.'

I had never seen such a bird before. It resembled the northern meadowlark in size and shape; in hue, its wings were like the quail's, its breast ash-color, its tail mottled above, like the wings, and of a delicate canary yellow beneath. But the greatest beauty it possessed was a bright crimson crescent, covering the whole back of the head. 'What is this bird?' said I.

'It is a Flicker,' answered the gentleman. 'It was sent me by a friend living in Florida.'

'Why don't you keep it alive?'

'For the reason I've told you. It's perfectly impossible to tame it. My children and I have tried every means we can think of without success. If we confine it in a cage, it mopes all day and eats nothing; if we let it fly about the room, it sculks under the furniture as soon as we enter; if we take it in our hands, it screams and fights. There is a specimen of the execution it can do in an emergency with that sharp, long bill!'

And my customer showed me his finger, out of which a strip of flesh an inch long had been gouged as neatly as it could have been done with a razor.

'It is nothing but botheration, that confounded bird!' he continued. 'It does nothing but make muss and litter about the house from morning till night; and for all our troubles, it never repays us with a single chirp. Indeed, I don't believe it has any voice.'

Just then the Flicker, still sitting on my finger, turned up its big, brown eye to my face and uttered a soft, sweet gurgle, like a musical-glass.

'Good heavens!' exclaimed the gentleman; 'it never did that before!'

'Suppose you let me take it for a month or so,' I said; 'it seems to be fond of me, and perhaps I can tame it. I never felt so little like killing any bird in my life. We may make something of its social qualities yet.'

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‘‘Very well,’ answered the new customer. ‘Keep it for a month. I’ll drop in now and then to see how its education is getting on.’

‘‘You may hold me responsible for it, Sir,’ I replied; and the gentleman left my shop.

‘All day the Flicker staid by me as I worked. Now it perched upon my shoulder, now on my head. At noon, when I opened my basket, it took lunch with me. When I whistled or sang, it listened until it caught the strain, and then put in some odd kind of accompaniment. The compass and power of its voice was nothing remarkable, but the tone was as sweet as a wood–robin’s. I could not be enough astonished with the curious little creature.

‘Still, every kind of animal takes to me naturally. I accounted for the previous wildness of the Flicker on the ground of mistaken management in the gentleman who owned it, and as a matter of professional pride, determined to make something of the bird, were it only to show, like your Sam Patch, Tryon, that some things can be done as well as others. When I went home in the evening I took the Flicker with me, and made it a nest in an old cigar–box on my mantel–piece.

‘The next morning, when I awoke, the bird was perched above me on the scroll of the head–board! Again I carried it down–town with me; again I brought it up in the evening. After that it was my companion every where. You will hardly imagine how it could become better friends with me than it did immediately upon our introduction. Yet our acquaintance grew day by day, and with our acquaintance the little being’s intelligence. It had not been with me a fortnight before it knew my name. You may think it curious, perhaps unfeeling, but you know it was my only friend in the world, and in memory of the one who had lately held that place, I called it ‘Brenta.’

‘‘Brenta!’ I would say as I sat before my grate in the evening, and wherever the little creature might be, it would come flying to me with a joyful chirp, light on my finger, dance on the hearth–rug, eat out of my hand, or go through the pantomime of various emotions I had taught it. If I said, ‘Be angry, Brenta,’ it would scream, flap its wings, and fight the legs of the chair. ‘Be sorry, Brenta,’ and it would droop its little head, cower against my breast, and utter notes as plaintive as a tired child’s.

‘By the time the month was up, it could do almost any thing but talk. Its owner, who, to his great delight, had paid it several visits during the progress of its education, now came to take it home.

‘‘I have become very much attached to the little thing,’ said I; ‘won’t you let me buy it of you?’

‘‘You should have asked me when I first brought it,’ was his answer. ‘You have made it too valuable to part with now. To show you how much I think it is worth, here is a ten–dollar piece for your services.’

‘I took the money, feeling very much as if I were receiving the price of treason. ‘If you ever change your mind,’ said I, ‘remember that I am always ready with a generous bid.’

‘When we came to look for the Flicker, it was nowhere to be found. I could not believe it possible that it had heard and understood our conversation, but other hypothesis to account for its disappearance was not at hand. After hunting every nook and corner of the shop, I forced myself into the traitorous expedient of luring it by my own voice. ‘Brenta!’ I called, and the poor creature instantly hopped out of _my coat–pocket_, climbed up to my shoulder, and nestled against my cheek.

‘‘The little rascal!’ exclaimed the gentleman.

‘I could willingly have knocked him down! It was not until I had undertaken the business with my own hands that we could get the Flicker into the cage which the gentleman had brought with him. Even then, the poor thing continued clinging to my finger with claws which had to be loosened by force, and went out of my shop–door screaming piteously and beating itself against the bars of the cage.

‘I had no heart for any thing the rest of the day. At night my room seemed lonelier than a dungeon. The very next morning, the owner of the bird came back with it in a terrible passion.

‘‘You have been teaching the thing tricks!’ was his first exclamation.

‘‘To be sure,’ said I mildly. ‘Wasn’t that what you wished me to do?’

‘‘_Wished you to do?_’ To mope, and wail, and lie on the carpet like a dead chicken? Never to sing a note or eat a morsel? To peck at the hands that brought food, and—and—’

‘‘I am sure I cannot help it, Sir, if the bird has become attached to me, and mourns when away.’

‘‘You’ve taught the creature to do it! Look at this finger, will you! another piece taken clean out of it! _Piece_, I say—_steak_, I mean! The bird’s a regular butcher! Here, kill the creature directly, and have it stuffed for my cabinet by this day week.’

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And as he sat down the cage on the counter, the Flicker, with a joyful cry, jumped to the wicker-door, and tired to pick a way out to me by its beak.

“There! You see what you've done! Why don't the wretch act so to me?”

“I really can't say, Sir. Perhaps because I've had a great deal to do with birds, and naturally know how to manage them.”

“Well, I don't care. Stuff the thing, and I shall be able to manage it then myself.”

“May I make a repetition of my offer? If you haven't a toucan in your collection, there is a very fine one I'll give you for the Flicker, stuffed only last Saturday. Here's a young pelican— a still rarer bird. Or how would you like a flamingo?”

“Got 'em all,” replied the gentleman curtly. “And if I hadn't, I count the Flicker. Kill the thing, I say, and stuff it.”

Just then the bird cast on me a glance as imploring as ever looked out of human eye. For a thousand dollars I could not have done the wrong.

“Really, Sir,” said I, “I prefer not to take the job. I am very much attached to your bird. I cannot bear to kill it.”

“Pon my soul!” he exclaimed, “if that isn't pretty for a taxidermist! I should suppose, to hear you talk, that you would faint at the sight of a dead sparrow! Well, you can get your courage up to stuff the bird, I suppose? As for the killing, I'll do that myself.”

As the man said this, he thrust his hand into the cage, and caught the Flicker by the wing. With a sharp cry, his victim struck him again on the finger, enraging him more than ever. He opened his pen-knife, pulled the bird out, drew the blade across its throat, and out of the cruel slash there poured, mingling with the blood, a bitter cry, like a woman's. I heard it, and every drop of my own blood returned to my heart. He let the bird drop upon the counter: it gave one hop, tumbled over in my hand, and its eye-lids slid shut.

“This day week, remember,” said the man, and went out of the shop, wiping his knife.

I took up the bird, laid it in my neck, and, I am not ashamed to say, cried over it.

There are a good many things which may happen between now and this day week. I am not one of those people who regard every misfortune that occurs to an enemy the judgment of Heaven in their behalf. But I must say, that the event which occurred before that man's week was out, always seemed to me a direct blow from Nemesis. He was a very passionate fellow; subject to temporary fits of insanity. One of them came on in the morning while he was shaving, and he cut his own throat as he had the Flicker's.

When his estate was settled, nobody thought of the bird. I inclosed the ten dollars he had given me for its education in an anonymous note to his executors, simply stating that my conscience demanded it; and having thus quieted that organ, kept the Flicker for myself. With a daguerrotype of Miss Brentnall's found among a parcel of papers labelled, “To be burned up,” and upon which alone, of all the parcel, I could not persuade myself to execute her will, I put the stuffed bird by. When I was too lonely to dare to be utterly alone, I went to the trunk, where they were preserved and looked at them.

III.—The Marmoset's Chapter

`After the loss of my second only friend, a painful change came over me. I had risen from the shock of Miss Brentnall's death with an elasticity which surprised even myself. Partly for the reason that my constitution was better by several less months of anxiety, grief, and application to business. Partly because I felt assured that, as she said, we should some time or other meet again.

`When the Flicker died, I felt that this only thing hitherto left to love me, could never reappear. The kind heart of the woman would beat again; the kind heart of the bird no more forever. And strangely enough, the whole sorrow that I had passed through for Miss Brentnall's loss revived, and I went about my day's work bearing the weight of a two-fold melancholy.

`The first thing that the bird fancying public knew—indeed almost the first thing I knew myself, so abstracted, so moody was I—a paragraph appeared in the morning papers, to the effect that the celebrated Taxidermist and Aviarian Professor, Orloff Ruricson, was about to close his business, and make a voyage to Europe, Asia and Africa, from which parts he hoped to return in two or three years, with a large and interesting collection of rare animals, to establish a Natural History Museum.

`I had caused the appearance of this notice myself; but when I read it, felt quite as surprised by it as any body. In nerve and mind I was so worn out that although thoroughly resolved to make the move, the consolidation of the purpose into such a fixed form shocked me.

`When the novelty of the idea passed off, I disposed of all my stock to various amateurs who knew me and had every disposition to help me by paying large prices. I put the thirty thousand dollars I was now worth into such a shape that I could get its increase in regular remittances; packed the bird, the daguerrotype, and a small wardrobe, and took passage by barque for Genoa.

`At sun-rise one Monday morning, the barque's yawl took me out to her anchorage. As I went up the ladder at the side, I heard an opera-air playing on board, and when I reached the deck, the first thing that met my eyes was an Italian grinder, with his organ and monkey.

``Is that man going the voyage with us?' I asked the captain.

``Yes, Sir,' he replied; `but he shan't play without permission after we get to sea. He's a Genoese, who has made enough money in this country to keep a fruit-stall in his own, so he's going home.'

`Home! He had a home and was going to it! I would have handed him my bank-book—taken his money and organ—to be able to say that.

`As the tug hitched fast to us and we began walking down toward the Narrows, I crossed to the other side of the ship, that I might take a look at the fortunate man.

`Certainly, I said to myself, Fortune is blind. He had a home; but he was one of the most ill-favored rascals I ever laid my eyes on. No body would have taken him for a Genoese—the New-Englander of Italy—rather for a Romanesque cut-throat, or a brigand of the mountain, who had found his stiletto or his carbine good for only the slowest kind of shilling and taken to the nimble six-pence of the hand-organ, on the principle that honesty was the best policy. You have seen a thousand pen-and-pencil pictures of the fellow, and need no description of him from me.

`As I stood beside him at the bulwarks, his monkey leapt upon me.

``Pardon, good gentleman,' said the Italian with an abject smirk, and gave a jerk to the chain that brought back the little animal flying.

``Never mind that,' said I; `let him come to me. I am fond of monkeys; I would like to look at him.'

``As it pleases, then,' replied the Italian, with another smirk, and loosed the chain again. `Go, Beppo!'

`Beppo needed no command, but jumped instantly upon my arm and laid his cheek upon my bosom. As I patted his head, I examined him curiously, and found him the most beautiful little monkey in the world. A Marmoset, with a great brown, tender eye like a gazelle's; a face which varied its expression constantly without ever degenerating into the brutal leer of the common ape; a winning, confiding mien of head and hand that was human, child-like; and a soft coronal of golden fur around his little skull, that added still more to his baby-like look, giving him the appearance of some mother's favorite, dressed for a walk in a bonnet of down. I don't know

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how I could have been guilty of the folly of becoming attached to the little fellow, after all the lessons of warning my life had taught me. But I did take a great fancy to him. Never a day passed during the whole voyage, in which he did not get many a tid-bit from my hands. He spent far more of the time with me than with his own master, and before long obeyed me with a hearty good nature, which he never thought of showing toward that musical brigand.

One sunny afternoon, when we were three weeks out, the captain, the grinder and myself stood upon the fore-castle-deck, trying to make out a sail just visible on the horizon ahead of us. As usual, Beppo was cutting his pranks about me. For a moment he would sit demurely on my shoulder and hold his tail to his eye in mimicry of the captain's eye-glass. A second more, and he would be sitting in the fore-top. The next, and he came sliding down a halliard to his old perch. These antics interfered with our look-out, and I put my hand into my pocket to feel for something which might keep him still. Finding neither prune, nor nut, nor string, but only the purse which I always carried there, I drew it out and opened it, to look for a copper. As I committed this incautious act, I saw the eyes of the Italian cast a sidelong, sly glance at the gold that shone there, and I shut the clasp with an uncomfortable sense of having been very silly. At the same moment, he stole away, like a cat, to the fore-stays, and pretended to be more earnestly interested than any of us in the sail.

The nights grew still warmer and warmer as we sailed on. The cabin became so close, that I ordered the steward to bring my mattress upon deck, and usually slept there under a shawl, unless we had rain.

I had lain down at about half-past eleven, upon one night in particular, utterly fatigued, sick at heart, despairing. As the tall masts nodded past the stars—the stars rather than the masts seemed moving—and in my heart I believed that even heaven itself was not permanent; that all things flickered and danced, and passed away as earthly hope had passed from my heart; nothing was fixed, certain, and to be striven for. Finally, I only wished to sleep. 'Let me die this temporary death of slumber,' said I; 'there is happiness therein, and therein only.' I was more of a Lord Byron in that instant; more of a moral desperado; less of a Thomas Carlyle, a Goethe, sanguine Yankee, who believes that the best way to get rid of misery is to suffer and work out, if you fall, always to fall on your feet and scramble out, than I had ever been in my life, Messers. Tryon and Bonenfant! So, said I, let me go to sleep.

Would you believe it, that confounded little Beppo would not hear of such a thing! Over my face this minute, over my legs the next; now tumbling down on my breast from a line; now, as the sailors say, working Tom Cox's traverse, up one hatchway and down the other, past my side.

I could not get a wink of sleep. I tossed and I tumbled; I swore and I grumbled. I called Beppo to me, and for the first time without success.

I was just about going after Luigi, his master, when I saw that person creeping to me in the shadow of the mizzen-mast. by the high cove of the after-hatch, I was quite hid from the stern, and the only person who happened to be there, the second mate, could see Luigi no more than me.

At that instant the monkey gave me a tweak of the hair that nearly made me scream out, and then ran away noiselessly forward. Luigi crept on and on. As he drew nearer, I could perceive a stiletto in his hand. Its blade gleamed faintly now and then in the star-light, so indistinctly that at first it seemed like a trailing white ribbon.

I did not believe his first intention was to kill me. That would have been absurd as well as cruel. So I lay still and let him come close. I feigned myself fast asleep and snored heavily.

He knelt at my side, and holding the knife over my heart with one hand, felt with the other in my pocket. Still I slept away for dear life. He found the purse; drew it out with a slow, gentle motion, and crept forward again on his hands and knees, thanking his saints in a whisper. I was on his back before he could turn around. He was lithe, but feeble, and I had him pinioned, prone upon his face, with the purse in his hand and the thanksgiving in his mouth, while it was yet only half-changed to a curse. Thus I forced from him both the stiletto and the purse, and threw the one over-board at the same time that I returned the other to my pocket. Then I arose, and we stood up face to face.

'Shall I have you hanged at the yard-arm in half-an-hour?' was my first question.

The little Italian looked me full in the face, his olive cheeks were like chalk, his lips quivered, but he did not speak. And then, as if suddenly understanding the cause of his failure, he ran forward to the fore-stay, where the marmoset was clinging and chattering.

I hurried after him. Catching him by the shoulder, I whispered in his ear: 'If one hair of Beppo's head is hurt,

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you are a dead man before you can say your prayers. You came after my money. You are a villain, but you shall have it—two gold pieces, ten dollars, at least—if you sell him to me on the spot. Is Beppo mine, on these conditions? If he isn't, I will arouse the crew, and you shall dangle aloft before the next watch is set. Yes or no?

‘‘You shall have the monkey,’ replied the Italian, with another of his infernal smirks. ‘You shall have him, but the gentleman will not find him good fortune.’

‘‘The devil take you and your fortune! If he brings me no better fortune than you deserve—and for the same reason—I shall wish, and not wait, to die.’ So I brought the monkey aft, and made Luigi acknowledge him mine, while I counted out the ten dollars, in the presence of the second mate.

‘After that night, warm as it might be, you will readily believe that I slept in the cabin. Beppo nestled by me, occupying as much of the berth as his little form required; and I declare to you, that had he needed it all I would have given it to him, and stretched myself on the floor, so warm an affection had I for the creature who had saved my money; possibly my life.

‘At that time, perhaps you will say because I was young and visionary, I often believed that Beppo knew what he had been the means of doing for me. At this day I shall be still insaner in your eyes, for I hold that he was not only the _means_, but the intentional _agent_. I must stop. I am forerunning my story.

‘It was amazing how I improved as soon as I had something to love! I became so strong, so hearty, that I was quite ashamed to think of having abandoned America for my health; and meditated going back with the barque's return voyage. Nothing but the presence on board of that cursed Luigi prevented my spirits from being better than since I could remember.

‘We reached Genoa, and anchored in Quarantine. My trunk was on deck, and in all respects I was ready to go ashore. Already the infernal Italian had taken his seat in the health-officer's boat; and, with his elbow resting on his organ, looked up at me over the gunwale. Beppo, for very joy of seeing land again, had climbed clear to the main truck, and was chattering audibly as he whisked his tail.

‘‘All ready, Beppo!’ I cried; come down, boy!’

‘In his haste at hearing my voice, as he tumbled head over heels down the main shrouds, for the first time in my life that I ever saw a monkey do such a thing, he missed his hold on a ratline and tumbled into the water of the harbor. I sprang to the side, and called to the oarsman of the boat:

‘‘Save that monkey, and you shall have—whatever you ask!’ Fool! I was talking English, and every man of them was an Italian! A language I had some understanding of, but could not speak.

‘And then I heard that olive-skinned wretch, the organ-grinder, rply to the speaker: ‘He says the beast who fell overboard is sick of the small-pox, and you must not touch him.’

‘As he made this answer he turned around to me with one of his diabolical smirks, kissed his lips to me, spit at the drowning Beppo, then asked me blandly: ‘Did I not tell the good gentleman his buying would be bad fortune? Are we settled of accounts, good gentleman?’

‘I to hear this! I to look over the side; hear my last friend screaming his poor wordless agony; see him look up at me with that supplicating child's eye of his; see him fighting the water despairingly with his little unlearned hands, then go down in a bubbling circle out of sight; I who could not swim a stroke!

‘The captain, seeing my distress, humanely put his own boat after the poor creature. With the boat-hook a sailor brought him up after he had gone down for the last time. And thus they laid him on the deck at my feet. I lifted him up; his child eyes were closed, and the golden crown of his fur lay matted and dripping over them. I tried to warm him in my bosom. I laid my hand on his heart; it had stopped.

‘Beppo was dead. The Marmoset whose nature had given, only of all, to love the man!

‘And I went into Quarantine at Genoa, once more alone in the world.’

‘Ciel! and vat you do with zat cursed Italian?’

‘I? Nothing. Ten years afterward I saw him rowing in the galley at Marseilles. He knew me; I knew him. He smirked as of old, but which such very visible teeth that I was glad he was chained; and passed on without even asking the overseer his crime.

IV.—The Young Maiden's Chapter

My wanderings, dating from the day I landed at Genoa, would fill with their narrative a book far larger than Livingston's Travels.' I journeyed over all the traversable regions of Africa; in India I have been wherever the foot of the white man has trodden; I spent a year and a half in China; almost as long in Syria; and I went every where over the continent of Europe. Then I passed six months in Sweden; most of that time living at my native town, Jonpoping, until at last the sound of my mother's tongue spoken by stranger mouths became absolutely unbearable to me, and I left the country never to return. I will see Great Britain, I said. No better place for that purpose, at least to begin with, than London. So I went there; and, with all the curiosities I had collected in my vagabond life, opened a shop as Exhibitor and Taxidermist, in Piccadilly.

By this time, you will perceive, I had quite abandoned my original idea of returning to America to open a museum. It takes no longer for the world in general, or the world of New-York, to forget its largest man, than for a heaping measure of grain to close up the gap after a hand is withdrawn. And I was a long way from the conceit of fancying myself even a large man. Probably, I said to myself, there are a dozen in my place by this time. I will not go back to revive a name wiped out; it is at least more entertaining to stay here and try chalking out a new one. If I fail, why, the remittances come regularly.

So up went the old sign on a fresh board: 'Orloff Ruricson, Taxidermist and Aviarian Professor.' In about three months from the opening of the establishment, the collection was a little more than self-supporting, and the Taxidermy thrived at the rate of ten guineas a week. I got some favorable critiques in the Times; some body called me the Minor Zoological Gardens; and gradually my aviarianism came into play. Lord Crinkum consulted me about his Chinese pheasants, and Lord Crankum got my general views on fighting-cocks. The Honorable Miss Dingleton, like Mr. Pecksniff, only with more money to bestow on the object, thought she would like to see my ideas of a grotto. I gave it to her, and of course every alderman's wife must have me fussing about her cobble-stones out in what she called a suburban willer. That's the great beauty of the art in England, looked at in the paying light; the moment you're so fortunate as to get a lord by the nose, you lead all Cockneydom withersoever you will. It's a country where every body shuts his eyes, and grabs the next bigger man by the coat-tail. No, on the whole, I got along.'

'That was all very well, looked at in the paying light, as you say,' interrupted John Tryon, 'but you must have been terribly lonely during the long winter evenings. Didn't you have any body to speak to; any body to love?'

'Nobody. I had learned the misery of that by lessons enough, I should think. Even in the desert I never made a pet of my camel, and most people do that, to the extent, at least, of complimenting the lovely beast upon his patience. I had nothing to care for and cared for nothing. I was now thirty years old, you see, and had travelled.

I had kept the shop in Piccadilly for a year. I stood one morning, at the expiration of that period, in a room of the back-shop, where I prepared specimens, and was consulted. My clerks had just taken down the shutters, and were chattering to each other behind the counter. I was pensive that morning, a mighty unusual thing for me, and their gabble disturbed me. I meditated calling out to them to be still, when the shop-door opened, the front-door looking on the street, and some one said:

'Please, Sir, can you give me any work?'

'Good Heavens! I started to my feet, and yet seemed in such a dream that I could scarcely move them after I was erect. Who spoke? It was a low, sweet, woman's voice, the like whereof I had not heard for nine years! Not that it was low, or sweet, or a woman's; not that it was all these together, but that it was the voice.'

'Get out with you, beggar!' answered the chattering clerks, with unanimous fierceness; and I heard the front shop-door shut slowly, as if by a tired, feeble hand.

In a second more and she would be gone; I should never see her again! That thought awakened me, and gave wings to my feet. I dashed through the shop; my clerks looking at me as if they thought I had suddenly gone mad. I jerked the door open, and saw a little girl's figure moving wearily away among the hurrying crowd; her back toward me.

'Who asked for work?' I called out aloud.

Among the few that turned to look was this lithe figure. She turned hastily, anxiously, deprecatingly, and

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again I heard that wonderful voice.

``It was I, Sir.'

``Come into the shop, if you please. Let us talk about it.'

``You are not vexed with me, Sir?'

`As the girl said this she cast her great brown eyes upon me so piteously, so helplessly, seeming so intensely to fear displeasure, yet so wistfully to beg help, that all at once there flashed before me the harbor of Genoa! I saw it for an instant as distinctly as we now see the Kaaterskill Clove; saw the villainous Italian smirking across his organ; saw the glassy, shining waters of the Mediterranean; and the drowning face of Beppo going down therein; _with those same eyes in it!_

``Vexed with you? With _you_? God knows I am not!' was my first wild exclamation, as soon as this strange phantasmagoria passed by; and I saw Piccadilly, and its crowd, and the slender girl, again, standing there uncared for, like myself, in the great ocean of London being.

``Come in, I say! Come in! For the love of God, come in!' I continued passionately, reckless who heard me.

``Work, food, money, help, any thing, every thing! I will give you all.'

`This I said beseechingly, yet neither this nor the passionate command did the girl, timid as she was, seem to regard as at all strange or out of place. She only came confidingly toward me, put her hand in mine, and I led her into the back-shop, while the chattering stared.

`I bade her take off her faded bonnet, and sit down. As she obeyed, her golden brown hair caught on a pin in the bonnet behind; its soft, well-grown mass lifted from her neck, and there I beheld, close where the brown joined the white, _a small red crescent mark reaching almost from ear to ear!_

`I seemed to be wandering through a chain of dreams. I tried to speak, but in vain. To think, but as vainly. She disengaged the bonnet, and let it droop upon her shoulders. Her face, thus disclosed, was the most beautiful array of human features, flushed through by the light of the most beautiful human soul, I ever saw, or mused of, or believed in, in my life!

`She sat in the chair opposite me. As for me, I gazed and gazed. Modestly inviting questions, she looked me frankly in the eyes; and then, as in wonder that I did not speak, threw her hand backward, and perused my face curiously. This posture elevated her chin. I was about to say something, but just then _I saw under that chin another crimson mark, the slenderest of slender lines, as if the finest knife-point dipped in blood had been drawn clear across the throat by a nervous hand_. I durst not say to myself what I was reminded of by _that_. Not even to think of it at all. I half-feared that I had become insane, rubbed my forehead, and kept repeating: `Oh! it is only her bonnet-strings tied too tightly, that is all!'

`I would not trust myself with questioning her then. Not a word of any kind did I speak to her, except to say gently, that she might consider herself my apprentice in the art of bird-stuffing; and that all her necessities should be provided for.

`I had a little bed made for her in the room of the old Yorkshire woman who minded my solitary establishment for me. She was an orphan, so she said afterward; and had walked all the way from the Stafford Potteries, where her only relative, an aunt, was just dead; hoping to find work in London, that might keep her from the street. She was eighteen years of age, and had never known father or mother.

`Once more I had a living creature to feel an interest in, to become attached to. Whatever was mysterious in her arrival, her appearance, or her voice, I dismissed from my mind as mere curious coincidences, at once too frivolous, too perplexing to be followed up. There was the real substantial fact: a girl without home or friends. Now what was to be done with her?

`I settled the question gradually day by day. I taught her, in the day-time, to help me at my specimen-table; in the evening, to read and write. The rapidity with which she caught by the right end, and made her own every new process, either of brain or fingers, was astonishing. She was my constant wonder and delight. So imitative, yet so original; so talented but so modest withal; so bright and sportive, so docile and grateful; she soon became my right hand and right eye in all I had to do.

`As soon as I had dressed her presentably, the clerks saw her superiority as they could not through the old clothes, and did it unquestioning reverence. But for this _reverence_ I verily believe they would have come in a body, and thrown themselves at her feet, entreating her to take her pick within the first month after she was domesticated with me. For they were all desperately in love with her; devouring her with their eyes as she went in

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and out among them so modestly and yet so loftily, like a queen in disguise.

`Well, I did not wonder; I could forgive them. For, six months after she had entered my shop—door, the homeless wayfarer, I awoke to the fact that I was in love with her myself. For the first time in all the days of my manhood, did I know what it was to feel a woman wrought into the texture of my life, so that pulling her away seemed an endless pain to look forward to; and before I knew that it had happened. And that combination of circumstances only, as I view it, is adequate to constitute _love_, on which marriage may be honorably founded.

`As soon as I knew that I loved Bessie Cartwright—that was her name—I began to torture myself with the question whether I ought to tell her of it _yet_. Whether, if I did so, her simple heart, out of mere gratefulness, would not instantly give itself up as a matter of debt and honor to the man whom she regarded only in the light of a benefactor. And I had rather have any thing happen than this, my own loneliness till I died even, than this, so galling to me if I discovered it when it was too late, so ruinous to every thing that was best in her young growing womanhood.

`As in the old days, it was my custom to look at the memorials of my lost friends, when times went hard with me, and my spirits fell. So, one evening, after I had been musing painfully in my room for a couple of hours, I took from my battered old trunk Miss Brentnall's portrait, the Flicker, and the Marmoset, which I had embalmed after his death in the harbor of Genoa.

`I ranged them on my table, and with a feeling of mournful pleasure gazed from one to the other, dwelling upon all the past which they recalled.

`As I sat thus employed, I heard Bessie's tap at the door; I called, `Come in!' and she entered, with her reading—book for the evening's lesson. Seeing the unusual array upon my table, she asked me: `What! Working still?'

``No; not working, Bessie,' I replied; `thinking.'

``May I see who that is?' said she artlessly, pointing to the daguerrotype.

``Oh! certainly. Though you must not laugh at it. It is a very homely lady, but a very good one; and, while she lived, my dearest friend.' So I handed it to her.

`She bent her brown head down to the shaded drop—light on my table, and held the portrait close to it. I watched her face to see the effect of that strange world—wronged face on the beautiful, Heaven—favored one.

`I saw Bessie Cartwright grow pale as death! Her eyes became fixed like a cataleptic person's. But her head moved, from the portrait to the Flicker, from the Flicker to the Marmoset. The portrait fell from her hand, she grasped hurriedly at the table, and then fell to the floor.

``Dead; dead like the rest!' said I, with a fierce coldness; `and because I loved her.'

`I pulled the shade from the drop—light, and drew it to the edge of the table, so that the light fell full on the prostrate girl. I called her by name, and got no answer. I loosened her dress, and in doing so pushed the heavy knot of her brown hair away from her neck. That scarlet crescent glowed there in the midst of a marble whiteness, like a flame!

`I turned her upon her back, and beneath her chin saw the slender crimson line, burning also brighter than ever, while all the throat was deadly pale. `Bessie! Bessie! speak to me once, only once more.' I spoke passionately at her ear.

`Still no answer. I looked in agony at the dead things which had once been mine; saw plainest of all the Flicker; and again that strange suspicion which I had felt the first day I ever saw the girl, awoke in my brain.

`I bent my mouth to her ear, and softly said: `Brenta!' At that instant her great dark eyes opened, she read my face wistfully, and then her lips murmured:

``Orloff, dear Orloff! I told you I would meet you again; I have kept my word.'

`It was the voice that became silent ten years before in the sick—room next my own!

``Miss Brentnall!' I exclaimed, not knowing what I said.

``Orloff, dear Orloff!' replied _the voice_, once more from the lips of Bessie Cartwright.

`And then the blood came rushing back to the young girl's face. Timidly she sat up, passed her hand across her eyes, and said faintly:

`Oh! I have had _such_ a dream!'

``What was it, dear child?' I asked.

``I thought that picture you showed me was I. Then I felt myself dying. You were by me till all the room grew

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dark. I hardly remember what came then; but I have had, oh! so many strange thoughts, and been in so many strange places! I thought I was killed with a little knife; I was on the sea; I was close by a great town that rose from the water's side; I was drowning; then I was myself again in the old dress I wore when I came to you; then I seemed to be all things at once, and you called me a name I had heard before, when I lay in the bed dying; and oh! forgive me, Sir, I called you by your Christian name, Orloff, _dear_ Orloff! I said, do forgive me; I will never do it again.'

``You must do something else than that,' said I, no longer awe-stricken and trembling, for in a moment the mystery of my life parted like a fog, and I saw its meaning beyond in the clearest of heaven's twilight. `Something else than that, Bessie. You must never call me by any other name than _dear_ Orloff! Can you call me that? For _I love you_; God only knows how I love you. Can you?'

`The girl looked at me with parted lips; caught her breath quickly; hid her face in my bosom; and once more after all those years the beloved voice, knowing what it said, replied:

``Orloff, _dear_ Orloff.'

`Bessie Cartwright is my wife. Not until years after did I tell her the meaning of her dream; not how through lives and deaths she had followed me to save and claim her own. She knows it now; we both keep it for the grateful wonder of our prayers; a mystery like all mysteries had we but the key, with its grand, beneficent meaning, unmeaning, contemptible only to those who read it wrong or not at all.'

`And you mean to tell to me zat ze beautiful lady you have now espouse, be vonce in ze body of ze vare ugly woman, ze red-head bird vat you call him, and ze marmosette; you mean to zay to me zat?'

`I'd like to ask that question too,' said John Tryon.

`I mean to tell you both, answered Orloff Ruricson, `that you can put _your own interpretation on my facts_. Also, that if you ever break our confidence in telling my history with its proper names, then good-by to your friendship with Orloff Ruricson.'

I have been permitted to state the facts without the names. Let me also be permitted to state them without my interpretation.