

FICTION

Oliver Optic

Seek and Find

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FICTION



ERNEST SWIMS FOR THE DESPATCH BARREL.—Page 270

SEEK AND FIND;

OR,

THE ADVENTURES OF A SMART BOY.

BY

OLIVER OPTIC,

AUTHOR OF "YOUNG AMERICA ABROAD," "THE ARMY AND NAVY STORIES,"
"THE WOODVILLE STORIES," "THE BOAT-CLUB STORIES,"
"THE RIVERDALE STORIES," ETC.

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SEEK AND FIND.

TO

My Young Friend,

ALICE LEE GOOKIN,

This Book

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

PREFACE.

"SEEK AND FIND" is the third of the serial stories published in "OUR BOYS AND GIRLS," where it appeared as the sequel of "BREAKING AWAY." The author had no more reason to complain of its reception than of that accorded to its predecessors; and he returns his sincere thanks to all those young friends who have written hundreds of letters to him, containing the most generous commendation, with an occasional criticism, which was by no means unwelcome.

Ernest Thornton is a smart boy--perhaps he is too smart; but his smartness is not worldly cunning; it is made up of those elements of character which constitute a noble and true man--good judgment, quick perception, and manly decision, mingled with those moral and religious attributes which are the leading springs of the true life. If some of the hero's actions are doubtful, his motives are always good. The greatest crime against the moral law is to be without a high aim; and while a thousand errors and short-comings may be forgiven, the want of a good intention is the capital sin which may not be pardoned. While we cannot ask or expect all young men to accomplish what Ernest Thornton did, we may point to his high aims and good intentions, and say to the reader, "Go thou and do likewise."

HARRISON SQUARE, MASS.,
November 29, 1867.

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OR,
THE ADVENTURES OF A SMART BOY.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH ERNEST THORNTON BECOMES ACQUAINTED WITH MISS KATE LORAINE.

WE are getting a capital breeze over here," said my friend Bob Hale, who was seated at my side in the Splash.

"There is always plenty of wind over here when it comes from the north-west," I replied.

It was one of the last days of May, and the weather, which had been chilly and disagreeable during the preceding week, was warm and pleasant. I had been to school, as usual, in my boat, and was taking Bob out for a sail, intending to land him at Parkville before dark, and return to the cottage of my uncle beyond the town. I had made one long stretch with the wind on the beam, nearly over to Cannondale; in fact, the water was beginning to shoal off the point half a mile to the northward and eastward of that town.

Along the shore of the lake for two or three miles, on each side of Cannondale, were many beautiful residences, occupied by wealthy people, who were attracted to the locality by the pleasant but not picturesque scenery. It was a delightful region for a summer sojourn, though many of the people were permanent residents.

"Well, Bob, we must come about or get aground," I continued. "Where shall we go now?"

"Anywhere you please, Ernest. I enjoy sailing wherever you go, though I like running along the shore, where you can enjoy these fine gardens, and occasionally look in upon a pleasant party, especially if they happen to be singing, or playing a lively game."

"That's just my idea; and we will follow the shore round to Parkville. The wind will favor us all the way."

I put the Splash about, and with the wind on the quarter, laid a course which kept the boat within a few rods of the shore. From the beach in the rear of many of the houses, little piers, not more than three or four feet wide, were extended into the lake, for the convenience of embarking and landing in the boats, with which nearly every dwelling was supplied. We were approaching one of these piers belonging to the first house beyond the Point, when Bob and myself were startled by a shrill scream, which caused both of us to spring to our feet.

"What does that mean?" demanded Bob.

"I don't know. I can't see anything," I replied.

"Is it somebody overboard?"

"I don't see any one. It came from the garden beyond that first pier."

"There it is again," said Bob, greatly excited, as the scream was repeated.

We were not long left in doubt in regard to the person who had uttered the cry; for a girl immediately emerged from the foliage of the garden, and ran down to the end of the pier, where she paused and looked timorously behind her. We looked anxiously for the cause of her terror, almost expecting to see a bear, a wolf, or at least a savage dog, in pursuit of the hapless maiden. The young lady was nicely dressed, and seemed to be fourteen years of age. Of course Bob and I were both willing "to do or die" in her defence, though we were just then rather too far off to be of instant service to her, even if any savage beast had assailed her.

"What's the matter with her?" said Bob; "she appears to be frightened out of her wits."

"I don't see anything to alarm her."

"Nor I."

But then the young lady screamed again, and we saw a lady rushing out to the place where the girl was, at the end of the pier. The latter seemed to be fearfully agitated; and giving one more agonizing cry, she leaped into the lake, just as the lady was on the point of seizing her by the arm.

Bob and I were thrilled to the depths of our being by this exciting scene. I had already put the helm up, and the Splash was headed directly towards the young lady, who was struggling in the water. The wind carried her away from the pier about twenty feet, when the Splash reached the place, and I ran her between the girl and the shore.

"Save her! save her!" cried the lady on the pier.



THE EXCITING SCENE ON THE SOUTH SHORE.—Page 14.

"Take the helm, Bob," shouted I, throwing the boat round into the wind, and springing upon the half deck.

I was prepared to jump overboard, if it was necessary; but it was not. I had seized the short boat-hook as I went forward, and with it I hooked on to her dress. Drawing her towards the boat, I seized her by the arm, and lifted her on board. She had been in the water but a few moments, and had not lost her consciousness; indeed, she appeared not to have suffered at all from her bath. I at once concluded that she was one of the young ladies whom I had frequently seen bathing on the beach, and that the water had no terrors to her. I had not seen her swim, though the water was over her head.

I placed her on one of the seats as soon as I had pulled her out of the water, expecting her to faint, or do some other womanish thing. She brushed the water from her eyes, and bending down so that she could look under the foresail, she caught a glimpse of the lady on the pier.

"Take me away from here--O, do!" said she, bestowing a pleading look upon me.

"Where shall I land you?" I asked, in gentle tones.

"Anywhere but here--don't leave me here," she replied, earnestly, and hardly less agitated than when she had leaped into the lake.

"But you are wet through, and you may take cold," I suggested, mildly.

"I don't care if I do. It makes no difference. Take me away from here."

"Where shall I land you?" I asked again, puzzled by her singular conduct.

"I don't care where; but if you land me here I shall jump into the lake again."

Bob Hale had put the helm up, and the *Splash* had filled away again on her former course, which was bearing us away from the pier on which the lady still stood.

"Shall I come about?" asked he, apparently satisfied that the only thing we could do was to land the young lady on the pier.

"Not just yet, Bob," I replied, fearful that a change of our course would increase her agitation.

"I am very much obliged to you for what you have done for me," said the dripping maiden, who paid not the

slightest attention to the condition of her clothing, and was wholly absorbed in her own thoughts, which were painful enough to give her face an expression of agony. "I hope you will not think I am ungrateful, Ernest Thornton."

"I do not think so," I replied, astonished to find she knew my name.

"And I shall be ever so much more grateful to you if you will take me away from this place," she added, with a beseeching look.

"I really don't know what to do. You called me by name, just now, but I do not remember to have seen you before."

"Perhaps you have not; but I have seen your boat so often that I feel acquainted with you."

"May I ask you to tell me your name?"

"I will tell you, but you will not know me any better. It is Kate Loraine," she replied, more calmly than she had yet spoken.

I was certainly no wiser for what she told me, though I knew that Loraine was the name of the people who lived in the house nearest to the Point.

"Who is the lady on the pier?" I asked.

"Mrs. Loraine," answered she, with a visible shudder; though I could not tell whether it was caused by the mention of the lady's name, or by the cold chill of her wet condition.

"Is she your mother?" I continued; and it seemed to me that her answer to this question would enable me to decide whether or not to land her on the pier.

"No, no!" replied she, with the most decisive emphasis.

"But your names are the same."

"They are; of course she has my father's name."

I could not see why that followed, but I did not like to carry my questions to the point of impudence.

"Is your father at home?"

"My father is dead," she answered, in a very sad tone.

"Excuse me if I ask who the lady is that stands on the pier."

"Mrs. Loraine."

"And not your mother?"

"No!"

"You seemed to be running away from her when I heard you screaming."

"I was; she was trying to catch me."

Perhaps Miss Kate Loraine thought I was very obtuse, but I could not understand the relation between the parties, and I had not the faintest idea why she was running away from Mrs. Loraine. I was not willing to believe that a young miss like her intended to resort to such a desperate remedy as suicide for any real or imaginary sufferings.

"What shall we do, Bob?" I asked, turning to my companion, completely nonplussed by the circumstances.

"I don't know what to do. It seems to me we ought to return the young lady to her friends," replied he.

"I have no friends," interposed Kate, and the tears started in her eyes; "at least I have none in Cannondale."

"Don't you live at Mrs. Loraine's?" asked Bob.

"Yes; but I shall live there no longer."

"You say she is not your mother?" I added, returning to the point I had twice left.

"She was my father's wife, but she is not my mother."

"She is your step-mother," I continued, as the light flooded my dull brain.

"She is; I do not wish to speak ill of her, but I do wish to keep away from her. She is not kind to me, to say the very least."

I pitied her, and I saw by Bob's looks that he was not at all behind me in the outflow of his sympathy. I had read stories enough about "awful step-mothers" to form an idea of Kate's situation, though I had no prejudices against step-mothers, as such. Bob Hale's father had married a second wife, but Bob and his sister would never have known from her treatment of them, that she was not their own mother.

If Kate was not a very pretty girl, she was certainly a very interesting one. Her form was grace itself, but her eyes were all that was pretty about her face; and when I looked at her I was not willing to believe it possible that any one, and especially one bearing her father's name, could ill-treat her.

By this time the boat had gone to the farther corner of the lake, and it was necessary to brace her up or come about. I went aft to take the helm, and Kate followed me, taking a seat at my side. I put the tiller hard down, and the Splash came about, heading towards Cannondale. Our passenger was quick to discern the course, and became quite excited again.

"You are taking me home again!" exclaimed she. "O, Ernest Thornton! you will not do that. Let me land here, anywhere, even on that island, but do not give me back to her."

"I don't know what to do, Miss Loraine; but I think you ought to have dry clothes at once."

"Have pity upon me, and do not take me home," pleaded she.

She was so agitated that I became alarmed; and to pacify her, I came about again, and steered for Parkville.



CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH ERNEST LISTENS TO THE STORY OF MISS KATE LORAINÉ.

FORTUNATELY the day was warm and the sun shining brightly, or our gentle passenger must have suffered severely from the effects of her voluntary bath. I do not know that I ever felt more embarrassed and perplexed than I did when I sat in the Splash that day, with Miss Kate Lorainé at my side, her dress hanging "slinky" and dripping upon her. Certainly there was nothing sentimental in the affair, for, though I was willing to become a knight errant in a good cause, the situation was so awkward that I could not enjoy it.

Bob Hale was as much in trouble as I was, and he could not tell what to do any better than I could. Neither of us was willing to assume the responsibility of taking the young lady from her home on the strength of her own assertion that her step-mother abused her. There were two sides to every question, and with the brighter example of Mrs. Hale before us, we were not disposed to regard her as a monster without giving her a hearing.

Kate was quite composed again when she found the boat was headed towards Parkville, instead of Cannondale. One thing was very much in her favor; she was not willing to speak evil of the lady who abused her. She had told us no more than was necessary to explain her position. Her demeanor did not indicate any thing malignant in her heart; on the contrary, her conduct exhibited a degree of Christian forbearance which was hardly to be expected of one who had been abused.

"I have heard all about you, Ernest Thornton," said Kate, as the Splash stood over towards Parkville.

"Have you, indeed? I was not aware that I was celebrated enough to be talked about," I laughingly replied.

"You are; and ever since you beat the Champion in the race with the Adieno, I have looked upon you as a hero. I have often wished that I might see you close to."

She was close enough to me now to make me shiver when I looked at her, she was so wet and drabbed.

"Perhaps I am a kind of one-horse hero among the boys," I added, for the sake of saying something.

"And among the girls, too," said she, promptly, if not boldly, though there was a degree of simplicity in her manner which prevented me from giving her words an unfavorable construction. "I have heard them in Cannondale and Parkville tell what a bold, brave fellow you are."

"I am very much obliged to them and to you for the good opinion of me. If you have confidence in me, that will answer my present purpose."

She looked curiously at me; and taking advantage of this favorable current of sentiment, I put the Splash about on the other tack, so that she was again headed towards Cannondale. Bob looked anxiously from Kate to me, and from me to Kate again. He expected another storm of emotion from her, and so did I; but I had decided upon my course, and was fully determined to carry it out, even if it broke the heartstrings of my fair passenger. I was sorry to be so ungallant as to resist the will of a young lady, but my conscience would not let me interfere with the domestic arrangements of Mrs. Lorainé, without giving her a chance to defend herself.

"They say you are a smart boy, Ernest Thornton," added she, apparently without noticing the change in the course of the boat.

"Perhaps I am--I don't know," I replied; "I am afraid if I take you over to Parkville, people will think I am smarter than I ever was before."

"Why?" asked she, bestowing a painfully anxious glance upon me.

"Don't you think it would be rather smart for Bob Hale and me to run away with a young lady like you?"

"Run away with me!" exclaimed she, with a troubled look.

"What should we do with you after we had landed you?"

"O, I won't give you any trouble at all--not a bit."

"We don't mind the trouble, Miss Lorainé; we were only thinking what would become of you."

"I have an uncle in New York city--my father's brother. If I can only get to him, it will be all I want," she answered,

and her future course seemed to be clear enough to her.

"But how will you get to New York?" I asked.

"I don't know; I would rather walk than stay at Cannondale any longer."

"Haven't you written to your uncle?" asked Bob.

"No; I don't know what his first name is; and Mrs. Loraine won't let me write any letters. I wrote one once, and directed it to Mr. Loraine, New York, but she burnt it up."

"Do you think you could find him?"

"I am sure I could. I would call on every one of that name in the city. Why, Ernest Thornton! You are going back to Cannondale!" exclaimed Kate, as she happened to glance ahead, and saw the shore not far distant.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Loraine. Just now you said I was a hero, and a smart boy, and all that sort of thing. My friend Bob Hale, here, is as smart and as much of a hero as I am, I assure you. Between us two we will do what we can for you," I interposed when she began to exhibit signs of another outbreak of emotion.

"That's so!" added Bob, decidedly; and he was always ready to back up any thing I said or did.

"Now keep cool, Miss Loraine," I continued. "Don't be a bit afraid, and Bob and I will see you through, if we have to stand on our heads and walk through fire and water to do it."

"You are very kind, and I am very much obliged to you," replied she, with a shudder, as she glanced at the pier, a quarter of a mile off, on which Mrs. Loraine was still standing. "But don't make me go there again."

"Now, Miss Loraine, you must be reasonable," said I, in the gentlest tone I could command, albeit I was not much accustomed to the refinements of young ladies' society. "It would not be right for Bob and me to carry you away from your home. People would think hard of us."

"Then I don't want you to do it," she replied, in tones of resignation.

"We don't know any thing about the affairs at your house."

"I have told you the truth."

"We do not doubt that; but you only say that Mrs. Loraine is not kind to you."

"She is not."

"Do you mean that she abuses you?"

"I do mean that," replied Kate, with some hesitation, which evinced an unwillingness to acknowledge the fact.

"What has she done to you?"

"She locks me up in one of the attic rooms for weeks together," she replied, bursting into tears.

"Don't cry, Kate; what does she lock you up for?" asked Bob, when I paused.

"I suppose I am very naughty, sometimes, but I can't help it," sobbed she.

"Then she locks you up to punish you for being naughty--does she?"

"Yes."

Bob looked significantly at me, as much as to say that he did not wish to have anything to do with "rescuing" a young miss who had been shut up for being naughty.

"If she would only be kind to me *sometimes*, I could bear it all. If she only smiled on me even once a month, I think I should not complain. But, O, it is so terrible to be locked into your chamber, and stay there day after day for a whole week!" moaned she, with a convulsive quiver.

"When did she lock you up last?" continued Bob, who had taken the investigation into his own hands, when Kate showed a willingness to answer.

"About a week ago."

"A week ago? I thought you said she kept you in your room for a week?"

"So she does, and she only let me out this forenoon."

"What did she lock you up for last time?"

"For taking such long stitches hemming her handkerchief."

"For taking long stitches!" exclaimed Bob, with something like horror in his tones. "Did she shut you up for a week for this?"

"She did; and she fastened the blinds of the chamber so that I could not open them."

"Did you refuse to take short stitches?" I asked, fearing there might be some aggravating circumstances.

"No, I did not, indeed. I hemmed the handkerchief just as I always did, and I did not think the stitches were too coarse," she replied, wiping away her tears with a wet handkerchief. "It was done just like this one," she added, exhibiting it as a specimen of her work.

Neither Bob nor myself was sufficiently skilled in sewing craft to judge of the quality of the work, but the stitches did not seem to be very long. We compared the hemming with that on our own handkerchiefs, but were not able to detect much difference.

"When did Mrs. Loraine shut you up the time before that," I asked, handing her the handkerchief.

"I had not been out three days."

"What was it for that time?"

"Because I pulled up some flowers in the garden which were just coming up. I thought they were weeds; and I'm sure I didn't mean any harm."

"How long did she shut you up for this?" asked Bob.

"Eight days."

"What do you do in your chamber while shut up there?" I inquired.

"Nothing."

"Don't you have books?"

"O, no! If I did, I shouldn't mind it so much."

"Don't you sew?"

"No; I'm not allowed to do anything," she answered, with a convulsive sob.

I could hardly keep from crying myself, and I was almost choked by my efforts to keep down my emotions. I had kept the boat away from the pier, in order to afford time for this inquiry, and the Splash was now off the Point. I put her about, and ran before the wind towards the pier again.

"Are you willing to tell us what the trouble was to-day, before you jumped into the water?" said Bob, tenderly.

"She told me to water the flowers in her garden, and I was doing it. She kept telling me how to do it, and what to water, and I tried as hard as I could to please her; but I was so frightened lest I should do something wrong, that I trod on a peony, and broke it down. She was very angry, and immediately told me to go back to my room, and stay there another week. O, if you only knew how I dreaded that room! If you only knew how gloomy and sad I am when shut up there! If you could only feel how long and heavy the hours are there, you would pity me."

"I do pity you," said Bob, warmly.

"I begged her on my knees not to shut me up. I felt then that I would rather die than be shut up again, for I only got out this morning. That's my room," said she, with a shudder, as she pointed to an attic window in the rear of the house.

"Miss Loraine, we will stand by you!" I exclaimed, with enthusiasm, for my feelings had been strongly worked upon by her story. "But you must go to the house, and get warm clothing. Bob and I will go with you."

"But I shall be sent to my room at once."

"If you are, we will get you out this very night, if we have to lift the roof off the house to do it."

Kate was fearful; but whatever happened, we were determined that she should have dry clothing. I ran the Splash up to the pier, where Mrs. Loraine was impatiently waiting for the boat.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH ERNEST CALLS UPON MRS. LORAINÉ.

I BEGAN to fear that you did not intend to return, young gentlemen," said Mrs. Lorainé, as the Splash came up on the leeward side of the pier. "I am afraid this young lady has given you a great deal of trouble."

"No trouble at all," I replied.

"She is a wayward and disobedient girl. I have trouble enough with her, but I do not wish to have her trouble other people," continued Mrs. Lorainé; and I could see that the glances she bestowed upon her step-daughter were full of malice.

"She seems to have some trouble herself, or she wouldn't have jumped into the lake."

"She would not have done that if she hadn't seen your boat close by," added the lady.

"I fear she will take cold," said I, wishing to draw the woman out as much as possible.

"There is no danger. She would be in the water half the time if I would let her. She is a troublesome girl."

Mrs. Lorainé certainly took the matter quite coolly, and did not seem to realize or to believe that the troublesome miss had actually jumped into the lake to escape from her cruelty. She told Kate to get out of the boat, and go into the house. The terrified girl obeyed in silence, and with trembling frame.

"Go to your room, and put on dry clothes," she added, as Kate walked up the pier. "She is a very naughty girl; but I am much obliged to you, young gentlemen, for the trouble you have taken on her account."

"We were very glad to serve her," I replied, fastening the painter of my boat to a ring in the pier, as the lady walked towards the house.

Bob and I stepped on shore and followed her—a movement which seemed to annoy her very much; but we were too decidedly in earnest to care what she thought or felt. Without any consultation with my companion, I had by this time made up my mind that Miss Kate had the rights of the case; that Mrs. Lorainé was a female tyrant. I did not consider that her family affairs did not concern me, and I had already concluded to adopt the policy of intervention, without regard to consequences.

Mrs. Lorainé was a lady, so far as her manners were concerned. There was nothing coarse or brutal about her. Like our old enemy, Mr. Parasyte, she appeared to be a refined tyrant, whose oppression was all the more intolerable because it was smooth and polished. The lady walked at a dignified pace towards the house, and we followed her at a respectful distance. Occasionally she glanced half round, so that she could see us, but she did not challenge us in regard to our intentions.

"What are you going to do, Ernest?" asked Bob Hale, in a low tone.

"I hardly know yet. We will follow the matter up, and when we get a little farther into it we shall know better what to do," I replied. "I think we will stop here a while, and let things take their course."

We halted, and busied ourselves in examining a parterre of flowers, while the lady continued on her way, and entered the house at a side door.

"I don't know about this business," said Bob, when Mrs. Lorainé was no longer within hearing.

"I do," I answered decidedly. "I'm as clear as a quill in regard to it."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to get the young lady out of the scrape, by hook or by crook. Since I have seen this woman, I am satisfied that Miss Kate did not tell us more than half of the truth."

"What can you do?"

"Just as soon as Kate has had time to put on dry clothes, we will call upon her to inquire for her health. We can't do any thing less than that, after we have pulled her out of the lake."

"We can certainly do that, but it seems to me that is about all we can do."

"I don't know; we will see," I replied, not quite willing yet to tell my prudent friend what I intended; not that he would be behind me in carrying out any good work, but because he was rather fond of arguing against bold measures.

We waited about half an hour, but we were not unobserved; for through the Venetian blinds I saw Mrs. Loraine several times in the act of watching our movements. It was plain enough to me that we were not welcome visitors, and that the lady was not a little disturbed by our presence. We went up to the side door, where she had entered, and rang the bell. The summons was answered by the servant girl, who, when we asked to see Mrs. Loraine, invited us to the sitting-room. I judged that we had unwittingly chosen an opportune moment for our entrance, for Kate's persecutor was not in the room, and probably had not noticed our approach. If she had, it is very likely she would not have permitted us to come in.

Through the open door we saw her come down the stairs. She looked vexed and annoyed when she discovered who her visitors were, and sailed into the room with an exhibition of *hauteur* which might have produced a strong impression on a couple of smaller boys than Bob and myself.

"We called to inquire for Miss Kate," I began, after I had risen from my chair, and made the politest bow I was capable of making.

"She is quite well," replied Mrs. Loraine, coolly.

"I hope she has not suffered from the cold bath she took in the lake," I continued.

"Not at all."

"She was very much agitated and distressed."

"She will get over that."

"We would like to see her, if you please," I added, coming to the point without any more parleying.

"It would not be convenient for her to see you this evening," answered Mrs. Loraine, with more emphasis than an ordinary case seemed to require.

"I am sorry, for we desire very much to see her; indeed, we promised to see her after she had changed her clothes."

"Well, young gentlemen, I will assure her you have kept your promise, which will be sufficient to relieve you from any charge of want of fidelity," said she.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Loraine, but if it isn't too much trouble, we would like very much to see Miss Kate."

"It would be no trouble at all, but it would be entirely inconsistent with my purposes to have her leave her room to-night," answered she, haughtily.

"At what hour to-morrow could we see her," I asked.

"It would not be proper at any hour to-morrow for you to see her. Kate is a wilful and disobedient girl, and I find it necessary to permit her to see no one, in her present frame of mind."

"Perhaps I ought to tell you, Mrs. Loraine, that Kate very strongly objected to returning to her home, and begged us to land her any where--in the woods--rather than bring her back to you," I added.

"Did she, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Loraine, her face becoming very red. "Then she is even more wilful than I supposed."

"It was only by the promise to see her, that we induced her to land here."

"You behaved very properly in returning her to me, and I am greatly obliged to you for your consideration. It is not necessary for me to detail to you, who are strangers to me, the troubles I experience in my domestic affairs; and you are too gentlemanly to wish to pry into them."

"Excuse me, but when a young lady becomes so desperate as to jump overboard, it seems to me she must be in a very bad condition."

"That was all a sham. Perhaps I have indulged her too much, and not begun early enough to subdue her violent temper. She is very wilful, and needs stern discipline."

"Do you think it was fair to keep her in a room a week for taking too long stitches, or for treading on a flower?"

She looked at me, and turned red again.

"I see that Kate has been indelicate enough to tell you about our family affairs. Of course you have sufficient discretion to disbelieve such ridiculous stories."

"After pulling her out of the lake, we were much interested in her. We don't wish to interfere, but I suppose there can be no harm in telling us what you did shut her up a week or ten days for."

"I am greatly obliged to you, young gentlemen, for what you have done; but I cannot submit to be called to an account for my conduct in my own family. I must ask you to excuse me now, for I have an engagement at this hour."

It was evident to me that we could find out nothing about Kate from her; but the look of malignity she wore on her face when she spoke of her step-daughter was the best kind of testimony to me. I rose from my chair, and moved towards the door, followed by Bob Hale. We bade the lady good evening, and she closed the door behind us.

Just as we were going down the steps, a buggy, drawn by two handsome horses, came up to the door, which assured us that the lady's engagement was not a pretence used to get rid of us. The horses were driven by a gayly-dressed gentleman. When he alighted, and I obtained a fair view of his face and form, I was considerably interested in him, for I had seen him before.

It was the gentleman I had seen at the cottage, with whom my uncle Amos had had some hard words. He was in some way connected with my silent guardian, and I was very anxious to know who and what he was, for such information might be the key to the mystery which shrouded my existence. For the moment I forgot all about Kate.

"Come along, Ernest," said Bob, when I paused to observe the gentleman.

"Go down to the boat, Bob, and I will be with you in a few minutes."

I stepped into a path where the foliage concealed me; but I saw the gentleman looking down the drive-way as if to obtain a second view of me, for I had observed before that he appeared to recognize me.

"I will be ready in a moment, Tom," said Mrs. Loraine, opening the front door.

Tom! He was a constant visitor, or she would not be thus familiar with him. Who was Tom? I wished she had called him by his surname. As I gazed at his face, while he sat in the buggy, I fancied that it bore some resemblance to that of my uncle.

This man had a quarrel with my misanthropic guardian. I had lived at the cottage with uncle Amos from early childhood. I could faintly remember a weary waste of waters before I came to Parkville,--in which the cottage was located,--but nothing more. During the preceding year I had drawn it out of my uncle that my father was dead, and my mother an inmate of an insane asylum, and that no property was left for me by my parents. Who they were, where my father died, or where my mother was imprisoned, he refused to tell me.

This gentleman who sat in the buggy had been to the cottage several times. High words had generally attended his visits. I had once asked my uncle who he was, and the fact that an answer was refused, was enough to assure me that a better knowledge of him would assist me in finding a clew to my own history.

Mrs. Loraine appeared at the door, and "Tom" nimbly leaped from his seat, and assisted her into the buggy.

"Who was that young fellow that came out of the house as I drove up?" asked he, as he took his place at her side.

"Ernest Thornton," replied the lady.

"Whew!" exclaimed he, as he drove off.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH ERNEST RELEASES THE CAPTIVE MAIDEN FROM HER PRISON.

WHAT the precise signification was of the "whew!" which the gentlemanly Tom had uttered, I did not know; but it seemed to indicate that he was not particularly pleased to learn that I had been a visitor at the house. I felt that there was work for me to do, which I could commence at once by following out the clew afforded me by Mrs. Loraine's visitor. My first business was to ascertain who this gentleman was. Doubtless any one in the house could tell me. Probably Kate knew all about him, and I was all the more eager to see her.

I walked down to the pier in a brown study. Mrs. Loraine had positively refused to let me see Kate, at the present time or in the future. She was again confined to her room, not to leave it, I judged, for weeks, unless I put my plan of intervention into execution. Her oppressor was away, and the present seemed to be the most favorable time for releasing the captive.

"Come, Ernest, are you going home, or not?" called Bob, who was getting impatient at my delay.

"Not yet, Bob; there is something for us to do before we go."

"What's that?"

"I don't intend to leave Miss Kate here."

"I don't see what we can do about it," said he.

"I haven't any idea of leaving her to the tender mercies of that tigress. She shall be a passenger in the Splash," I added, as I stepped into the boat, and sat down in the standing-room. "I want to see her for my own sake as well as hers. I've had an idea since you left me."

"An idea?" queried he.

"Yes, a big idea. You know my story as well as I know it myself, and I don't mean to keep anything from you."

"What's up, Ernest?"

"I want to know who and what I am; and I'm going to find out, if there is any such thing. I told you about a well-dressed fellow who has been to the cottage of my uncle several times."

"I remember all about him. He quarrelled with your uncle, you said."

"That's the man. Well, Bob, the fellow that drove up in that two-horse buggy, as we came out of the house, was the very one who came to the cottage."

"Is that so?"

"That's so."

"Does he live in Cannondale?"

"I don't know where he lives. I heard Mrs. Loraine call him Tom, and that's all I know about him. I'm going to find out who he is."

"If you can."

"Kate must know who he is, for he seems to be a regular visitor at the house of Mrs. Loraine."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to get Kate out of the house."

"How, Ernest?"

"I don't exactly know yet, but I shall find a way."

"Don't you think that would be rather high-handed?"

"I can't help it if it is. I would just as lief raise a breeze over here as not."

"We shall get into a scrape, Ernest."

"I won't drag you into it, Bob. You may stay on the boat--"

"No, I won't! I'm ready to take my share in the enterprise."

"I'm satisfied this girl is abused, and it would be mean in us to leave her to her fate. It's nearly dark now, and there isn't any one in the garden. I'm going up to take a look. Kate said her room was in the attic."

"Yes; that's the one with the blinds closed."

I landed again, and Bob went with me up to the house. There was no one in sight, and nothing to prevent our doing the work we had undertaken immediately. After examining the premises, I concluded that we must release the captive maiden by means of the window. It would not be prudent to enter by the door, which was probably locked in the absence of the lady.

I visited the stable on the grounds in search of a rope; but I found there a ladder, which suited me better. With the assistance of Bob, I carried this to the rear of the house, and raised it to the window. I ascended to the window, and found that the blinds were nailed on the outside, so that they could not be opened. This was some confirmation of the truth of Kate's story. I descended again, and found a hammer in the stable, with which I returned and removed the nails.

"Kate!" I called, as soon as I had opened the blinds.

"O, Ernest Thornton!" exclaimed she, opening the window. "I felt sure that you had deserted me. I am so glad you have come!"

"We have no time to spare. Get your clothes as quick as possible; tie them up in a bundle, and throw them out the window."

She did not occupy many minutes in this preparation for her departure. The bundle was made up and thrown to the ground.

"How am I to get out?" asked she, glancing blankly at the ladder.

"Can you go down stairs and go out by the door?" I asked, willing to spare her the descent by the ladder.



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"I cannot; the door is locked," she replied, in trembling tones, for she was violently agitated by the situation.

"Then you must go down by the ladder," I added, ascending a few rounds higher. "Now give me your hands, and don't be afraid, for I can hold you so that you cannot fall."

I braced myself upon the ladder, which I directed Bob to hold firmly in its place, and took her by both hands. It was a perilous feat to step from the window to the ladder, and she was so terrified that I held her whole weight; but the passage was safely effected. I held her by the hands till she reached the ground, for she was so timid I dared not trust her to her own energies. I went up again, closed the blinds, and restored the nails, hoping that the escape of the prisoner would not be discovered before the next day. The ladder was conveyed to the stable, and placed where we had found it.

"Now run down to the pier and get into the boat as fast as you can," said I to Kate. "Crawl into the cuddy, and keep out of sight."

"Do you think any one will catch me?" asked she, quivering with terror.

"No; there is no person near to catch you," I replied, as I picked up her bundle of clothes.

We reached the boat without meeting any person, though Mrs. Loraine's man drove the cow into the yard just as we were pushing off from the pier. I had only lowered the jib of the Splash, so that she was ready to start without any delay; and in a few moments we were standing up the lake, the breeze still fresh from the north-west.

"You may come out now, Kate," I called to our passenger, when we were half a mile from the pier.

"Am I perfectly safe?" she asked, timidly, as she crawled out of the cuddy.

"Yes; no one can see you now. Sit down on this seat, and don't be alarmed."

"What shall we do with Miss Loraine now we have released her?" asked Bob, as she sat down by his side in the standing-room.

"I don't know," I replied. "We will settle that question before we go on shore. What did Mrs. Loraine do to you when you went into the house, Kate?"

"She spoke to me very severely, and sent me to my room. She told me I should not come out again for a month."

"She was mistaken this time, if she never was before," said Bob, with a congratulatory smile.

"She was, indeed; and O, I'm so thankful to you!"

"Do you know where Mrs. Loraine has gone now?" I asked, approaching the subject which was so near my own heart.

"I don't; I heard a carriage drive up the yard. I suppose she has gone out to ride," replied Kate.

"A gentleman drove up to the door in a two-horse buggy. Do you know who the gentleman was?" I asked, anxiously. "Mrs. Loraine called him Tom."

"O, that was Mr. Thornton," she answered.

"Mr. Thornton!" I exclaimed.

"Yes; is he any relation to you?"

"Not that I am aware of," I replied, musing upon the fact that he bore my name.

"He often comes to see Mrs. Loraine, and people say they are engaged to be married," continued Kate.

"Where does he live?"

"I'm not very sure, but I think it is in Philadelphia. He stays at the Cannondale Hotel about a week at a time, and comes to Mrs. Loraine's every day."

"How often does he come to Cannondale?"

"Every two or three months, I should think. But I don't see much of him. I have been kept in my chamber most of the time," she added, sadly.

"Did you ever hear him speak about Amos Thornton, my uncle?"

"Never."

"You say he is going to be Mrs. Loraine's husband."

"That's what people say; I don't know anything about it, only that he is very often at the house."

"Do you know anything about Mr. Thornton?" I continued. "Is he rich?"

"I don't know whether he is or not. I think he must be. He always takes her out to ride with a span of fine horses."

"Is Mrs. Loraine very rich herself?"

"She is not very rich herself. She has what my father left her by his will."

"Of course your father left something to you," added Bob Hale.

"Mr. Windleton called me a little heiress two years ago, and said I should have forty thousand dollars when I was old enough to receive it."

"Who is Mr. Windleton?"

"He was a great friend of my father. He keeps the money that belongs to me. I forget what they call him."

"A trustee," suggested Bob, who was somewhat earned in the law.

"Yes; that's what he said he was. My father gave his wife only half as much as he gave me; but I wish he had given her all of his property," said Kate, looking over into the water.

"Why do you wish so?" I asked.

"I think she would have been kinder to me. Mr. Windleton's daughter Ellen told me, if I should die, that my money would go to Mrs. Loraine. I don't know whether it is true or not;" and without any apparent reason, Kate burst into tears.

Bob and I comforted her as well as we could.

"I'm afraid," she continued, when she had wiped away her tears, "she hopes I shall die."

"I guess not," I added. "That would be horrible."

"Why does she treat me so then--not even let me look out the window?" sobbed she. "I think she wants my money. I have tried to think it was not so, but I can't, ever since Ellen Windleton told me that."

"Why don't you tell Mr. Windleton how your step-mother treats you?" asked Bob.

"He and his whole family are in Europe. They have been there more than a year. I shall tell him when he comes back; but Mrs. Loraine is my guardian."

"Ernest, we are almost over to Parkville, and it is time to know what we are to do with Miss Loraine. It won't do to take her to Parkville," said Bob.

"I will stay in the boat all night. That's a nice little place in there," interposed Kate, pointing to the cuddy.

"You may go in there now, if you please," I added. "I will land you, Bob, and take care of Kate myself. It is quite dark now, and I can take her up to the cottage. No one will find her there."

"What will your uncle say?"

"He will not see her; if he does, he won't say anything; he never says anything."

My friend was entirely willing to take his share of the responsibility, but I was satisfied that I could dispose of my fair passenger without any assistance. I landed him at the steamboat pier, and then stood over towards the cottage.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH ERNEST IS AWAKENED BY A LOUD KNOCKING.

THE Splash continued on her course up the lake, after I had landed Bob Hale. It was quite dark, and I told Kate she need not stay in the cuddy any longer. She came out, and sat down near me. I was still in doubt as to what I should do with her; and now that Bob had left me, the problem seemed more difficult than before. Mrs. Loraine was not a woman to let the matter rest where it was. She was full of spirit and vindictiveness, and as she was the legal guardian of Kate, she would not let her escape pass unnoticed.

In the morning, if not before, it would be discovered that the bird had flown. After the interest Bob and I had manifested in the welfare of the young lady, her guardian would know where to apply for information, and I might expect to hear from her in the course of twenty-four hours, and it was not improbable that the search would be commenced that very evening. I told Kate, as we sailed along, that her absence would create a tempest in the household of her step-mother, and that we must be prepared for vigorous proceedings on her part.

"I hope I haven't got you into trouble, Ernest Thornton," said she, her tones indicating much anxiety.

"Never mind me, Kate. I am used to trouble, and I can stand anything. I only hope I shall be able to keep you safe from your enemies."

"Can't I stay in this boat? That cabin is a nice place; I am sure it seems like a fairy palace to me, compared with my prison house in the attic chamber."

"You might stay in the cabin a day or two; but of course you can't live there for any great length of time. You say you have an uncle in New York city."

"I have. If I could only find him I should be safe. I never saw him, at least not since I can remember; but as he is my father's brother, he must be something like my father, and he will take care of me."

"How can we get you to New York? That's the question."

"If I could only reach the railroad, I should not be afraid to go alone," she added, earnestly. "I am sure I could find my uncle, for his name is not a very common one."

"But I don't think it would be safe for you to go alone. We must manage that some way or other, though I hardly know how. It will need some money to pay your fare."

"Dear me! so it will!" exclaimed she, blankly. "And I haven't a single cent!"

"Never mind, Kate; we will manage that. I can raise the money for you, and see that you get to New York."

"You are very kind, Ernest Thornton," replied she, warmly. "I shall have plenty of money some time, and will pay you back every cent."

"There will be no trouble about that," I added. "I am only thinking how I shall get you safely to your destination; but I am going to do it somehow or other. Are you not afraid to stay in the boat all night?"

"O, no! I'm not afraid of anything but my attic chamber."

"My cabin isn't a bad place to stay in. I have slept there a great many nights, in all parts of the lake, sometimes miles from any house."

"I'm not a bit afraid, Ernest Thornton. Why, the cabin is a splendid place, and there are two nice beds there. I'm sure I don't want any better room than that. I could live there a whole year."

"You will not have to stay there long. Just as soon as I can get the money, and find some one to go with you to New York, I shall sail up the creek, where there is a railroad station, and you shall start for New York. Now we are almost to the cottage of my uncle, and you had better keep out of sight, for I don't want any one to see you."

She crawled into the cuddy, and sat down on one of the berths. I always moored the Splash about ten rods from the shore, so that she could lie in the deep water. The row-boat in which I came off to her was fastened to the buoy, so that I easily found the place in the darkness, and made fast to the moorings. I lowered my sails, and put every thing in order as usual.

"Now, Kate, I think you will be perfectly safe here. I will bring you off some supper very soon."

"I don't need any supper. Mrs. Loraine sent me some before she went out to ride; but I could not eat a mouthful."

"No matter; I will bring off something, and see you again to-night."

I went ashore in the row-boat. My supper was waiting for me in the dining-room. After I had finished the meal, I buttered several slices of bread, and wrapped them in a napkin, with some cheese and some cake. Probably old Betsey, the housekeeper, thought I had a ravenous appetite that night; but she never asked any questions, or expressed any surprise at anything which occurred at the cottage. I pulled off to the boat again, and gave the contents of the napkin to Kate.

"I am sorry I can't light the lantern, Kate," I added, as I handed her the provisions; "but I'm afraid it would betray you, if Mrs. Loraine should happen to come here in search of you to-night."

"I don't care to have a light. I am so rejoiced to get away from my prison that I don't care for anything," said she, with enthusiasm. "You don't know how much I have suffered over there, Ernest Thornton."

"I hope you have seen the last of it; but we must be very careful. In the morning you must stay in your cabin, for my uncle gets up very early, and walks all about the place. You must not let him see you on any account."

"I will not. I will be as careful as you can desire."

"In the morning I hope I shall be able to do something with you."

"I shall trust myself wholly to you, Ernest Thornton, and one of these days I hope to be able to repay you for your goodness to me."

"Never mind that, Kate; I am going to do what I think is right because it is right. I suppose you thought it was rather hard in me to take you ashore at the pier over there, this afternoon; but I'm sure I shouldn't have dared to do what I have done if I hadn't seen Mrs. Loraine, and satisfied myself that she ill-treated you."

"I think you did just right, Ernest Thornton; but I was willing to suffer rather than get you into trouble."

"I don't care for myself; it don't make much difference what happens to me. If I can only enable you to reach your uncle in New York city, that is all I want. But it is getting late now, and I think you had better go to sleep. You can do as I do, Kate, when I sleep on board. I always lock myself in."

I explained to her how this was done. There were two doors opening into the cuddy, one on each side of the mainmast, with a slide over each. Outside of these doors were two round holes, which I had sawed in the bulkhead for ventilation. By reaching the arm through one of these apertures the slide could be locked. I fastened Kate into the cuddy, and then gave her the key, with which she opened the door without difficulty herself.

"I shall keep a good lookout for you," said I, as I pulled my tender alongside.

"I am not a bit afraid, Ernest Thornton," replied she. "I shall pray for you, and thank God for giving me such a good friend."

"Good night," I added, speaking through the round hole.

"Good night; and don't worry about me," replied she.

So far as her comfort was concerned, there was not the least need of worrying about her, for the cabin of the Splash was a miniature parlor. There were two good hair mattresses in the berths, with plenty of bed-clothes. The floor was carpeted, and there was every convenience which so small an apartment could contain. I had slept there for a week together; and when my uncle had banished me from his house, I had intended to live on board of her all the time, and earn my living by carrying out parties. So long as no one disturbed her, I had no fears in regard to my guest in the boat.

But I was very much troubled about the final disposal of her. It would not be safe for her to go to New York alone. It might be several days before she found her uncle, and it was not proper to subject a young girl like her to the perils of the great city without a protector. I had no objection to making a trip to New York myself. The spring vacation would commence on the following Monday, and I could be absent from home a whole week without being missed, if I kept the Splash out of sight, for my uncle would suppose I was off on a cruise in her.

This plan pleased me, and I determined to carry it out. School kept but two days more before the vacation, and if I could only keep Kate out of sight till Monday, everything would work well. The financial question was not a difficult one to manage. I calculated that about thirty dollars would pay the expenses of the trip to the metropolis; and uncle

Amos would give me this sum or more, without asking a single question. I had about ten dollars on hand, which would be a sufficient margin for contingencies.

The whole matter was as luminous now as youth and enthusiasm could wish; and I went to my chamber satisfied that I had solved the problem. It seemed to me that the only possible obstacle to the complete success of my scheme would be the interference of Mrs. Loraine and her friends. In the morning, at farthest, the search for the escaped prisoner would be commenced. But I could do nothing to provide against emergencies in this direction. I could only wait till I saw how "the land lay" in the morning, and then trust to my own skill and dash to overcome the difficulties as they presented themselves. In my prayers I remembered poor Kate, and asked the blessing of Heaven upon her. I felt sure that the Good Father would help me to save her from the cruel persecution to which she was subjected. Having thus commended myself and Kate to the care of Him who watches over the innocent, I turned over and went to sleep.

My slumber was soon disturbed by a violent pounding at the front door of the cottage, which was just beneath my window. I leaped up in the bed and listened. They were not doubtful sounds that I heard, and they appeared to be made by the heel of a heavy boot. The person who demanded admission to the cottage at that unseemly hour was evidently in earnest, and the door groaned under the vigorous assaults he made upon it. Of course I could not be uncertain in regard to the errand of the midnight visitor--for such the striking of the clock in the hall below now assured me he was. "The tug of war" was at hand, and I was to be called upon at once to "face the music."

I decided not to be forward in meeting the messenger from Mrs. Loraine, whoever he was. It was possible, if not probable, that she had sent the deputy sheriff after me; and this terrible official might hurry me off from my bed to a cell in the Cannondale lockup, heedless of the fact that I was found in another county. If I was arrested, what would become of poor Kate? The cold sweat stood on my brow as I thought of her. But I came to the conclusion that I would not be arrested by any deputy sheriff, or any one else, if I could possibly avoid it; and it was a satisfaction for me to hear the wind piping merrily at my window, for that would give heels to the Splash, if a hurried departure became necessary.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH ERNEST GETS AN IDEA.

THE knocking at the door of the cottage was continued almost without intermission. The visitor was evidently endowed with only a small portion of the necessary virtue of patience, for when he ceased pounding for an instant, it was only to curse and swear at the heaviness of the sleepers within. I was sure that old Jerry and Betsey, who slept in the rear of the house, would not hear the summons, even if the imperative messenger broke the door down; but I was rather surprised that my uncle, who, I always supposed, slept with one eye open, if he ever slept at all, did not answer the call more promptly.

I got out of bed, and looked out at the window, hoping to obtain a sight of the visitor; but the night was too dark for me to distinguish his form or features. Again he swore, and again he hammered away at the door. What they do in New Jersey when it rains is to *let* it rain; and what I did when he pounded was to *let* him pound. I was perfectly willing he should pound; I even hoped that he enjoyed it. In spite of the anxiety I felt for poor Kate, I could not help laughing at the ludicrous earnestness with which he swore and pounded. Like most men, my uncle was cool when he was not excited; and as there had been nothing on the present occasion to excite him, I suppose he was cool. Doubtless he stopped to dress himself before he answered the summons. Very likely the dread necessity of speaking to the visitor appalled him, and he desired to postpone the trying ordeal as long as possible.

I am obliged to acknowledge my belief that Mrs. Loraine's messenger was exceedingly unreasonable, for he did not intermit his hammering long enough to ascertain whether any one was coming to the door or not. What was not more than five minutes in fact, might have seemed to be half an hour to him. Within as short a time as could have been properly expected, I heard the door of my uncle's library open, and uneasily I listened for the result. The bolt on the front door creaked and grated. The door opened with difficulty, and while my uncle was tugging at it, I lifted the sash of my window a couple of inches, that I might hear what passed.

The door swung back, and I put my head to the window to catch the first words that were spoken. Of course my uncle was not the first to utter them; he seldom spoke, and never was surprised into speaking, even on an emergency.

"Well, governor," said the messenger, crustily, "you sleep like a rock. Where is that confounded boy of yours?"

"In bed," replied my uncle.

"Rout him out; I want him," continued the visitor, pushing his way into the house.

This movement prevented me from hearing what followed immediately; but I hastened to my door, hoping to catch a word which would enable me to determine who the person was.

"The young villain has run away with Mrs. Loraine's step-daughter," I heard him say, as I opened the door wide enough to permit me to catch the sound. "I tell you, governor, you must get rid of the young vagabond, or he will swamp the whole of us."

"Hush! he will hear you," said uncle Amos.

"No matter. I have pounded away hard enough to wake the dead. If that didn't rouse him, nothing will," added the messenger, gruffly.

"Silence!"

"I have had about enough of this thing," continued the rough visitor. "You insist on keeping the whelp here, when you know he is a bombshell in your path and mine. Why don't you send him to sea, and let him get drowned?"

"Be still, Thomas," replied my uncle, in a whisper.

"I won't be still, governor. The vagabond has run away with that girl, and--"

They passed into the dining-room, and I could not hear the rest of the sentence. The visitor was Tom Thornton, for my uncle called him Thomas. I was a vagabond, and a bombshell in the path of both of them. Tom called my uncle "governor," and this indicated that he was his son. I half suspected this before, but it was news to me to learn that I was regarded as a dangerous young man. Why was I dangerous? I had not done anything to imperil the life or the fortunes of either of them.

My uncle would not tell me anything about my father, or my mother, save that the latter was insane and the inmate

of an asylum. Now, Tom objected because I had not been sent to sea to be drowned! They were talking about me down stairs, and I slipped on my pants, and crept down the stairs. I found that they had entered my uncle's library, and the spring lock on the door had fastened it. I listened, but I could not distinguish what was said.

I was determined not to be balked in my purpose, for this was an opportunity which might not occur again for years to obtain some clew to my own affairs. In fact, I had resolutely resolved to SEEK AND FIND my mother, who was still living; and I wanted information.

The library of my uncle was contained in an addition to the house which had been erected after the completion of the original structure. It was on the end of the house, and could be reached only through his chamber. The roof was flat, and covered with tin plates. On the side fronting the lake there was a bay window. The middle sash was generally open at the top in warm weather, as I had no doubt it was at the present time.

I stole softly up stairs to my chamber, from which one of the windows opened upon the flat roof over the library. I raised this window, and crawled like a cat over to the bay window, the top of which was considerably lower than the roof. Lying down on the projection, I placed my head near the top of the window. I was rejoiced to find that I could hear the voices of the occupants of the room below me. More than this, a lucky thought, as I regarded it, occurred to me as I lay there. The window was pulled down at the top, and I found that I could get into the room almost as easily as I could stay out. I deemed this an important discovery, for I fully intended, at the first convenient opportunity, to explore the library. Though the thought came to me, I did not follow out its leading at this time.

"How can I get rid of him?" demanded uncle Amos, as I placed my head near the open sash; and it was evident that the parties had made some progress in the discussion while I was securing my position.

"Send him off. I can find a place for him in a store in New Orleans, where the yellow fever will make an end of him," replied Tom.

"Thomas, I will not harm him. I don't want to kill him," added uncle Amos.

"Of course you don't want to kill him--let the fever do that. Let him go away, and lose the run of you. Something must be done at once. He is a smart boy, they say, and if he should happen to get an idea, he would blow you and me so high that we never should come down."

That was an idea, and I happened to get it.

"My son, I have stained my soul with crime for your sake," added my uncle, bitterly. "We have wronged this boy enough. I will not have him injured."

"I don't wish to injure him, only to get him out of the way, so that he will lose the run of you," replied Tom, petulantly. "He don't know anything about me."

"Don't flatter yourself, Tom Thornton," I thought, but did not say.

"I am willing to do anything proper to be done with him. He will graduate soon at the Institute, and we must find a place for him in some business," said uncle Amos.

"I will find a situation for him in New Orleans."

"Not to take his life."

"No, no; certainly not. I know of a firm there that wants a young man from the north, and you must send him off in the course of a week. Now, what has the villain done with that girl?"

"I don't know; he has not brought her here," answered my uncle.

"What has he done with her? There was a young fellow with him; do you know who he was?"

"Probably the Hale boy. They run together."

"What could they have done with the girl?"

"I don't know. What motive had they for carrying her off?"

"Out of pity I suppose. Kate is a careless girl, wilful, and disobedient. She objects to being shut up in her chamber for her misdemeanors."

Tom Thornton related the incident in which Bob and I had been concerned on the pier.

"The child must have been badly abused, or she would not have jumped into the lake," said uncle Amos, when he had heard the story.

"It does not concern you or me whether she has been or not. I fancy the girl is not of much use to any one."

"Why do you run after her, then?"

"What's the use of arguing the question. Mrs. Loraine wishes me to find the girl, and return her; and I'm going to do it, if I have to choke your smart boy to get at it. Where is he?"

"In his chamber; but you must not harm him," replied uncle Amos, nervously. "He is as high-spirited as his father was."

"What do I care for that? He must tell me where the girl is."

"Perhaps he will not be willing to tell you."

"Then I shall make him do so," added Tom, savagely; and it seemed to me he was getting up a very pleasant prospect for me.

"You must handle him very carefully," said my uncle, nervously.

"If he tells me where the girl is, that's all I want of him. If he don't, I shall--I shall crush it out of him. He will find I am not made of milk and water."

"You will find I am not, either," I said to myself, as, when Tom moved towards the door, I rose from my recumbent posture, and hastened back to my chamber.

I slipped off my pants, and got into bed again, that I might not be suspected of having left it. I had scarcely done so before Tom entered my room with a lamp in his hand. I opened my eyes, rubbed them, and stared at him.

"I want to see you, youngster," he began. "I suppose you don't know me. My name is Jones."

"If your name is Jones, my name is Smith," I replied, with gross imprudence.

He looked at me, and appeared to be startled by my sharp and reckless reply. Very likely he thought me as smart as my reputation.

"Your name is Thornton," said he.

"So is yours," I answered; and I couldn't help it.

He stared at me again. Perhaps he concluded that I had obtained my information of Kate Loraine, and he knew that I had seen him at her step-mother's house.

"What have you done with that girl?" demanded he.

"Hold on a moment till I dress myself," I replied, as I jumped out of bed, and began to put on my clothes.



CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH ERNEST HAS AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. TOM THORNTON.

FROM my perch over the bay window of the library, I had heard Tom Thornton express his savage determination to crush out of me the information he wanted. Being forewarned, I was in a measure forearmed, and I did not intend to be caught in a vulnerable position. I decided to do a little light skirmishing before the battle opened. What I had seen and heard of my assailant gave me a wonderful self-possession, for which I could not account to myself.

I hurried on my clothing, though I dressed myself with the expectation of taking a cruise on the lake before my head rested on the pillow again. Though I felt that it was my first duty to protect Kate Loraine, and send her to a place of safety, I fully realized that I had a battle of my own to fight. By their own confession, Tom and his father had wronged me deeply. If my mother was still living, as I believed she was, they had probably wronged her a hundred fold more than me. With these thoughts and feelings, an impulse of desperation seemed to inspire me. I was ready for anything, but I was astonished and amazed at my own calmness.

"Do you think I'm going to wait all night for an answer?" demanded Tom, gruffly, before I had half finished dressing myself.

"If I am to give the answer, I expect you will wait till I get ready," I replied.

"Do you, indeed?" stormed he.

"I do, indeed."

He moved towards me, and I retreated to a corner of the room, where stood a heavy base-ball bat, which had been presented to me for skilful playing. That corner was my base of supplies.

"Do you know where that girl is?" said he, pausing and glancing at my muscular artillery in the corner.

"Hold on a minute, till I am dressed, and I will answer the question."

"Answer it now--this instant."

"Not yet."

"What do you mean, you young villain? Do you intend to insult me?"

"That question is rather refreshing, Mr. Tom Thornton, after coming to my room in the middle of the night as you did. Do you mean to insult me?"

"Insult you, you young villain!" sneered he.

"Insult me, you old villain! for I'm sure you have had a deal of experience in the villain line."

"Will you answer my question, or not? Do you know where that girl is?" he continued, when he saw it was as easy for me to use harsh epithets as for him.

"When I have dressed myself I will answer, but not till then," I replied, adjusting my collar with more than usual care. "Mr. Tom Thornton, I don't wish to quarrel with you on our first acquaintance. Besides it don't look well for near relations to quarrel."

"What do you mean by near relations?" he asked, evincing some alarm.

"Your name is Thornton, and so is mine. As you come to the house of my uncle, I suppose we must be relations. But I assure you I have no particular desire to claim kindred with you."

"You are an impudent young cub; and if you are any relation to me, you shall have some of the starch taken out of you before you grow half an inch taller," replied Tom; and in the war of words I felt that I had the weather-gage of him, for I knew things of which he supposed I was entirely ignorant.

"I don't think my impudence exceeds yours, Mr. Tom Thornton. You didn't come into my room behaving like a gentleman," I answered, as I put on my sack coat.

"I am not in the habit of having a boy speak to me as you do."

"I am not in the habit of having any one speak to me as you do," I retorted. "But I don't want to quarrel with you, as I said before."

"Well, Mr. Ernest Thornton, if your high mightiness is ready to condescend to answer my question, I must beg the favor of a reply," sneered he, putting the lamp down upon the table.

"Take a seat, Mr. Thornton. Your speech is improving," I added, throwing myself into a chair near my base of supplies.

I think my visitor was entirely satisfied by this time that he could make nothing by bullying me; and it seemed to me that in reaching this point I had accomplished a great deal. Tom Thornton sat down in a chair, near the table where he had deposited the lamp.

"Thank you, Mr. Ernest Thornton. I am seated, and await your further pleasure," he continued, with a curling lip.

"You intimated that you came on business."

"I certainly hinted as much as that."

"And your business relates to Miss Kate Loraine?"

"It does. I took the liberty to inquire if you knew where she was at the present time. A direct and unequivocal answer to this question would oblige your humble servant very much," said Tom, nervously; and I saw that it was with the greatest difficulty he could confine himself to this satirical style of speech--for he wanted to break out in menace and violence, to crush me with hard words and savage demonstrations, which prudent cunning restrained him from using. "Do you know where the girl is?"

"I do," I replied, promptly. "I trust my reply is sufficiently direct and unequivocal."

"It is; and you will oblige me by informing me, as directly and unequivocally, *where* she is," said he, rising from his chair.

"I am sorry to disoblige you, Mr. Tom Thornton; but I must respectfully decline to give you any information on that point," I answered, firmly.

"Am I to understand that you refuse to tell me where she is?" demanded he, turning up the cuff of one of his coat-sleeves.

"That was the idea I intended to convey," I replied, imitating his example by rolling up one of my coat-sleeves.

"You won't tell me."

"No, sir."

"You know where she is?"

"I do."

"And won't tell?"

"I will not."

He turned up the other coat-sleeve, and I did the same.

"I'll tell you what it is, youngster, we have played this farce long enough," Tom proceeded, in a rage. "I want you to understand that I am not to be trifled with. You may make a fool of the old man, but you can't make a fool of me."

"Perhaps nature has already done that kindly act for you," I put in, as he paused to take a long breath with which to whet his wrath.

I know, now, that it was wrong for me to make these saucy and irritating replies; but I could not well help it then. Tom Thornton was a villain, by his own confession. My uncle had declared that he had stained his soul with crime for his son's sake. Whichever was the greater villain, it was clear that the son was the more obdurate, graceless, and unrepentant of the two. I had no patience with him. I had no respect for him, and I certainly had no fear of him. Even policy would not permit me to treat him with a consideration I did not feel.

"For your insults we will settle by and by; at present my business relates to this girl," said he, smarting under my charge.

"Well, Mr. Tom Thornton, so far as Miss Loraine is concerned, your business with me is finished," I replied.

"Not yet; before I have done you will be glad to tell me where the girl is."

"I will tell you nothing in regard to her."

"I command you to tell me where she is."

"You may command, if you choose."

"And I will be obeyed," said he, furiously.

"You will see whether you are or not."

"Who are you, young man, that have the impudence to enter the house of a lady, and entice away her daughter?" foamed he.

"I am Ernest Thornton. I did not enter the house after you rode off with the lady; I did not entice the girl away, and she is not the lady's daughter."

"Silence! Don't you contradict me. You ran away with the girl!"

I whistled a popular air, simply to prove that I was not intimidated, and that Tom was not getting along very rapidly.

"Once more, and for the last time," roared Tom, foaming with passion, "will you tell me where the girl is, or will you take the consequences?"

"If it's all the same to you, I'll take the consequences," I answered.

"Very well; you will take them, or you will tell me the whole truth," said he, savagely, as he rushed to the door.

There was a key in the lock, which I seldom or never used. He took it out, left the room, and locked the door behind him. He was evidently so much in earnest that he did not intend I should escape the fiery furnace he was preparing for me. I could not but laugh at his folly in thinking to confine a live boy of sixteen in the chamber of a cottage. I concluded that he had gone for a stick, a club, or some other weapon, with which to reduce me to subjection.

Though I felt able with the base-ball bat to defend myself from the assaults of Tom, I did not court the conflict. There was room for an accident which might deprive me of the power to serve Kate in the hour of her extremity; and I was disposed to keep her on the safe side, if I did not keep there myself. I heard the heavy footsteps of Tom Thornton, as he descended the stairs, and walked through the hall. I concluded that he would see my uncle before he returned. I slipped off my shoes, and put one in each side pocket of my sack. Fearing that my bat might be removed during my absence, I thrust it up the chimney, at the fireplace, resting one end on a jamb, where I could easily reach it.

Carefully opening the window, I stepped down upon the roof of the library, and thence to the top of the bay window, to the position I had before occupied. My uncle was in the library, but Tom was not with him, and I concluded that he had gone out of the cottage for the weapon he wanted. I felt safe enough, however; for, by lying down on the top of the bay window, close to the wall of the building, I could not be seen by any one who did not come close to the place where I was concealed.

I bent over and looked into the library window a second time. By the side of the grate, at the end of the room, a small iron safe had been built into the brick-work of the chimney, in which my uncle kept his papers and other valuables. In the occasional visits I had made to the library, after I was conscious of the mystery which shrouded my affairs, I had gazed wistfully at the iron door of this safe, and longed to possess the secrets which it contained. I believed that there were papers in that strong box which could tell me where my mother was, or give me some clew to her place of imprisonment. Perhaps the whole history of my father's family was contained within its iron sides. Perhaps the story of my wrongs could be traced from the documents there. If not, why was I so carefully excluded from the library?

I felt a deep and thrilling interest when I glanced into the room, and saw uncle Amos seated before the open door of this safe.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH ERNEST VISITS HIS UNCLE'S LIBRARY.

WHILE Tom Thornton was looking for a battery with which to reduce my fortress, my uncle appeared to be searching for some paper in his safe. I concluded that Tom's unexpected arrival had suggested some business to be done with him. I was in a fever of anxiety to hear what passed between them.

Uncle Amos handled the papers, folding and unfolding them, giving each a hasty glance, and then restoring it to the safe. One document in particular attracted my attention, on which my uncle gazed much longer than on any other, and then laid it down, apart from the others, on the bottom of the safe. While I was watching his motions with breathless interest, I heard the front door slammed violently. My uncle was startled. He hastily closed the door of the safe, locked it, and put the key under the cushion of his arm-chair. Taking the lamp in his hand, he hastened out of the room.

"Thomas!" I heard him call, after he had passed into his chamber.

In a moment he returned to the library, followed by Tom, who had in his hand a heavy stick taken from the wood-pile.

"What are you going to do?" demanded my uncle, as he glanced at the club in Tom's hand.

"I am going to make that boy tell me where the girl is," replied Tom.

"With that stick?"

"Yes, with this stick."

"You will never find the girl in that way," said my uncle, shaking his head. "Throw your stick away."

"But the rascal insulted me with almost every word he spoke," growled Tom.

"I told you to handle him gently. You can't drive him."

"But he must tell me where the girl is."

"He will not, of course. If he thinks the girl has been abused, he is just foolish enough to take her part, and would be pounded to a jelly before he would tell you a word about her. If you are careful you can find out where the girl is. Probably he carried her off in the boat. You say it must have been nearly dark when he left Cannondale. He could not have gone far with her. Either she is at Mr. Hale's in Parkville, or she is concealed somewhere in this vicinity."

Uncle Amos appeared to gasp with the mighty effort this long speech had cost him.

"The young rascal shall tell me where she is, or I will break his head. I will teach him that he can't trifle with me, if he can with you," replied Tom, in snappish tones.

"You will defeat your own purposes. Where is Ernest now?"

"In his room; and I locked him in," answered Tom, with a kind of chuckle, indicating that he thought he had done a big thing.

"Locked him in!" exclaimed my uncle. "How long do you suppose he will stay there?"

"Till I choose to let him out," said Tom, who still appeared to be very well satisfied with himself.

"I think not. There are two windows in the room, and when he gets ready to leave he will do so. You seem to think the boy is a fool. Very likely he has taken the alarm by this time, and has gone off to look out for the girl, if he has hidden her in this vicinity."

"Do you suppose he has gone?" asked Tom; and his tones indicated his perplexity.

"I don't know; but you can't do anything till daylight, and I want to talk with you about our affairs."

"Confound your affairs!" ejaculated Tom, petulantly. "I can't stop to-night to talk about them. I came after the girl, and I must have her too."

"Thomas, I can no longer endure this wasting anxiety," continued my uncle, solemnly. "This boy haunts me by day

and by night. I seldom sleep an hour at a time. For your sake I am suffering all this; but you are cold, distant, and harsh to me."

"What do you wish me to do, governor?" demanded the reckless son. "I send you all the money you want."

"It is not money, but a clear conscience, that I need," groaned the wretched old man. "I would rather live in abject poverty than purchase plenty at such a fearful price."

"Don't be foolish, governor."

"I live in constant fear of the boy, especially since he questioned me, months ago, about his parents and his property."

"Of course you told him he had no property."

"I did."

"Then it's all right. In the course of a week we will send him to New Orleans. When he has gone you can change your residence, and he will lose the track of you."

"Perhaps he will not be willing to go to New Orleans; he certainly will not under such treatment as you bestow upon him. Thomas, my brother's will--"

My uncle paused and looked at his son, as though in doubt whether to finish the sentence he had begun.

"Well, what of the will?" demanded Tom, evincing more interest than he had before exhibited. "Of course you destroyed that years ago?"

"No, Thomas, I dared not do such a thing," replied my uncle, in a hoarse whisper.

"You did not!" exclaimed Tom. "Where is it? Let me have it!"

"No, Thomas, I dare not even yet destroy it," groaned the old man.

"This is madness!"

"Perhaps it is. I wished to talk with you about it. It is no longer safe for me to keep it in the house."

"Why don't you burn it, then?"

"I dare not."

By this time I was so dizzy holding my head down, that I was obliged to raise it. I was so giddy and confused that I came very near rolling off the top of the bay window; and in my efforts to save myself, I made a noise, which disturbed the conference. Tom and my uncle were alarmed. I heard them rush out of the room. Without waiting to ascertain their intentions, I put on my shoes, and climbed down from the bay window to the ground.

I had hardly accomplished my descent before Tom and my uncle appeared at the window of my chamber. They had rightly attributed the noise to me, and hastened to my room to learn what had happened.

"He has escaped," said Tom, as he drew in his head, after satisfying himself that I was not on the roof.

I went round to the front of the house to ascertain what they would do next. There was a horse and chaise in the road, with which Tom had come, the animal fastened to a post. He neighed as I approached him. I found that he was shivering in the cool night air, after the severe sweat he had had in coming. I took a robe from the chaise and covered him, for I liked a horse almost as well as a boat. When I had finished this kindly act, Tom came out of the house with a lantern in his hand. He was followed by my uncle, and they went down to the landing, where my skiff lay.

"He hasn't gone off in the boat," said my uncle.

"And he shall not," added Tom, as he walked off and disappeared behind the house.

I was alarmed lest he should go off to the Splash and find Kate there; but presently he returned with an axe in his hand. Giving the lantern to his father, he proceeded to smash the skiff with the axe, his object being to prevent my going on board the Splash. I regarded it as a puny effort on his part, and was relieved to find they did not intend to visit her themselves. As soon as I was satisfied in regard to his purpose, I crept carefully up to the horse, unfastened him, and jumped into the chaise. The animal was full of spirit, and anxious to go.

"Have you found the girl?" I shouted to Tom, as I drove within a few feet of where he stood.

He sprang for the horse's head as soon as he discovered my intention; but I gave him the rein, and he went off like a rocket. I turned towards Parkville, and after going half a mile, I reined up to ascertain whether I was pursued or not. I could hear nothing; so I turned into a by-road, leading to a grove. I had taken this step only to procure a diversion of Tom's plans, if he had any, and I fastened the horse to a tree. Covering him up with the robe again, I walked back to the highway. In less than ten minutes, I heard the well-known rattle of my uncle's buggy. I stepped behind a bush till it should pass. As it went by, I heard my uncle's voice, as well as Tom's. My diversion had worked well, for both had gone in pursuit of me, and I was delighted with the result.

As fast as my legs would carry me, I hastened back to the cottage. A light was burning in the library. I was almost choking with anxiety, for I had a purpose to accomplish. I climbed up to the bay window, pulled the sash down, and leaped into my uncle's "*sanctum sanctorum*." With trembling hand I raised the cushion of the arm-chair. I could hardly repress a shout of joy, as I saw the key, just where my uncle had put it. Eagerly I seized it and opened the safe door. I grasped the huge document that lay on the bottom of the safe, and opened it. I read,--

"In the name of God, amen! I, Ezra Thornton, being feeble in body, but of sound and disposing mind--"

"It is my father's will!" I exclaimed, without pausing to read any more.

My heart was in my mouth. I glanced at other papers; but I did not understand them, and it seemed to me then that the will was all I wanted. I thrust that into my pocket, and was about to close the safe door when my eye rested upon a thick pile of bank bills. I wanted money. Would it be stealing to take some of these bills? No! All that my uncle had was mine, according to his own statement. There were thousands of dollars in the pile. I could not think or reason in the excitement of the moment. I took about one fourth of the bills, thrust them into my pocket, closed the door of the safe, locked it, and put the key under the cushion in the chair.

I got out of the window, and placed the sash as I had found it. When I reached the ground, the cold sweat stood on my brow, so violent were my emotions. I entered the front door of the cottage, passing old Jerry on the way, and went to my chamber, the key being on the outside, where Tom had left it. I prayed that God would forgive me if I had done wrong, for I could not determine whether I had or not.



ERNEST DEFENDS HIMSELF.--Page 99.

As the will and the money would not be safe in my pocket, I wrapped them up in a piece of newspaper, and concealed them in the closet. By this time it was daylight. I sat for half an hour in a chair, thinking what I should do. At sunrise Tom and his father returned. I suppose old Jerry told them he had seen me, for both came up stairs immediately.

"Now, you young villain!" yelled Tom, as he rushed towards me, beside himself with passion.

I retreated towards the chimney, and pulled out my bat.

"What are you going to do with that?" demanded he.

"I am going to defend myself," I replied, as firmly as I could; but I was terribly agitated.

"We'll see if you are;" and he sprang towards me.

"Gently, Thomas; don't be rash," interposed my uncle.

"Keep your distance, or I'll smash your head!" I added, making a few vigorous passes with the bat.

He was prudent enough to heed this warning, and left the room, but only to return with the club he had selected before.



CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH ERNEST, AFTER A SUCCESSFUL RETREAT, FALLS INTO A TRAP.

TOM THORNTON was the maddest man I ever saw when he returned to my chamber armed with the club. His father had followed him down stairs, evidently for the purpose of pacifying him; and when they returned he was still trying to dissuade him from any act of violence.

"Don't be rash, Thomas," pleaded my uncle, as they were coming up the stairs.

"Don't talk to me, governor. I will bring the young cub to his senses!" roared Tom, violently.

"Control your temper, and listen to reason. You will ruin yourself and me by your rashness."

"I'll take care of that," replied Tom, as he rushed into the room.

Uncle Amos caught him by the shoulder when he reached the door and attempted to detain him; but Tom was in such a fury that nothing could check him. He shook off his father, and advanced towards me, apparently with the intention of making an end of me. I raised the heavy bat, and looked him steadfastly in the eye. I was the cooler of the two, and the experience I had had in a hand-to-hand fight with Mr. Parasyte gave me both courage and skill for such a conflict.

He came upon me with reckless vehemence, aiming a blow at my head; but I struck at and hit his club with such force that it was knocked out of his hands, and flew over into one corner of the room. Quick to take advantage of this favorable circumstance, I ran to the spot, and put my foot on the stick, in order to hold the weapon I had captured.

Tom rushed forward to recover his club at any hazard, but I laid about me, right and left, with all my might, so that the bat whizzed through the air. To have come within the circle of the flying bat would have insured him a broken head, and he paused a moment. My uncle stepped forward, and taking him by the shoulder, drew him back from such dangerous proximity to my weapon.

"One of you will certainly be killed!" gasped my uncle. "Stop, Ernest!"

"I am ready to stop when he is," I replied, panting with my exertions.

"What have you done with my horse, you villain?" roared Tom.

"I'll tell you when you have cooled off," I answered. "I want you to understand now that I am not to be trifled with."

"I'll bring you to your senses, yet," said Tom, with an awful scowl, as he turned and rushed out of the room again, followed by my uncle.

It was plain that he had gone after another weapon, and perhaps this time he would bring something more dangerous than a stick from the wood-pile. Fighting was not at all to my taste, and I was not quite willing to risk my prowess against such an insane assailant. I realized that he would just as lief kill me as not, and I might not again be as fortunate as I had been during the first onslaught. Discretion was certainly the better part of valor in such an encounter, for there were no laurels to be won in the battle; and I determined to make my escape before the return of my savage foe. I did not mean to come back, for my mission was in the great world until I had developed the mystery of my own wrongs.

I approached the closet, after I had opened the window, for the purpose of obtaining the will and the money I had concealed there. I was on the point of opening the closet, when I heard a step on the stairs, and then my uncle appeared at the door.

"Ernest, if you have any regard for me, or any gratitude for what I have done for you, don't incense him any more," said he, in pleading tones.

"What shall I do?--let him kill me?" I replied.

"What have you done with the horse and chaise?"

"They are in Welch's Lane."

"Don't resist Thomas any more."

"I shall resist him to the death, if he don't let me alone," I answered, firmly. "I didn't begin it."

"Yes, you did, Ernest. You carried the girl off, and he is acting for her mother."

"The girl has been abused. If she hadn't been, she wouldn't have jumped overboard."

"There! Thomas is coming!" exclaimed he, greatly alarmed at the prospect of a renewal of hostilities. "Tell him where the girl is, for my sake, if not for your own."

"I will not," I replied, as I heard Tom's step on the stairs.

The window was open, and while there was yet time, I leaped out upon the roof of the library, with the bat still in my hand. Throwing the weapon down, I stepped on the bay window, and from that dropped to the ground. Picking up the bat, I retreated to the grove which bordered the lake beyond the house. I had left the valuables in the closet, and was therefore not prepared to take my final departure.

I had advanced but a few steps before Tom and his father appeared at the window. My furious foe staid there only long enough to obtain a sight of me. A moment afterwards he rushed out at the front door, and started in pursuit of me. I doubted just then whether I had gained any advantage by transferring the battle-ground to the open air, for Tom's legs were longer than mine, though probably he had not practised running so much as I had. Taking the path near the bank of the lake, I ran with all my speed, till I came to the brook which flowed round the hill in the rear of the cottage and discharged itself into the lake. For some distance above the outlet the stream was from ten to fifteen feet wide. There was a rude foot-bridge, consisting of a single wide plank, across it, for my uncle's domain extended a short distance beyond it.

I crossed this bridge. Tom was only a few rods behind me, and a brilliant strategic idea flashed into my mind as I stepped upon the plank. As it is considered good policy for a retreating army to destroy the bridges behind it, I adopted the suggestion, and as soon as I had reached the other side of the brook, I lifted the end of the plank, and pulled it over after me. Tom rushed up to the other side just as I had completed the job. The stream was a good ten feet wide, and its banks were rather soft and slippery.

From the movements he made, I thought, at first, that he intended to leap over the brook; and I placed myself in such a position as to insure his falling into the water, if he attempted such a piece of gymnastics. Tom wore nice clothes, and he did not run the risk of soiling them by a possible accident. He paused on the brink of the stream, and feared to cross the Rubicon.

"How are you, Tom Thornton?" I exclaimed, after he had looked about him for the means of bettering his situation, and of continuing the chase.

The exertions he had made to catch me had evidently cooled him off in some measure. He was out of breath, and was apparently becoming "demoralized." He looked at me, and scowled most unamiably.

"Follow the brook up to the road, and you can get across there," I added, as he again looked about him for the means of overcoming his difficulty.

"None of your impudence, you puppy!" replied he; but his invective was tame compared with what it had been.

"If I am a puppy, Tom Thornton, perhaps you would like my bark to cross the brook with," I answered.

"The time to settle up all this business will soon come," said he, shaking his head.

"Mr. Tom Thornton, if you think you can scare me with any bugbears, you are mistaken. I know you better than you think I do."

"What do you know?" demanded he, surprised out of his malignity by my remark.

"What I know I keep to myself. When you go back to Mrs. Loraine, I wish you would tell her from me that it won't sound well when it is told she kept that poor girl shut up in her room for a week or ten days, with the blinds nailed so that she could not open them, just because she took long stitches, or trod on a flower. If I were in your place I shouldn't like to marry a woman like that."

Tom looked uneasy, and played with his watch chain. I thought he wanted to say something conciliatory; that he desired to extend to me the olive branch of peace, the better to get me into his power. I was quite willing to listen to any overtures of this kind, for I wanted to return to the cottage, obtain the will and the money, and then bid a final adieu to Parkville until I had solved the problem of my existence. I was fearfully anxious lest my uncle should discover the loss of the valuable document I had taken, and it should be found where I had concealed it.

"Ernest, you are getting yourself into trouble," said Tom, after a while, in milder tones than he had yet used.

"For which, no doubt, you are very sorry," I added.

"I'm sure I don't want to quarrel with you."

"You have been very mild and gentle to me."

"Well, I was mad, Ernest," said he, with something like a smile. "If you will tell me where my horse is, we will call it all square."

"I told uncle Amos where he is. I left him down in Welch's Lane."

"Where is that?"

"Your father knows where it is. His horse is harnessed, and he will drive you down there," I replied, hoping they would adopt my plan, and thus enable me to enter my chamber and reclaim the valuables I had left there.

"Very well; I will do so. I will help you put the plank across the brook before I go," he replied.

"No, I thank you. I can put it across myself when I get ready to do so," I answered, cautiously.

"What are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid of anything; but I'm not going to put my head in the wildcat's mouth."

"I won't touch you."

"I don't intend you shall. Go and get your horse, and I will take care of myself."

"Well, I will."

He turned, and walked up the path towards the cottage. Of course I had no faith in his word, and I determined to keep at a respectful distance from him. When he had disappeared in the grove beyond the brook, I raised the plank on one end, and then dropped it across the stream, restoring the bridge to its original position. I crossed the brook, and walked towards the house. When I came in sight of it, the buggy was leaving the yard. I concluded Tom and his father had really adopted my suggestion, and were going to Welch's Lane for the horse and chaise. But I was too wary to advance without reconnoitring the ground.

"Your breakfast is all ready, Ernest," said old Betsey, the housekeeper, as I approached the back door.

"Where are my uncle and the gentleman?" I asked.

"They told me they were going down to Parkville, and I need not wait breakfast for them."

I went into the dining-room and sat down at the table, as much for the purpose of getting something for Kate as to eat myself. I was scarcely seated, when I was thrown over backwards, chair and all, and found myself lying on the floor, held down by Tom Thornton.



CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH ERNEST STRIKES A HEAVY BLOW FOR LIBERTY.

DEAR me! Good gracious! Why!" screamed Betsey, when Tom Thornton threw me upon the floor. "I thought you'd gone off with Mr. Thornton. What in the world are you going to do? Let the poor boy alone!"

Betsey did not think I was having fair play, and old and stiff as she was, she rushed up to Tom, apparently with the intention of interfering.

"Out of the way, old woman!" growled Tom. "Go and get me a rope."

"A rope! I won't get you any rope! And if you don't let the poor boy alone, I'll go out and call the neighbors," replied Betsey, bustling about the room as though she intended to do some desperate thing.

For my own part, I felt that it would be useless for me to resist. Tom was strong, and I was wholly in his power--taken by surprise, and at a disadvantage which I could not overcome. I lay still, therefore, and thus saved some hard knocks.

"What are you going to do with the poor boy? He shan't be treated so!" persisted Betsey, who had not talked so much before for ten years.

"Be still, old woman! He's a bad boy. He stole my horse, and ran away with a little girl. I shall not hurt him if he behaves himself," replied Tom, who appeared to be afraid she would call in some person to take my part.

"You act like a brute. You treat him worse than an ox," continued Betsey.

"Now get up, sir," said Tom to me, still retaining his hold upon my coat collar.

He helped me to my feet. Being vanquished, I had nothing to say, and I uttered no complaint. When I rose, he tied my hands behind me with his handkerchief. I submitted because it would have been folly for me to resist; but I intended to watch my opportunity, and submit no longer than necessity compelled me to do so. My brutal conqueror took me by the collar, led me into the hall, and thence into the cellar. In one corner there was a kind of closet partitioned off with brick walls, which had been built for a milk-room; but as my uncle kept but one cow, it was seldom used. There was no window in it, and a more damp, dark, and disagreeable dungeon it would be difficult for a boy of sixteen to imagine. It had a heavy wooden door, and altogether the place looked as hopeless as it was gloomy.

Tom led me up to the door and thrust me in, with my hands still tied behind me. The only ray of hope I could obtain was derived from the fact that there was no lock on the door.

"Now, Mr. Ernest Thornton, it is my turn," said Tom, as he partially closed the door of my cell, and gazed in upon me. "You are a smart boy, but you have rather overdone it this time. I told you in the beginning that I was not to be trifled with. You begin to believe what I said by this time. Have you anything to say before I close the door?"

"No," I replied.

"A couple of days in this place will bring you to your senses," added Tom, malignantly.

I made no reply. I did not feel like talking. I was busy thinking how I should recover the ground I had lost. I saw that the cellar wall was not laid in mortar, except two or three feet at the top and above the ground. I had already made up my mind that this wall would begin to come down as soon as I was left alone.

While I was looking at the situation, old Betsey--whom I had never suspected of having the least interest in me--tottered down the cellar stairs, and protested that I should not be confined in such a place. Tom told her it was her employer's orders, and drove her out of the cellar. I was satisfied that the old housekeeper was not a party to the deceit by which I had been lured into the trap. My uncle told her that he and Tom were going to Parkville after the horse, as Betsey explained to me afterwards, bidding her call me to breakfast, that I might not be late to school. This was Tom's plan to ensnare me, and during this time he was in the cellar, preparing the dungeon for my reception. My uncle and old Jerry had gone in the buggy after Tom's horse and chaise.

"Ernest, I am willing to make terms with you now," said Tom, after he had got rid of Betsey. "I came over here after that girl. You say you know where she is. If you will tell me where I can find her, I will not shut you up. Will you do it?"

"No!" I answered, as decidedly as I could speak the word.

"Think well of it. If I can't find her with your help, I shall find her without it."

"Perhaps you will."

"The Hale boy was with you. I shall have him arrested at once by the sheriff."

"Bob Hale don't know where the girl is. If he did, he wouldn't tell. When you arrest him, he can tell a good story about Mrs. Loraine's motherly care of Kate."

Tom bit his lips; he had no more idea of arresting Bob than he had of arresting me.

"Once more, before I shut you up, will you tell me where the girl is, or not?"

"I will not! I will rot in this hole before I will tell a word about the girl."

He slammed the door upon me, and I was in utter darkness. I heard him putting props against the door, and pounding them down so as to make it secure. Then all was still outside, and I concluded that he had gone up stairs. I had a faint hope that old Betsey would come down and release me; but I immediately went to work upon the handkerchief which confined my hands.

My captor had crossed my wrists and tied them together in this position. I twisted and wrenched till I stretched the linen of the handkerchief, and strained the knot enough to permit me to pull my hands through my bonds, and free them. The darkness was gloomy and oppressive, even after I had been only half an hour in the dungeon. I felt that, for Kate's sake, as well as my own, I must get out. For the present she was safe, for Tom had destroyed the skiff, so that he could not go out to the Splash; but the poor girl would suffer agonies of terror if I did not go to her in the course of the day.

I was almost furious when I thought of my situation; of Kate in the cuddy of the boat, and of the will and money in the closet. I was afraid my uncle would discover his loss before I could escape. I could hardly keep from weeping with vexation as I thought of my misfortune. But it was not my style to groan long over my mishaps, when there was a chance, however desperate, of retrieving them. I was determined either to break my way out of my prison, or convince my jailer it was not strong enough to hold me.

I felt of the stones that formed the wall, and pulled out as many of the small ones as were loose enough to permit their removal. I then used my strength on a dozen of the larger ones, till I found one which could be taken out. How I wished then for an iron bar! With such an implement I felt that I could soon let in the daylight. But I had no bar, and after removing one stone about the size of my head, I was utterly unable to start another around it.

I was perplexed. I felt in my pockets for something to help me. I don't know but I had a faint hope of finding an iron bar; but certainly there was none there, or anything else with which I could operate on the obdurate stone wall. In my perplexity, I "fished my pockets" thoroughly. In the usual assortment a boy carries with him, I had a quantity of matches. I was not a smoker, but I always found it convenient to have a match when I happened to be out after dark in the Splash, to light my cabin lantern.

These matches were suggestive, for the door of my prison was made of wood, and fire would consume and destroy it. There were several shelves across the end of my dungeon, one of which I pulled down, and with my knife proceeded to whittle off the shavings for a fire. While I was thus engaged, I heard a vehicle drive up to the door. It was immediately followed by another, and I concluded that my uncle had returned. I had made a large pile of shavings. I then went to work on the lower part of the door, cutting into it, and roughening the boards, so that the fire could be readily communicated to it.

Having completed my preparations, I lighted a match, and set fire to the shavings. They were rather damp, and it was some time before I could get up a free fire. I moved the combustibles against the door; but the wood was saturated with moisture, and I was almost suffocated by the smoke, while the door appeared to be only charred by the heat of the fire. While I was busily engaged in this effort, the props were removed, and the door thrown open. My uncle rushed forward and stamped out the fire I had kindled.

"What are you doing, Ernest?" gasped my uncle.

"Working my way out of this hole," I replied.

"There, Thomas, you can see what the boy is," groaned my uncle. "But he shall not be kept in such a place as this."

"Very well, governor," said Tom, who had followed his father. "Put him into his chamber."

My captor came forward, and taking me by the collar, led me out of my dungeon. He had a club in his hand, and

assured me if I made any resistance, he would hit me on the head with it. Deeming it prudent to be submissive, I permitted him to conduct me to my chamber. The blinds were closed, and I saw that the room had been prepared for my reception. It afterwards came to my knowledge that my uncle positively refused to permit me to be confined in the cellar; and they had nailed up the windows and the blinds before they removed me to my new prison. I was locked in, after old Betsey had placed on the table food enough for my breakfast and dinner.

My uncle was human. After all the wrongs he and his graceless son had inflicted on me, he was not willing that I should be injured. I had always thought he hated me, but compared with Tom, his feelings were tender and fatherly. The first thing I did when I was left alone was to assure myself that the valuables in the closet were safe. They were just where I had left them, for my uncle had been too busy to open his strong box.

I ate my breakfast, and then dressed myself in my best clothes, ready for my final departure, for a window-sash and a pair of blinds could not keep me. I marvelled that my jailers expected to confine me in my chamber; but I concluded that they were on the watch below ready to check any movement I might make. I examined the windows, and found they were nailed down on the outside. My fowling-piece, fishing-rods, and other articles which could be used as offensive weapons, were removed from the room.

It was necessary that I should strike and run within the same moment. I wanted a battering-ram, with which to smash the window and the blind. With the bed-key, which was in the closet, I took down the bedstead as quietly as I could. Reserving one side piece for use, I placed the rest against the door, so that it could not be opened. I then put the will and the money into my pocket, and filled a napkin with food for Kate. A few quick and vigorous blows with the side piece of the bedstead reduced the window and the blinds to a wreck, and I leaped out upon the roof of the library, just as I heard my persecutors at the door of the chamber.



CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH ERNEST MAKES GOOD HIS RETREAT FROM THE COTTAGE.

WITHOUT remorse, I glanced behind me at the wreck I had made of the window. I did not regard myself as responsible for any damage I had caused in breaking away from my persecutors. Not only Tom, but my uncle, was engaged in a conspiracy against me, in which they had been concerned from my early childhood. Indeed, I had already come to the conclusion that the cottage and grounds had been purchased with money which rightfully belonged to me.

Judging from the conversations to which I had listened, detached and indefinite as they were, I was satisfied that my uncle and his son intended to cheat me out of my birthright, and out of the inheritance my father had left for me. But this was nothing compared with the statement of my uncle that my mother was insane, and the fact that I was not permitted to know even where she was. I began to doubt whether she was insane, or had ever been. It was possible that my uncle, to obtain his brother's property, had confined her in a lunatic asylum on a mere pretence. My blood boiled with indignation as I thought of these things, and I did not wonder that my uncle could not sleep nights, that he was a misanthrope, and hated the sound of his own and of other people's voices.

With such provocation I could have justified myself in smashing all the windows in the cottage, or even in burning the house to the ground. I thanked God that I had escaped, when I stood upon the roof; and without the loss of a moment, I made my way to the ground. I caught one glance of Tom's face as he came to the window before my descent. But he was active and resolute, and almost as soon as I reached the ground, he had descended the stairs, and passed out upon the lawn in front of the house.

There was nothing more at the cottage for me, and now all I wanted was to get on board of the Splash. My skiff was destroyed, and my pursuer would not permit me to build a raft. I could have swum off to her; but the water might injure, if not ruin, the priceless document in my pocket. Tom was at my heels, and all I could do was to run.

"Stop!" shouted Tom.

I ran all the faster when the sound of his voice assured me how near he was.

"Stop! If you don't stop, I'll shoot you!" cried he.

I glanced over my shoulder, and saw that he had my fowling-piece in his hand; at least there was no other gun about the place. But I was not much alarmed by the threat, for the gun had not been used for months, and I did not believe it was in condition to go off. The wretch expected to frighten me by this demonstration; but if he had had a twenty-four pounder, loaded with grape, it would not have stopped me till the shot struck me.

Tom slackened his pace and raised the gun to his shoulder, threatening again to shoot me if I did not stop. The trick only gave me the advantage, for I gained several rods while he was making the feint with the gun. I reached the foot-bridge over the brook, and, profiting by my former experience, I adopted the same course again. I had just time to drag the plank over the stream when my pursuer reached the opposite bank. I felt that I was safe now; and, out of breath with my exertions, I did not hurry myself.

"Will you stop, or shall I send a bullet after you?" shouted Tom; and I could easily imagine the chagrin with which he again found his progress checked.

I made no reply, but continued on my way down the path. I did not lose any time, for it was possible that he might, in his desperation, wade across the stream, and follow up the pursuit. Some distance behind him, I saw my uncle hastening to the spot with what speed he could command. I was satisfied with myself. I had fought a hard battle with my enemy, but I had won the victory.

A little way beyond the brook I came to the fence that divided my uncle's estate from that of his nearest neighbor. I leaped over, and continued my walk till I came to the house of Mr. Van Wort. He was a farmer, and had two grown-up sons, one of whom kept a small flat-boat for fishing and gunning purposes. I saw the owner of the boat hoeing in the garden. Though I was hardly acquainted with him, I went to him and asked if he would lend me his boat for half an hour. I found he was a crabbed fellow, and was not disposed to oblige me. I told him that I was in a great hurry, that my own skiff was broken, and if he would lend me his I would give him a dollar for the use of her. The dollar opened his eyes and his heart, if he had any. He consented to the bargain, and I paid him in advance, telling him I would push the skiff ashore when I was done with her, for I could not land in the Splash. He promised to be on the lookout for her, brought the oars from the barn, and I pushed off.

I had pulled but a short distance when I discovered Tom and my uncle walking along the path by the side of the lake. They had crossed the brook, Tom having probably waded over; and restored the plank for his father to go over upon. I paid no attention to them, though Tom repeatedly shouted to me. They retraced their steps as I rowed along the shore; but they were powerless to injure me while the deep waters of the lake lay between us. I reached the Splash, and went on board of her.

"Good morning, Miss Loraine. How do you do?" I said, going to the cuddy.

"Nicely, I thank you," replied Kate.

"Have you been comfortable in your cabin?"

"Very; as nice as a bug in a rug. But I was afraid something had happened, as you did not come off as soon as I expected."

"Something has happened; but you are safe, at any rate," I added. "We will talk about that by and by. Will you hand me the tiller, if you please?"

"I don't know what it is," said she, laughing; and everything appeared to be sunshine with her. "Here is the key; you can open the door."

She handed it to me through one of the ventilators, and I unlocked the door.

"Don't show yourself, Kate; for we are closely watched," I added, as I took the tiller from the cuddy. "Tom Thornton is on the shore with my uncle. Don't let him see you."

"Mercy!" exclaimed she, crouching down in the berth, as if afraid he would look through the side of the boat.

"Don't be alarmed. There is no danger. The wind is fresh, and he could not catch us, even if he had a boat. Here is some breakfast for you," I continued, handing her a napkin in which I had enclosed the provision sent up for my dinner in my chamber.

I hoisted the fore and main sails of the boat, and slipping the mooring, ran up the jib. I stood over to the Van Wort place, and after going as near the shore as the depth of water would permit, I headed the skiff to the bank, and gave it a smart push, which drove it far enough upon the beach to hold it, just as the owner of it came to receive it. Trimming the sails, I went down the lake close-hauled.

Kate was eating her breakfast, and I was glad to be alone with my own thoughts for a time. My uncle and Tom still stood on the shore in front of the cottage, watching me. I wanted to mature my plans. I intended to go to New York with Kate, and help her find her uncle. There was a railroad station at Cannondale, and another at the head of Adieno Creek. It would be safer for us to take the train at the latter station. Tom Thornton would do something. He would not stay another hour at the cottage. He had money enough and energy enough to cause me a great deal of trouble. I had no doubt that he would procure a whole fleet of boats to pursue me. He would even charter the Champion steamer, if he could get her.

I had already studied the railroad time tables, and as it was now after ten in the forenoon, there would be no train along the south shore till between three and four in the afternoon; and Tom would have abundance of time to carry out any plan he might devise. I did not wish to leave Parkville without seeing Bob Hale. He had been my friend and confidant, and I might not see him again for weeks, or even months. I might meet him at recess at the Institute, and I concluded to do so.

Just then it occurred to me that if I went off with Kate, I should leave Bob a legacy of trouble and confusion. When I disappeared, Tom would go to my friend, and harass him, perhaps cause his arrest. I was not willing to allow this if it could possibly be avoided. It would be better and fairer for me to settle all this business with Tom before I left. He still stood on the shore with his father, and I supposed he was watching to see where I went, hoping that my movements would give him a clew to the hiding-place of Kate. I put the Splash about, and headed her towards the cottage.

"Kate," I called to her, "you may come out now, if you like."

"Is it safe to do so? If it isn't, I had just as lief stay in here," she replied.

"Perhaps you will think I am crazy, Kate; but I wish to have Tom Thornton see you;" and I proceeded to explain the difficulty under which poor Bob would labor after our departure.

"I shall do just what you tell me, Ernest Thornton, if it is to jump overboard" replied she, coming out of the cabin, and taking a seat on the weather side of the boat.

With the wind nearly aft, the Splash dashed forward on her course. I ran her up within twenty yards of the shore, where Tom and my uncle stood, and then threw her up into the wind.

"Mr. Tom Thornton," I shouted, "I want you to understand that Miss Loraine has been on board of my boat all night."

It must have been a great satisfaction to him to know that he had been within a stone's throw of her ever since his arrival at the cottage.

"Bring her ashore, you villain!" cried he, stamping his feet with rage and vexation.

"You smashed my skiff so that I can't land here," I replied.

"Ernest, will you hear me?" called uncle Amos, as the Splash filled away again.

"I came up here to let you know that Bob Hale hasn't anything to do with this business," I shouted.

The boat was receding from the shore, and nothing more could be said. I saw that both Tom's and my uncle's horses were harnessed, and standing at the front door of the house. I watched them closely, and presently they got into their respective vehicles, and drove off.



CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH ERNEST OBTAINS SOME VALUABLE LETTERS.

WHAT will they do?" asked Kate, trembling with fear, when I told her my uncle and Tom had driven off.

"I don't know; that is what I would like to ascertain," I replied, considering the circumstances which presented themselves. "If they were going to the same place, they would have taken the same vehicle. It is about fifteen miles round by the road to Cannondale. I think one of them must have gone that way. About two miles below, the road lies near the lake, and I will run down where I can see which of them goes in that direction."

"I am terribly frightened, Ernest Thornton," said my fair passenger, after I had headed the Splash in the direction indicated.

"I cannot deny, Kate, that we are both in great danger of being captured; but I shall do the best I can, and we can only hope that it will come out right in the end. Tom Thornton will do everything that mortal man can do to catch us."

"I'm afraid you are doing too much for me, Ernest Thornton. You will get yourself into trouble," she added, anxiously.

"Don't worry about me, Kate. I think Tom Thornton has a stronger desire to capture me now than he has you. We are both in the same boat in a double sense. I will tell you all about it by and by. I must keep my eyes wide open now. Of course Tom knows you have an uncle in New York."

"I suppose he does."

"Then he will readily understand that you intend to reach him if you can."

"Mrs. Loraine would think so, I know, for she burned the letter I wrote to my uncle."

"There goes Tom Thornton's chaise," said I, pointing to the vehicle, as we reached a part of the lake which commanded a view of the road. "He has stopped to watch the boat. I know where he is going now, and that's enough."

"What will you do?" asked Kate, fixing the gaze of her deep-blue eyes upon me.

"I hardly know. I confess that my plans are not arranged yet, and everything depends upon circumstances. I am going up to the Institute now to find Bob Hale, if I can."

"Will that be safe?"

"I think it will. No boat on the lake can catch the Splash in this breeze; and Bob may be able to help me."

In half an hour we were off the Institute pier; but the recess was over, and the students were all in the school-room. It was not safe for me to remain long in this vicinity, for my uncle had by this time reached Parkville, and had probably employed some one to pursue me. I wrote a note to Bob with pencil, on a slip of paper I had in my pocket, and running the Splash up to the pier, sent it to the school-room by one of the men who was at work in the garden. My friend appeared immediately.

"Come on board, Bob. I have a great deal to say to you, and only a little time to say it in."

"But it is school time," replied Bob.

"I must not stop here a moment. I am going off, Bob, and may never see you again, at least not for some time."

"Why, what's up, Ernest?" he asked, as he stepped on board, his scruples removed by the announcement I had made.

"A great deal has happened since we parted last night," I replied, pushing off the Splash from the pier.

"How do you do, Miss Loraine?" continued Bob. "I am glad to see you are still safe."

"I am very well, thanks to Ernest Thornton," she replied.

I headed the boat up the lake towards the cottage again, and proceeded to tell Bob all that had happened since midnight. He listened in amazement to my story. I showed him my father's will, which I had not yet read, and we went through it together.

"It is very plain that they mean to cheat you out of the property your father left for you," said he.

"That is clear enough. My uncle told me nearly a year ago that my father left nothing for me."

"It seems that your father died in England," added Bob.

"Yes; in London. This will name my mother as my guardian, and my uncle Amos as the trustee, to take care of the property, which, it seems, was all in stocks and bonds. But my uncle says my mother is in an insane asylum; but whether in England or the United States, I don't know," I continued, folding up the will.

"I don't see how your uncle did it. It is the most infernal, mean business I ever heard of," said Bob, indignantly. "But what are you going to do?"

"I am going to find my mother!"

"How will you find her? Where will you look for her?"

"I don't know," I answered, feeling for the first time that my information was very insufficient.

"Were there no other papers in the safe?"

"Plenty of them; but I was so agitated I could not examine them."

"But what are you going to do, Ernest?"

"I am going to New York, first; then to Philadelphia, perhaps, where Tom Thornton lives when he is at home. I may find out something there."

"But how will you get to New York?"

"My plan was to run up the creek, and take the train at the Adieno station; but Tom Thornton has gone over that way, and I am afraid he will have somebody stationed there and at Cannondale to stop us. If you could help me, Bob--"

"Help you! certainly I'll help you!" interposed he, warmly. "What shall I do?"

"If you could get a team and drive us over to Romer, which is about ten miles, we could take the train there without danger."

"I'll do it."

"And, Bob, you may tell your father the whole story, and then he won't blame you," I added, not wishing to get him into a scrape.

"My father is away; but don't worry about me. You are clearly in the right, and I will do all I can for you, whatever happens to me."

"Thank you, Bob. The time will come when I shall stand on my feet, and then it will be all right with you."

I ran the Splash up a small creek on the edge of the town, and landed Bob. He was to procure a horse and covered wagon, and take Kate and myself at the cottage; for, now that Tom and my uncle were away, it seemed to be the safest place to land. Besides, I had another object in view in choosing this locality.

For an hour I cruised about the upper end of the lake, until I saw Bob wave his handkerchief from the wagon, near the cottage. I ran the Splash into the mouth of the brook, which was the only place where the water was deep enough to permit our landing. I lowered the sails, and fastened the painter to a tree. I directed Kate to run through the grove to the road, where she would find the wagon, and promised to join her in a few moments. Trembling with fear, she ran up the hill, and I hastened to the cottage. My uncle was away, and I was determined to look at the papers in the safe again, for I was convinced that I could not find my mother without more information than I possessed.



ERNEST SURPRISED BY HIS UNCLE.—Page 139.

I went directly to the bay window where I had entered the library before, and effected an entrance without any difficulty. I found the key of the safe under the cushion, where I had left it, and opened the door. Eagerly I seized the pile of papers I had seen before, and began to examine them. Most of them were unintelligible to me, and apparently had no connection with my father's affairs; but there were several letters dated at London, which I thrust into my pocket. I could find nothing else which promised to be of service to me, and I was about to close the door, when I discovered a sealed letter lying in a pigeon hole by itself. I took it from its place, and read the direction: "Robert G. Bunyard, 47 Old Jewry, Chambers, London."

This letter, I was convinced, would afford me some information; indeed, the address would give me a clew to what I wanted. I was kneeling on one knee, with this letter in my hand, when the door of the library suddenly opened, and my uncle stepped into the room.

"Ernest Thornton!" cried he, in tones so full of terror that they pierced my soul.

He sprang towards me; but I stepped out of his way, though I was nearly paralyzed by this unexpected interruption. I thrust the letter into my pocket, and stood at bay near the window by which I had entered.

"What have you done?" gasped uncle Amos, as he staggered towards me, his face pale as a sheet, and his limbs trembling in every fibre. "What papers have you taken?"

"My father's will for one," I replied, almost as much disturbed as he was.

"O Heaven!" groaned he.

"Uncle Amos, will you tell me now where my mother is?"

"O, Ernest! I am ruined!" exclaimed he, sinking into a chair.

"Will you tell me where my mother is?" I repeated, with all the earnestness I could command.

"Is this the return you make to me for all my kindness to you?" he added, in a choking voice. "I have given you all you wanted—boats, money, everything. Have pity on me, Ernest. I—I shall—I shall go mad!"

"I should think you would," I replied, having in some degree recovered my self-possession. "You told me my father left nothing for me; that my mother was in an insane asylum."

"She is, Ernest—she is," said he.

"Where?" I demanded, in a loud, fierce tone.

"I cannot tell you. Where is Thomas? Send for him, and he will make it all right. You shall have every dollar that belongs to you, Ernest. I am a miserable wretch; but I did not do this deed for my own sake. Send for Thomas."

"I have had enough of Thomas. He would cut my throat as readily as he would turn his hand. Will you tell me where my mother is, or shall I find her myself?"

"You cannot find her, Ernest. Be calm, and you shall have all. Send for Thomas."

"I will not send for him. I don't care so much for the money as I do for my mother. Tell me where she is, or send for her."

"She could not come."

"Then I can go to her."

"Sit down, Ernest, and be calm."

"I'm calm enough. I could forgive you for anything you have done to me. If you will not tell me where she is, I shall find her myself."

"You cannot find her."

"I can apply to Mr. Robert G. Bunyard--and--"

My uncle sprang to his feet, uttered a cry of agony, and attempted to stagger towards me; but his legs yielded beneath him, and he sank upon the floor. He had either fainted or fallen in a fit. I called old Betsey, and she and I placed him on a sofa. She said he had only fainted, and wanted to know what had happened. I replied that my uncle would tell her if he thought best. We bathed his head and rubbed his temples till he opened his eyes.

"Send for Thomas," said he, feebly.

I was satisfied that he would recover, and being perfectly willing Tom should be sent for, I told Jerry where he could probably be found. I then left the house by the front door. My uncle's horse stood at the hitching-post. He had probably employed some one to follow up the Splash, and then returned to the house. As I went out, I saw a large sail-boat standing up the lake, which I concluded was in pursuit of me. Hastening up the hill, I found Bob greatly alarmed at my long absence.

"I was afraid something had happened to you," said he.

"Drive on, and I will tell you about it," I replied, as I seated myself in the wagon.



CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH ERNEST LEAVES PARKVILLE, AND TAKES THE TRAIN FOR THE EASTWARD.

WHAT kept you so long?" asked Bob, when I was seated. "I was sure something had gone wrong with you."

"I don't know whether it has gone right or wrong. I went into the library, and opened the safe again. While I was looking at the papers, my uncle came in."

"Whew!" whistled Bob. "There was a storm in the library about that time--wasn't there?"

"Not much of a storm. I pity my uncle from the bottom of my heart. He is suffering more than you can imagine or I can describe, and he has been a sufferer for years," I replied.

"Well, what did he say to you?" asked Bob, who did not seem to be in the humor, at that moment, for moralizing.

I described the scene which had occurred in the library as minutely as I could,--and Kate and Bob were thrilled by the narrative. For my own part I had not yet recovered from the shock it had given me. The expression of agony on my uncle's face haunted my imagination. I could still see his pale face and his quivering lip, and his piteous pleading lingered in my ears. Most terrible are the sufferings of the evil-doer, and I resolved anew that I would always be true to God and principle. What were mines of wealth to a man tortured with the pangs of remorse?

"Do you think there is any danger that we shall be pursued?" asked Bob.

"Not the least," I replied. "I don't think any one will suspect that we have left town. I believe my uncle engaged a boatman to pursue the Splash. I saw a schooner, which I think was the Alert, standing up the lake, after we had landed. They will find the Splash in the brook where I left her. Old Jerry was going over after Tom Thornton, and very likely he will reach the cottage some time this afternoon. As it is almost a matter of life and death with him, no doubt he will follow; but he will be a day behind us. Now, Bob, I want to look over these papers, so as to determine what I am to do."

I read my father's will again. It appeared from this document that he belonged to the city of Philadelphia, but was temporarily residing in London. How long he lived there, or for what purpose, I had no means of knowing. His property, consisting of stocks, bonds, and other securities, amounted to over one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, the income of one third of which, after paying legacies, was placed in trust for the use of my mother during her lifetime, and two thirds in trust for his son during his minority. Five thousand dollars was given to his brother, who was appointed his sole executor and trustee, with an annuity of fifteen hundred dollars, payable from the income of the trust funds, during the minority of his son Ernest; and of five hundred dollars during the life of his wife, if she survived the son's maturity. In the event of his wife's decease, her third was to be held in trust for his son. The mother was appointed the guardian of the son; and if the son died before he was twenty-one, then the property was to go to his brother, "the said Amos."

"It is rather a mixed-up mess," said I, perplexed by the contingencies and the repetitions.

"I don't think so," replied Bob, who was more of a lawyer than I was. "I understand it well enough. Your father gives your uncle five thousand dollars in the first place, and then the income of one third to your mother, and two thirds to you till you are of age. If your mother is living when you are twenty-one, your uncle pays you your two thirds; if she is not living, he is to pay you the whole; and that ends his connection with the business. He is to have fifteen hundred dollars a year for taking care of the property."

"I understand all that," I added.

"The rest of it is clear enough. If your mother dies before you are twenty-one, all the income goes to you. Whenever your mother dies, her share goes to you. If you die before your mother, your share goes to your uncle; and then your mother's share goes to him or his heirs at her death. It says at the end there that your uncle shall not be required to give bonds for the faithful performance of his duty under the will. Don't you understand it?"

"I think I do; at least I understand enough of it. I would give all the money to know where my poor mother is. I care more for her than I do for myself."

"I think you will find her."

"O, I hope you will!" exclaimed Kate.

"I heard Tom tell my uncle that he had given him all the money he wanted," I added. "What do you suppose that means?"

"I suppose your uncle has given up the property to Tom," replied Bob.

"Tom lives in Philadelphia--don't he, Kate?"

"I think he does; indeed I am pretty sure of it," she answered.

"I can't see how they have managed the business without discovery. My father must have had some friends who knew about his affairs."

"And your mother, too," added Bob. "I don't see through it; but I suppose you will understand it one of these days."

"Bob, I don't like to carry this will round with me. I may lose it, or Tom Thornton may get it away from me. I want you to take it. Give it to your father, and ask him to keep it safe for me. And when I want a powerful friend, I shall call upon him."

"You may be sure he will do all he can for you," said Bob, heartily, as he carefully deposited the precious document in his pocket. "What else have you, Ernest?"

"Here is a letter directed to 'Robert G. Bunyard, London,'" I replied, producing it.

"I wouldn't open that yet. What else have you?"

"Here are half a dozen letters," I added, opening one of them.

"What does it say?--read it," said Bob, impatiently.

I read it, and it proved to be an acknowledgment of the receipt of two hundred pounds, signed by Bunyard.

Four others were of similar import, and all of them were dated in different years. The sixth began in the same manner, acknowledging a like sum of money. It was dated three years back. I read aloud, with intense emotion, a few lines that followed the business matter.

"The poor lady is much more quiet and contented in her new home than she was at my last writing, and her physician hopes that she will soon be quite reconciled. She persists in declaring that she is entirely well, and wishes to return to America. She says nothing now about the melancholy death of her son, and we hope that good nursing and skilful treatment will eventually restore her, at least, to her ordinary degree of health."

"My poor mother!" I exclaimed, bursting into tears, and crushing the letter in my hand.

"How sad!" said Kate.

"I must go to her at once! I will find her, if I have to search through the earth for her!" I ejaculated, bitterly, as I wiped away my tears. "Did you think my uncle was such an infernal villain?"

"I did not, Ernest; but don't be distressed about it. The letter intimates that she is kindly treated."

"I hope she is."

"Have you any more papers, Ernest?" asked Bob, apparently as much with the intention of turning my thoughts away from the sad subject which agitated me, as of gratifying his own curiosity.

"That's all, Bob," I replied, taking from my pocket the piece of newspaper in which I had rolled up the money I had taken from the safe. "Was it stealing for me to take this money?" I asked, as I unrolled the bills.

"I don't think it was," replied Bob. "You took it to pay your expenses in finding your mother; and, even if it were a technical theft, I don't think any one can blame you for what you have done. The money is really your own. How much is there?"

"I don't know. I haven't looked at it before."

"Count it, Ernest."

I did so, and was appalled to find I had taken between fourteen and fifteen hundred dollars.

"All right, Ernest. You are a smart fellow, and I'll tell you what I should do if I were in your place," replied Bob, who

did not appear to be alarmed at the magnitude of the sum.

"What?"

"I would go to England in the very next steamer, and find my mother."

"Go to England!"

"It is clear enough to me that your mother is there. If you expect to find her, you must go there."

"I will do it, Bob," I replied, excited at the idea of crossing the ocean in search of my mother.

"Certainly; do it. You have a letter directed to--what's his name?"

"Robert G. Bunyard."

"Go to London, find this man, deliver the letter, and tell him you want to see the poor lady."

"I'll do it. Don't you suppose Tom Thornton will try to stop me?"

"No matter if he does. Keep a stiff upper lip."

"I shall do that. I have fought my way through so far, and I shall do it to the end," I replied, confidently. "It would have been better if I had avoided that scene with my uncle; but I could not help it."

"What odds will that make?"

"A great deal of odds. My uncle knows now that I have the address of his London correspondent. He will tell Tom about it. My uncle may be full of regret and sorrow; but his son will follow me like a bloodhound. But, no matter what happens, Bob, I shall fight my way through. My poor mother shall be released from her bondage, and be happy again."

"Right, Ernest!" exclaimed Bob, as he urged forward the horse.

We rode in silence for several miles; but I was intensely excited as I thought of what my mother had endured for a dozen years. I recalled the indistinct visions of the past, which still lingered in my mind; and more vividly than ever before it came to my remembrance that, far back in the past, I had known a motherly lady, who loved and cherished me as a little child. The dreary waste of waters which had lingered in my fancy became a reality to me. I had crossed the ocean, after the death of my father; but I did not yet know whether I was born in England or the United States.

I prayed for my mother; and she seemed more dear to me than if I had seen her every day of my life. I prayed that God would spare her, and restore her to me; that he would crown with success my exertions to find her. I am sure that, in all my intense emotion, I did not cherish a sentiment of revenge towards my uncle, or even towards his son, who had treated me like a brute. My silent prayers warmed my heart, and blessed me with new strength and courage.

At half past two we drove into Romer. Bob put up his horse at a stable, and we dined together at a hotel. At quarter past four, the train going east arrived; and, bidding Bob an affectionate farewell, after he had promised to write me the news in Parkville on his return, Kate and I entered the car, and were soon whirling away from the town, from friends and from enemies.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH ERNEST WONDERS WHAT TOM THORNTON WILL DO, AND FINDS OUT.

THOUGH I had not travelled much, I felt quite at home on the train. I was not troubled with any of that disagreeable quality called "greenness," for I had read the newspapers every day regularly for five years; and, through them, a person may know the world without seeing much of it. Besides, nearly all my schoolmates had come from places more or less distant; and, being of an inquiring mind, I had "pumped" many of them dry.

With what I had read, with what I had learned from pictures, maps, and diagrams, and with what my friends had told me while we were sailing in the *Splash*, I had a tolerably correct idea of the city of New York. I was very much surprised, when I arrived there, to find how familiar the streets were to me. I had pored for hours at a time over the street maps of the cities in Colton's *Atlas*; I had walked in imagination through the streets of London and Paris; and I had read the encyclopaedia, and all the books of travel which came in my way.

After this course of study, I was not burdened with "greenness." I felt at home; and, though I looked with interest upon scenes and objects that were new to me, I did not keep my mouth wide open, or stare like an idiot. I take all this pains to prove that I was not green, because I had an especial horror of verdancy in general, and verdant boys in particular. I kept myself cool and self-possessed, and I was delighted to find that no one looked at me, or appeared to think I was ill at ease.

I was dressed in my best clothes, and though they were made by a provincial tailor, Parkville was progressive enough to boast of a genuine artist in this line. There was nothing about my companion, any more than myself, to attract attention. Doubtless most of the people thought we were brother and sister, or that some elderly gentleman and lady, seated in another part of the car, would claim us when we reached our destination. I suppose I thought of all these things because I feared that some one was looking at me, and because I had an especial dread of being noticed at that time.

Even Bob Hale, partial as he was, and sympathizing with me to the fullest extent, could not deny that I had been guilty of what he called "technical theft." In the very worst possible phase in which it could be viewed, I had robbed my uncle's safe of nearly fifteen hundred dollars, and I had the money in my pocket. I was liable, therefore, to be arrested at any moment when the intelligence of my constructive crime should be forwarded to the proper officers, or whenever a deputy sheriff from Parkville could overtake me.

My conscience did not then, and it does not now, accuse me of the crime of theft. That money was really mine, though, if it had been applied or invested by my legal trustee, in accordance with the law, and the last will of my father, I should have had no more right to touch it than if it had belonged to another person. My uncle and his graceless son were engaged in a scheme to rob me. The latter wished to destroy the will at once,—supposed it had already been done,—while the former, from simply prudential motives, preserved it. In his own words, he dared not burn it. He evidently kept it that it might open an avenue of escape in case his vicious plan miscarried. After I had been disposed of, sent off and had "lost the run" of my uncle, the document could be destroyed. I felt, therefore, that I was fully justified in using enough of the money, at least, to enable me to obtain justice.

It was nine o'clock in the evening when the train arrived at Albany. We could go no farther that night, and I felt the awkwardness of my situation. I did not like to go to a hotel with Kate Loraine; and, leaving her in the ladies' room at the railroad station, I looked about the premises till I found a respectable-looking baggage-master, whom I asked to direct me to a good boarding-house. He gave me the street and number of one he could recommend, and I called a carriage, which conveyed us to the place indicated. It was kept by a very worthy old lady, who fortunately had two vacant rooms, though she seemed to be suspicious, and hesitated about taking us.

"Who are you?" asked she, bluntly, as she surveyed me from head to foot.

"My name is Ernest Thornton. This young lady's name is Kate Loraine. She is going to her uncle's in New York. I was recommended to stop at your house, and I have money enough to pay for all we have," I replied, as squarely as I could speak, and telling as much of the truth as it was important for the old lady to know.

"How long do you want to stop?" she asked, apparently satisfied with my reply.

"I don't know yet. I shall be able to tell you to-morrow," I answered, for I had some doubts whether I should leave the next day.

"Well, I suppose I can keep you," said she.

"Thank you."

"Have you had any supper?"

"No, ma'am, we have not."

I paid the hackman, who stood with the valise I had bought in Romer for Kate, in his hand, and he departed. I don't know whether any one thought we were runaways or not. We were safe for the present. The old lady showed us our rooms, and then went to get us some supper. I sat down in my chamber to think over the situation. I was not quite satisfied, and of course I wished to keep out of trouble just as long as I could.

By this time Tom Thornton had probably reached the cottage of his father, and had learned what had happened. My uncle had told him that I had obtained the precious will--that the charter of their villany was gone. He had found that "that boy" was not to be trifled with. "That boy" had possessed himself of the fearful secret of their evil practices, had probed the mystery of their iniquity, and was ready to come down upon them like an avenging spirit, to expose their rascality, and to publish to the world the story of their infamy.

How mad, vexed, overwhelmed Tom was I could easily imagine. He had no more soul than a brickbat, and without a doubt had heaped abuse upon his father, had berated him for not burning the will, and for permitting me, by his weak fears, to be a bombshell in their path so long. Before I knew who Tom was, I had heard hard words pass between them. I now supposed he was angry because my uncle would not "dispose" of me in some manner which he proposed.

Tom Thornton and his father had discovered that the evil man shall not prosper in his way; the sword of retribution was hanging over them, and their cherished scheme was crumbling to pieces. My uncle was in despair, as he had been when I left him. Piteously he had begged of me to be merciful to him; and if he had told me where my mother was, and promised to do justice to her, I am sure I could not have gone another step to expose him. But my uncle was an old man--if not in years, at least in sorrow and suffering. For years he had been pursued by the terrors of a guilty conscience; had been in an agony of doubt and fear, if not of remorse. He was broken down, had lost his courage, and there was nothing to fear from him.

Tom was a different person. He was bold and daring. He had no conscience, and apparently no fears. He was young and vigorous, strong-minded and reckless. For years he had been living like a nabob upon the income of the property which my father had left for me. He had been swimming in luxury, driving his span, and spending half his time in winning the favor of the fair widow Loraine, whose fortune, if not Kate's, he intended to add to his own ill-gotten wealth. Tom Thornton would not resign his possession of the property, and his bright prospects of the future, without a terrible struggle, and I was quite confident that I should have to fight a grim battle with him.

What would he do? That was the vital question with me. As the prudent general endeavors to anticipate the purposes of the enemy, I tried to measure the probable intentions of Tom Thornton. What would he do? Would he have me arrested as a criminal for robbing my uncle's safe? I confess that the cold sweat stood upon my brow as I thought of it; as I considered what an awful thing it would be to be carried back to Parkville by an officer, and sent to the common jail. But, perhaps, if this were done, it would be the best thing that could possibly happen to me.

If arrested and tried, I should have the privilege of the meanest criminal to defend myself. I should call on Squire Hale to produce my father's will. I should lay bare in a court of justice the whole of Tom's and his father's infamous conduct. But Tom knew that I had taken the will; that I had deprived him of his sheet anchor. With only half an eye he could see what the consequence of arresting me must be. My uncle would groan and tremble at the very idea of such an exposure. After these reflections, I came to the conclusion that I should not be arrested as a criminal. Tom Thornton would fight his battle with other weapons than those of justice and the law.

Tom had shown by his acts that he did not scruple to take the law into his own hands, and I was convinced that my future trials were to be caused by individual persecution rather than public prosecution. Again the question came up, What will he do? It was certain that he would follow me, and it was almost as certain that he would find me. I had hardly a doubt that he would take the night train from the west, and be in Albany the next morning. Such a person as Tom Thornton must be a selfish man, and I concluded that he would not trouble himself much more about finding Kate. His own trials overshadowed those of the fair widow of Cannondale. He would be after me rather than Kate.

While I was anxiously considering the case, the landlady called me to supper. She poured out the tea, and asked more questions than I cared to answer; but so far as I said anything, I told the truth. I did not sleep many hours that night; I was too much disturbed by the perils of my situation to slumber. I thought, and thought, and thought. Tom Thornton would arrive in the morning. At the railroad station he would begin his inquiries for me. The baggage-master, who had directed me to the boarding-house, would tell him just where I was.

I had almost made up my mind to leave Kate in Albany, go to New York alone, find her uncle, and then return for her; but the thought that Tom would arrive in the morning caused me to abandon this plan. I rose very early, and walked down to the river, where I found a steamer would leave for New York at eight o'clock. I went back to the boarding-house, and after breakfast paid the bill. We walked down to the river, and went on board of the steamer. I took a seat where I could see everybody that came on board of the boat, for I felt very certain that Tom Thornton was already in the city, and searching for me. I was not wrong, for just as the boat was on the point of starting, and I was congratulating myself on the fact that we were safe, I saw him standing on the wharf, looking at me.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH ERNEST FACES THE ENEMY.

I HAD discovered what Tom Thornton intended to do, in part. It was not an officer who came to arrest me; it was Tom himself. Though I had confidently expected him--as we always dread the worst possible thing that can happen to us--I had hoped to escape him when the bell sounded for the departure of the steamer. I felt quite sure that all was well with me, and had begun to congratulate myself on my singular good fortune, when his ugly face appeared on the wharf.

I do not think now that I made any mistake in not remaining in Albany, for it was the easiest thing in the world for him to trace me out, and find the boarding-house where I had spent the night. If I had left the cars at the last station before the train reached Albany, I might have avoided him. It seemed to me that my only way was to continue the journey, and I did so. If I had been alone it would have been an easy matter to evade him.

Tom Thornton rushed on board of the steamer just in season to secure his passage, for the plank was hauled on board the moment he had crossed it. I was on the hurricane deck when I saw him, and he saw me. Perhaps there was a chance for me yet to outflank him. It was a bad scrape, but all I could do was to make the best of it. I left my position when I saw Tom coming on board, and went to Kate, whom I had requested to remain in the saloon. I sat down by her side, and tried to look as unmoved as I could.

"Don't be frightened, Kate," I began.

"Frightened! Of course I am not frightened now," she replied, fixing the gaze of her deep eyes upon me.

"But you musn't be when I tell you something."

"What, Ernest Thornton?" demanded she, taking the alarm at once.

"Tom Thornton is on board of this steamer. Don't be alarmed; I will take care of you. He shall not harm you, and he shall not take you away from me."

"O mercy!" exclaimed she, turning as white as a sheet.

"Don't be disturbed, Kate. I think I can take care of him," I added, with more confidence than I felt.

"What shall we do?"

"I don't know yet, but I will see. Leave it all to me, Kate. If he speaks to you, answer him civilly."

"I could not speak to him. I shall faint away if he comes near me. O, Ernest Thornton, I am frightened almost to death!"

"There is no need of your being alarmed. I don't think he desires to see you half so much as he does me. I will put you in a safe place soon. Come down into the ladies' cabin for the present."

She followed me, trembling in every fibre of her frame. I left her at the door, bidding her keep out of sight as much as possible. A glance along the main deck, in the vicinity of the captain's office, assured me Tom was not there and I procured a state-room of the clerk. Going half way up the stairs to the saloon, I discovered my pursuer. He was evidently looking for me. I watched him till he had made the circuit of the long apartment, carefully avoiding him. He then went below, to look for me in other parts of the boat. He walked forward first, and I took this opportunity to conduct Kate to the saloon again, and gave her the state-room I had procured, telling her to lock herself in.

"Won't he find me here?" asked she, with quivering lips.

"No matter if he does: keep your door locked. I will knock four times by two's. Don't open the door on any account till you hear my rap."

"I will not."

"I will keep watch on the outside. Now don't be alarmed. I will take good care of you."

She closed the door, and I heard her lock it. I felt then that she, at least, was out of Tom's reach for a time, and that I was in condition to fight the battle alone. Large as the steamer was, it was impossible for me to avoid a meeting with him, since he knew that I was on board. If he had not seen me the case would have been different, and I might have

contrived to keep out of his way.

I could not help asking myself what I should do. I did not expect Tom would resort to violence in the presence of hundreds of passengers. He would fasten himself upon me, and not lose sight of me. If he had intended to arrest me, he would have sent a sheriff after me, instead of coming himself. What would he do next? This was the important question. Of course I could not answer it. I could only wait for time and circumstances to develop his plan. As it was useless for me to attempt to avoid him, I sat down in the saloon, resolved to let things take their course.

Summoning to my aid all the coolness, self-possession, and impudence I could command,—and I found that for an emergency in which I had right and justice on my side, I had an abundant supply of this kind of ammunition,—I calmly waited the appearance of my adversary. I deliberately made up my mind to speak up like a man to him, and to stand my ground like a hero. If he made a scene, I would denounce him, and punch him with the naked truth.

Tom Thornton appeared to be making a very diligent search below, for it was half an hour before he came up to the saloon again. Most of the passengers were out on the hurricane deck, or in other places where they could view the scenery on the shores of the river. I had plenty of time to get thoroughly "primed" for the exciting interview I anticipated. As I thought the matter over, I felt that I had the weather-gage of him—that all the advantage was on my side. The will was in my possession, and subject to my order. I had the address of my uncle's London correspondent, and whatever Tom might threaten, he could not deprive me of these favoring points. I could afford to be cool and impudent; and if Tom wanted to talk, I could talk as fast and as much to the point as he could.

At last I saw him come up the steps. He was certainly a splendid-looking fellow, though he was evidently a man of the world. He was elegantly dressed, not over-dressed, and his movements were easy and graceful. I could not help thinking of these things, in which he had so decided an advantage over me. But he lacked one thing, without which everything else is vain and valueless—moral principle. He was a villain, and as such I despised him.

I could not help noticing that the expression on his face was troubled, rather than malignant; indeed, he really seemed to be more in sorrow than in anger. He saw me when he first glanced around the saloon, and walked towards the sofa on which I was seated. This time he was not savage and violent, as he had been before when I met him. He had something to think of now, and perhaps he had learned that "that boy" was not to be trifled with.

"Good morning, Ernest," said he; and it would have been difficult to discover in his tones that he was an enemy.

"Good morning, Mr. Tom Thornton," I replied, in cheerful tones, intending to intimate to him that I was master of the situation.

"You left home rather suddenly," he continued.

"Rather; and I presume you did not think a great while about it before you started."

"Ernest, I think we had better come to an understanding," he added, seating himself on the sofa at my side.

"I know what I am about, and I suppose you know what you are about," I answered, with easy assurance. "I don't know that we can come to any better understanding."

"I think we can," added Tom, very mildly. "I don't believe you know what you are about."

"Leave that to me."

"Ernest, I know what you have done at your uncle's house," said he, in a whisper, as though he had possessed himself of a valuable secret.

"So do I."

"You robbed your uncle's safe," he continued, in the same confidential tone.

"That depends on whether the safe was his or mine," I answered, readily.

"Ernest, it is no use for you to play bluff with me. You know what you have done," he added, rather petulantly; and I saw he was disappointed because he had failed to make an impression upon me.

"No one knows better than I what I have done."

"You have taken money and valuable papers out of your uncle's safe."

"I know it."

"You opened it without his knowledge or consent."

"I know that too."

"And then you ran away from your home."

"That also I know."

"I was sent for by your uncle--"

"By your father, you mean," I interposed.

"I said by your uncle," added he, persistently. "I found him quite ill--made so by your bad behavior."

"Not much," I replied, when Tom looked into my face to notice the effect of this revelation. "Didn't he tell you he had not slept nights for years; that he had steeped his soul in crime for *your* sake, Mr. Tom Thornton?"

He started, sprang to his feet; but recollecting himself, he sat down again, and tried to recover his calmness.

"It's no use for you to tell me, Mr. Tom Thornton, that your father was made ill by my bad behavior. It was your bad behavior and his own that trouble him."

"Young man, you talk just as though you were entirely innocent yourself," added Tom, virtuously. "Do you really think you are free from guilt?"

"I think I have done nothing more than my duty."

"Then you believe it is all right to break into your uncle's safe, and take his money and his papers?"

"Circumstances alter cases."

"They don't make black white."

"Sometimes a man's hypocrisy whitewashes his whole life. Sometimes a man lives for years on his ill-gotten gains, and all the world thinks he is an honest man. Then circumstances make black white."

"You are talking of something besides the subject before us. Let us come back to it."

"No; I am talking about the subject before us."

"You confess that you robbed your uncle's safe."

"I admit that I helped myself to certain things in it which I wanted. I am ready to admit it anywhere you choose to place me," I replied, easily and good-naturedly.

"Are you aware that you have committed a crime?" said he, more pointedly than he had before spoken.

"I don't think I have committed any crime, or even any wrong. If you think so, Mr. Tom Thornton, you are welcome to your opinion."

"I do think so," he answered, beginning to be a little excited. "Do you know that I can arrest you, and send you to prison?"

"I do know it; and I respectfully ask, Why don't you do it?"

"Why don't I do it?" repeated he, apparently amazed at my impudence, and disappointed because an arrest and a prison appeared to have no terrors to me.

"Yes, why don't you do it?"

"I'll tell you why I don't do it. Because your uncle is weak, and don't wish to injure you. That's the reason."

"That isn't the reason. I want to tell you, Mr. Tom Thornton, that nothing would suit me better than to have you arrest me, and send me to prison."

This answer vexed him so much that he jumped up, and walked off.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH ERNEST MAKES A LANDING ON THE HUDSON.

TOM THORNTON was no fool, and it was easy enough for him to see that I understood the situation. It was useless for him to tell me that any tenderness on the part of my uncle saved me from arrest, for the son would have crushed me like a worm beneath his feet in spite of the father. I think he got up and left me because he could not control his temper, and feared a scene. He cooled off in a few moments, and came back, as I knew he would.

"You defy me to arrest you--do you, Ernest?" said he, dropping into the seat at my side.

"Yes; if you wish to put it in that form, I defy you to arrest me. I repeat that I should be very glad to have you do it."

"Why so?" asked he, nervously.

"It would give me a chance to defend myself, and that is just what I want, now I have the means to do so."

"You have some queer conceits, young man," sneered he. "What have you done with that girl?"

"She is safe."

"I asked you what you had done with her."

"And I didn't answer you."

"What have you done with her?"

"She is safe."

"Running away with her is another criminal offence."

"If it is, I shall fight that battle on the same ground with the other. If you choose to take me back to Parkville on any charge, of course you can do so. If you do, a certain document will be brought to light, which will convince Mrs. Loraine and everybody else, that Mr. Tom Thornton, with his gold watch and chain, his span of bays, and his fine clothes, isn't worth a dollar in the world."

Tom's lip actually quivered.

"I don't want to injure you, Ernest," said he. "Your uncle is not willing that you should be brought to justice."

"I have no desire to bring him to justice, either."

"You talk like a fool, like a small boy," said he, impatiently.

"Then don't talk with me."

"You will make out that you haven't done anything wrong yourself, but your friends have made a martyr of you. When I offer to get you out of the scrape into which you have plunged, you speak just as though you were the injured party."

"Exactly so, and I speak just what I mean. You talk to me just as though you and your father had not suppressed my father's will, intending to rob me of my inheritance, and kept my mother in a madhouse for ten or a dozen years."

"What sort of bosh are you talking now?" demanded Tom, with an effort, while his face was pale, and his frame trembled.

"I can prove it all. If you and your father wish to tell me where my mother is, and to make terms you can tell me what you will do," I added, following up my advantage.

"You have taken some ridiculous notion into your head, and I really don't know what you are talking about."

"Did you ever read my father's will?"

"Your father's will!" exclaimed he. "I never heard that he made a will. If he did, it was the most ridiculous thing he ever did in the whole course of his life, for he hadn't a penny to leave."

"Perhaps you can tell me why my uncle so persistently refused to tell me anything about my father or my mother?"

"I certainly can if you insist upon it; though, having more regard for you than you have for yourself, I should prefer to follow your uncle's example, and not say anything about them."

"I will not ask you to spare my feelings, Mr. Tom Thornton. Your father went so far, when I insisted upon it, as to tell me that my mother was insane."

"She is, poor woman, and I don't wonder that her reason was dethroned," replied Tom, whose face brightened up wonderfully as he spoke.

"He refused to tell me anything about my father."

"Which was very kind of him. Your uncle is a strange man; but his greatest weakness is his regard for you. It is best you should know nothing of your father; but if you wish to know, I'll tell you."

"I do wish to know."

"He committed a forgery in London, and died in Newgate before his trial took place. Your poor mother was so grieved that it made her insane. Now you know the whole truth, and you can understand why your uncle did not wish to talk to you about your father."

I confess that I was rather startled by this explanation, and I could not help asking myself if there was any truth in it. It certainly accounted for my uncle's unwillingness to tell me anything about my parents. But I would not believe it. It was treachery to my father's memory to do so.

"Did he make his will in Newgate?" I asked.

"His will! What will? I have told you he had not a penny in the world. Your uncle has ever since paid your mother's board in the insane asylum."

"That is very kind of him. Can you tell me where she is?"

"I don't know."

"I suppose not; and probably it would not be convenient for you to tell if you did."

"I would tell you if I knew. If you desire it, I will persuade your uncle to tell you. You keep talking about a will. What do you mean by it?"

"I found such a document in my uncle's strong box."

"Where is it?"

"It is safe."

"If there is any such document it is a mere fiction. I don't know anything about it."

"You don't?"

"No."

"All right."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing."

"Of course when you speak of a will, you mean something by it," persisted Tom.

"It's no use to talk."

"Why not?"

"Because the truth isn't in you."

"I speak the exact truth."

"No--you don't."

"But I do."

"You know all about the will. I heard my uncle speak to you about it; and I heard you ask if it was not destroyed. You asked for it, and wanted to burn it then. Don't you know anything about it now?"

"You heard all this?" said he, biting his lips.

"I heard it."

"You dreamed it."

"No, I didn't dream it. I heard a great deal more than this. You wanted to destroy the will; but your father said he dared not do it."

"Pray, where were you, when you heard all this?"

"On the top of the bay window of the library. The upper sash was pulled down, so as to let the air in."

"Then you are an eaves-dropper as well as a thief."

"I was on the eaves of the bay window, and I dropped down about the time you went up stairs to look for me. Now you know all about it--and so do I. You may tell me my father died in Newgate, and that you never heard of any will. I shall believe just as much of it as I please, and no more. You think I'm a boy, Mr. Tom Thornton; but I've got brains enough to know chalk from cheese."

Tom wiped his forehead. He did not like my style; but he could not do anything. He dared not take any decided step. After observing the feebleness of his position, I made up my mind that I had won the victory. He was afraid to arrest me, and I felt as safe as though I had been in London then. But there was one more point I wanted to impress upon him.

"I have no doubt, Ernest, that you have some paper which you think is valuable; something which has the form of a will," said Tom, after he had fidgeted about in his seat for some time.

"It has that form," I replied.

"I should like to know what the paper is. Where is it?"

"No matter where it is. I know its value, and I have put it where, the moment you take your first step against me, you will find it lying like a big snake in your path."

"Won't you let me see it?"

"No."

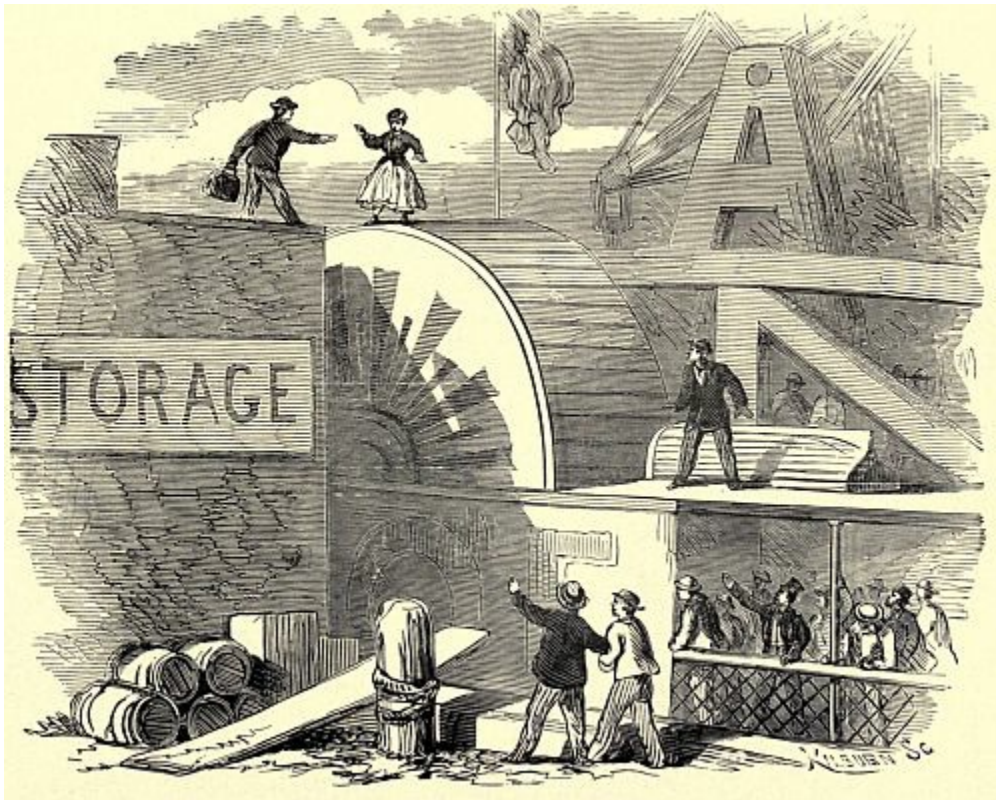
"I only want to know what it is. You need not let it go out of your own hands."

"I won't show it."

I had made my point. I had assured him the will would be forthcoming when he took any step to annoy me. Tom tried all sorts of persuasion to induce me to exhibit it; but without denying that I had it, I declined to produce it. He was so weak that I began to despise him. At last he got mad, and threatened me with all sorts of calamities. I told him, when he became abusive, that I would not talk any more with him, and abruptly left him.

Most of all, I desired to shake him off and get rid of him. While he was watching me, I could not convey Kate to her uncle, and I was puzzled to know what I should do. When the steamer arrived at New York, Tom would keep both eyes fixed upon me, and I should have no chance to assist my fair companion. I walked about the boat, and thought the matter over; but the more I considered it, the more unsatisfactory it seemed.

About one o'clock the steamer made a landing at Poughkeepsie. I went down to the main deck, from which the gangway planks led to the wharf. I found Tom Thornton there, apparently for the purpose of assuring himself that I did not take "French leave" of him, which was just the thing I intended to do, if it could be done without his notice. I went forward, but found that the stern of the boat was swung in, so that the forward gangway was twenty feet from the pier.



THE ESCAPE DEFEATED.--Page 187.

Returning to the saloon deck, I carefully examined the position of the boat in regard to the shore. I went out upon the space over the guards, and outside of the state-rooms. On the edge of the wharf there was a storehouse, the end of which reached about to the middle of the steamer's wheel. The top of the paddle-box was nearly on a level with the flat roof of this building. I could not see Tom Thornton, but I concluded that he was still watching for me on the main deck. The space between the top of the paddle-box and the roof of the storehouse was not more than three or four feet, and I concluded that a girl as resolute as Kate Loraine would leap across the gulf without difficulty. I went to her state-room, and gave her the four raps. She was glad enough to see me, and taking her valise I told her to follow me. I waited till I heard the order given to haul in the plank, and then led Kate up the rude steps on the curve of the paddle-box, heedless of the sign which interdicted passengers from ascending.

A waiter shouted to me; but, fearful that I should be accused of trying to evade the payment of our fares, I threw him my tickets, and told him I must land at Poughkeepsie. I reached the top of the paddle-box with Kate, and jumped over on the roof myself, with her carpet-bag in my hand.

"Now jump, Kate!" I called, as I heard the bell ring to start the wheels.

"I am afraid," she replied, shuddering, as she looked down into the yawning gulf below.

"Jump quick, and I will catch you!"

"I cannot! I cannot!" exclaimed she, in an agony of terror.

The wheels turned, and in an instant the space was too wide for her to come on the roof, or for me to return to the boat. The people discovered us, and began to shout. I saw the waiter give the tickets to a man; but, at the same instant, Tom Thornton, perceiving me on the roof of the storehouse, sprang upon the rail, and leaped ashore, as the stern swung in and grazed the pier. The steamer went on her course; and I saw the man to whom the waiter had given the tickets assist the frightened Kate down from the paddle-box.

I was on shore, but so was Tom Thornton.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH ERNEST OUTFLANKS TOM THORNTON.

MY first impulse, standing on the roof of the store, as the steamer bore Kate Loraine away from me, was to denounce the timidity of girls in general, and of the young lady in my charge in particular. I am sorry to say that, as a rule, I did not think much of girls, though I had a very high opinion of and regard for Kate; but I am happy to say that a few years cured the general dislike, and increased the particular preference.

I was about to mutter something smart and saucy about Kate; but a better and more charitable thought checked the speech, and I felt that I had asked too much of her when I required her to jump four feet, over a chasm of such depth as that which gaped between the steamer and the building. I suppose I forgot, in my enthusiasm for her safety, that girls are not used to climbing trees, and promenading on the roofs of barns. With my second thought I excused her, and blamed myself for expecting her to take such a leap.

There I was on the roof of a storehouse in Poughkeepsie, while the steamer was hurrying down the river at the rate of fourteen miles an hour. If I had separated myself from my fair charge, I had also separated Tom Thornton from her. The enemy was on my track, not hers, thus confirming what I had told Kate—that he was after me rather than her. Though I was not afraid of him, I wanted to keep out of his way, and give him the slip if I could.

There was a scuttle in the roof, upon which I stood. I raised it a little, to obtain a view of the interior; but at that moment I heard the voice of Tom inquiring the way to the roof. While I had been staring at the retreating steamer, he had entered the building in search of me. I closed the scuttle, and retired from its vicinity to the end of the storehouse. Adjoining it there was a one-story building. Throwing the carpet-bag down, I "hung off," and, repeating the operation, reached the ground before Tom had made his way to the roof. Fortunately my path led me down in the rear of the building, and out of the way of the people, who had been observing me from the ground. Behind this building I conducted my retreat in as good order as possible, but with all practicable speed.

The road which led down to the steamboat pier was flanked on one side by a row of one-story buildings, used as stores. I had jumped on one of these shops, and thence to a narrow space on the verge of the wharf. Before any one could go round the storehouse, I had reached the street. I did not dare to run, lest some one should suspect me of being a fugitive. The street was crowded with people, who had just landed from the steamer, and I walked as fast as I could till I heard the screaming whistle of a locomotive. In a few moments more I discovered the railroad station, and being now some distance from the steamboat wharf, I ventured to run. I reached the station just as the train was starting.

"Where does this train go?" I asked of a brakeman on a car.

"Down river. Be in a hurry if you are going," replied the man.

I was going, and I was in a hurry. I entered the car and dropped into a seat, exhausted by the hard run I had had. I caught my breath, and wiped the perspiration from my brow, feeling that good fortune had favored me in the most singular manner. I had certainly given Tom Thornton the slip, and in spite of my habitual modesty, I voted unanimously that I was smart. But it was all luck, in this instance, which favored me; for I heard some one say that the train was thirty minutes late that day. It was due in Poughkeepsie at ten minutes before one, and left half an hour behind its time. If it had been in season, of course I should have lost it. I was very thankful for the accident which, the conductor said, had delayed the train.

From the car window I had frequent views of the river; and in a short time I saw the steamer in which I had come down, ploughing her way down the stream to her destination. I could almost fancy I saw Kate on the hurricane deck. The poor girl had trouble enough now, and I had no doubt she was bitterly lamenting the misfortune which had separated us. On whirled the train, and I soon lost sight of the boat; but I hoped to be able to get on board of her at her next stopping-place, if I could find where that was. I inquired of a gentleman who sat in front of me at what places the steamers stopped. He informed me that some of them stopped at all the towns, but the larger of them at only the principal ones. I mentioned the steamer on which I had been a passenger, and he assured me she would make a landing at Peekskill.

In about an hour the train arrived at this place, and I hastened to the river; but I was obliged to wait over an hour before the steamer appeared. She came up to the pier, and I went on board. I was immediately recognized by a dozen persons who had seen me on the roof of the storehouse. They wanted to ask me some questions; but I avoided them, and rushed up to the saloon. I inquired of the stewardess for Kate, and was told that she was in her state-room. I gave

the four raps, and she opened the door.

"Why, Ernest Thornton!" exclaimed she. "Where did you come from?"

"From up the river," I replied.

The inquisitive passengers had followed me to the state-room, and I was obliged to go in and shut the door in order to avoid them. I saw by the looks of Kate's eyes that she had been crying. Our sudden and unexpected separation had been even a greater trial to her than I had supposed, and her smile was now so full of joy that I never felt happier before in my life.

"I was sure I had lost you, Ernest Thornton. Why, how can it be that you are here, when you were left on the wharf more than two hours ago?" said she, bewildered by my presence, for our reunion was quite as unexpected as the separation had been.

"It is very easily explained, Kate," I replied, with abundant good-nature. "I hope you have not been crying."

"But I have. I never felt so bad before in my life. I believed I had lost the last friend I had in the world, for I was afraid that horrible Tom Thornton would kill you, or do something almost as bad. But you don't explain how you happen to be here. Did you fly?"

"No; I came in the train, which happened to be half an hour late for my especial accommodation;" and I related my story in full.

"I am sorry I didn't jump when you told me to do so," said she, when I had finished. "I ought to have jumped, even if I had been sure of falling into the river."

"I ought not to have asked you to take such a leap, Kate; and it is very fortunate that you had not the courage to do it, for Tom Thornton would have been with us. It couldn't have happened any better even if we had planned it ourselves. Who was the man that helped you down from the paddle-box? What did the people say to you? Did you tell them anything?"

"I did tell them, Ernest Thornton. I hope I haven't done anything wrong," she replied, a sudden shade of anxiety passing over her features.

"It will do no harm."

"The man that helped me down was the steward, they said. Indeed, he was very kind to me, and so were all the people. Half a dozen of them promised to take care of me when I reached New York, and help me find my uncle. They wanted to know who you were, and why the gentleman wanted to catch you."

"What did you tell them?" I asked, rather fearful that she had told more than I cared to have the public know about my affairs.

"I told them the truth; that I had been ill-used by a person, and that you were taking me to my uncle in New York."

"Did you tell them who Tom Thornton was?"

"I only said he had been sent after me. The steward thought he must have supposed I was on the building when he jumped ashore. I didn't tell them anything about your troubles. I didn't know that you would wish me to do so."

"I am glad you did not. But, Kate, you needn't stay in here any longer. We have got rid of Tom Thornton, and you may go out and look at the scenery, if you wish. Have you been to dinner?"

"Yes, the steward gave me some dinner. He was very good to me, and I want to thank him ever so much for his kindness."

When we left the state-room, we were surrounded by the curious passengers, and I was obliged to tell them the adventures I had gone through with. I left Kate with a lady and gentleman who manifested an interest in her, and went down to my dinner, and when I paid for it I paid for Kate's also. When I went on deck, I found that I was a lion, and the passengers insisted upon hearing me roar. They asked questions with Yankee pertinacity, and I finally told a select party of them that I had taken Kate out of her step-mother's house by the way of the attic window, but I was careful not to call any names, for if Mrs. Loraine behaved herself, I did not care to expose her to the public.

"You are a smart young man," said an elderly gentleman, heartily. "Does your father live in this State?"

"I have no father, sir," I replied; and I had dodged a dozen similar questions before.

"No father. I suppose you live with your mother," he added, with the evident intention of drawing me out.

"No, sir. My mother is in England, where I hope soon to join her."

"Ah, in England!" he added, with increasing interest. "In what part does she reside?"

"I do not yet know."

Perhaps he thought it was very odd I should not know.

"I am going to England by the steamer next Wednesday," continued the gentleman. "If I can serve you there, it would give me great pleasure to do so."

"Thank you, sir;" and I began to feel a deep interest in the subject myself.

"You don't know in what part of England your mother resides, then?"

"I do not, but it is somewhere near London."

It was my turn to ask questions now; and I was glad to do so, in order to save myself from being "pumped." I made a great many inquiries about the steamer, the expense, bills of exchange, and other matters, and the gentleman gave me much valuable information. He left the boat at Yonkers, but told me he should be in New York on Monday. He gave me his address when in the city, and I promised to call upon him if I could.



CHAPTER XVIII.

IN WHICH ERNEST CALLS ON SEVERAL LORAINES.

IT was after four o'clock on Saturday afternoon when the steamer arrived at her wharf in New York. The lady and gentleman who had taken so much interest in Kate were anxious to do something to assist her. They were not what is called "stylish" people, and they did not put on any airs. The gentleman was a well-to-do farmer in the western part of the state, and his wife doubtless superintended the making of the butter when she was at home. They were fifty years old, with only one child, a grown-up son; and the lady, the moment she heard that Kate had been ill-treated, proposed to take her home and "do" for her.

In the course of the afternoon Kate mentioned this offer to me, and declared that she liked the lady and gentleman very much indeed. She did not yet know whether her uncle would receive her into his family. If he was unwilling to come between her and her step-mother, Kate was determined to go home with the farmer, whose name was Macombe. The worthy couple really hoped that her uncle would not take her. I found they were going to remain in New York for a week. They intended to stay at a small hotel in the lower part of the city, and I promptly adopted their suggestion to go with them.

Annoying to me, and disagreeable to Kate, as was the publicity to which we had both been exposed by the events of the day, I could not help acknowledging that we had been the gainers by it. The interest excited by my singular conduct, and the sympathy called forth by her helpless condition after we were separated, made many friends for us. I had dreaded the disagreeable necessity of going to a hotel or a boarding-house with Kate, to be stared at, questioned, and suspected, because we were so young; but now the difficulty was entirely removed. We could go to a public house in the train of Mr. Macombe and his lady, and would appear to be a part of his family.

Besides this manifest advantage, I had learned all about the steamers that went to England, and had actually made the acquaintance of a gentleman who was going to London, and who was quite willing to be my friend. If Tom Thornton would keep out of my path till the following Wednesday, I should embark in the steamer, and be on my way across the ocean to find my mother.

Half a dozen people offered to assist Kate, when the boat hauled in at her wharf, and the steward was all kindness and attention. We took a carriage, and drove to the hotel, whose name I have forgotten; but the window of my chamber looked out upon the Battery. As soon as we were comfortably installed in our several apartments, I went to the office and found a Directory. It contained the names of four men whose surname was Loraine. I looked a few years later and there was not a single one. Two of them were merchants, one was a broker, and one was a mason. Nothing was to be learned from their occupation, and as it was too late to find the owners of the names and their places of business that day, I was obliged to defer the search till Monday.

I had left my uncle's without any clothing except that which I wore; and if I was not in absolute need yet of an additional wardrobe, I knew enough of the world to believe that a quantity of baggage adds to a person's respectability, especially at the hotels. I walked up Broadway, and purchased a good-sized valise, a strong and serviceable article, which would contain all I should need in my travels. At a clothing store I bought a good every-day suit, for that I wore was a very nice one--too good for comfort in travelling. At a furnishing store I procured a supply of shirts, collars, and handkerchiefs. When I had packed all these articles in my valise, I felt quite respectable.

As I was walking back to the hotel, I saw in the window of a shop an article which was labelled "money-belt." It was a kind of pocket-book, made of wash-leather, attached to a belt to be worn round the body. I went in and bought one; and it seemed to solve the problem about the care of the large sum of money in my possession, which had been a great trouble to me. I could carry my funds in this belt without the danger of being robbed; and as soon as I reached my room, I enclosed in a piece of oiled silk the greater part of the bills which I had carried in my breast pocket, rolled up in a piece of newspaper, put them in the money-belt, and strapped it around me. It did not feel comfortable at first; but the very annoyance it caused served to remind me that my money was safe.

Mr. and Mrs. Macombe were very good, pious people, and, wherever they were, would as soon have thought of going without their food, as of staying away from divine service; and we went to church with them three times on Sunday. They would not even talk about worldly affairs on that day; and Kate and I were probably saved from answering a great many questions included under the head of forbidden topics. They seemed to be greatly pleased to know that I regularly attended the Sunday school at home. So pure, and true, and good were they, and so much interested in me, that I wanted to tell them all about my own affairs, and to ask them whether I had done wrong in taking the will and the money from my uncle's safe; but I concluded that for the present it would be safer for me to keep my own counsels. They were excellent people, but their very simplicity of character might lead them to betray and injure

me.

On Monday forenoon, leaving Kate with Mrs. Macombe, while her husband was attending to his business affairs, I went in search of the four persons by the name of Loraine. I had written down the address of each, and obtained from Kate all the information she possessed in regard to her father. I decided to try one of the merchants first; and as Mrs. Loraine doubtless knew the name of her deceased husband's brother, I half expected to meet Tom Thornton blockading the door of the uncle's counting-room.

When I saw, on the opposite side of the street, the sign "Mortimer Loraine & Co.," I made sure that Tom Thornton was not in sight, and then went in. I was directed to the private office of the senior partner. He was a cold, stiff, formal man, and eyed me from head to foot with a kind of contempt which I did not appreciate.

"Your business with me, young man?" demanded he, in cast-iron tones.

According to Parkville etiquette, he ought to have asked me to sit down, and I was waiting for him to do so.

"I called to ask, sir, if you ever had a brother by the name of Austin Loraine," I replied.

"No, sir," answered he, gruffly.

"Excuse me for troubling you, then, sir," I added, bowing and retreating.

"Who was Austin Loraine?" he demanded.

"It's of no consequence, sir, if he was not your brother," I replied, still retreating.

"What is your business with him?" he added.

What my business was did not concern him, and I opened the door and retired. Mr. Mortimer Loraine rose from his stuffed chair and followed me, repeating the question he had put to me. I simply told him I wished to find the brother of Austin Loraine; and in my heart I was very grateful that he was not the person, for I should have been afraid to leave Kate in the keeping of such a cast-iron man as he was. He appeared to think he had a monopoly of the name of Loraine, and no one else ought to possess it, or to have relations with it which he was not permitted to know. Giving no further heed to him, I left his store.

My next attempt was with the broker, William, whose office was in Wall Street. He was quite civil, and assured me he had but one brother, whose name was Mortimer, and whom I had just seen on Broadway. He was just as curious to know my business with any one of his name as the first had been; but I was not willing to give him any satisfaction. The next Loraine on my list was the other merchant, whose place of business was in Chambers Street. "McKim & Loraine" was the firm. Impressed with the belief that the junior member of this firm would prove to be the person I sought, I was very careful to satisfy myself that Tom Thornton was not lying in wait for me. In the morning I had put on the new suit of clothes purchased on Saturday night. I hoped this change in my dress would enable me to pass unnoticed if he were watching for me.

As I did not see him anywhere in the vicinity,—though I knew it was possible for him to be concealed in some doorway, or observing me from some chamber window,—I entered the store of McKim & Loraine. As I went in, I saw on a corner sign the full names of the partners, the last of which was "Freeman Loraine." I was directed to the counting-room by a porter.

"Is Mr. Loraine in?" I asked of a clerk at the desk.

"He is not—gone to Baltimore," replied the man, hardly looking up from his ledger.

"When will he return?" I inquired, greatly disappointed.

"Don't know; Mr. McKim is in his office; he can tell you."

I entered a small apartment in the corner, and asked for the senior partner. An elderly gentleman, busy with heaps of letters, informed me that he was the person.

"I wish to see Mr. Loraine very much," I continued.

"He has been in Baltimore for a week; we expect he will return to-day or to-morrow—probably to-night," answered Mr. McKim, fixing his eyes upon the open letter before him.

"Have you been acquainted with Mr. Loraine long?" I ventured to ask.

"Thirty years," replied he, glancing at me with a smile, as though the acquaintance was a pleasant thing to contemplate. "He has been my partner for twenty."

"Can you tell me, sir, whether he ever had a brother by the name of Austin Loraine," I added, emboldened by his smile.

"He had; I knew Austin very well. He died some eight or ten years ago," said Mr. McKim, now so much interested in my questions that he threw down the letter, and gave his attention wholly to me.

"I am very glad to learn this, and I am sorry Mr. Loraine is not at home."

"Can I do anything for you?" he asked.

"No, sir; thank you; I think not. Mr. Loraine's niece is in the city, and wishes to see him very much," I added.

"Why don't she go to his house? His family are at home."

"Kate is with some friends, and I think she would rather wait till her uncle returns, as he is coming so soon. I will call again to-morrow."

"Mr. Loraine lives in Madison Place;" and he gave me the number, which I wrote down on a paper, and told Mr. McKim where Kate was staying.

When I went out of the store I looked again for Tom Thornton. He must have come to the city by this time, and I was rather surprised to find he was not already on my track. I did not see him, but I afterwards found out, to my sorrow, that his eye was upon me from the moment I went into the store of McKim & Loraine. I hastened back to the hotel, and informed Kate that I had found her uncle, but he was not at home. She was so well cared for by Mrs. Macombe that she was in no haste to leave her.

After dinner we all took a walk on the Battery and up Broadway, to see the sights. When we returned, at five o'clock, we found a carriage waiting to convey Kate and me to Mr. Loraine's house in Madison Place.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN WHICH ERNEST STARTS FOR MADISON PLACE WITH KATE.

I COULD not exactly understand how Mr. Loraine, being in Baltimore, or on the way to New York, had sent a carriage for his niece. It was possible that Kate's uncle had returned sooner than he had been expected, or that Mr. McKim had seen his partner's family, and they had sent for Kate. It did not occur to me that there was anything wrong; but I desired to see Mr. Loraine, and tell him her story before his niece went to his house.

"Who sent you for Miss Loraine?" I asked of the hackman.

"How should I know who sent me?" replied the driver, an ill-favored Irishman, and a rough specimen even of New York hackmen, who are not reputed to be saints. "A gentleman gave me this paper, and told me to come here."

I took the paper, and read what was written upon it: "Call at the ---- Hotel for Miss Kate Loraine, and drive her to No. -- Madison Place. Bring the young man who is with her also."

"Who gave you this?" I asked.

"I don't know who he was. It was a gentleman that came over to the hack-stand by the Park."

"Was he an old man, or a young man?"

"Middling ould--not very ould, either; he wasn't what you'd call a young man," replied the driver.

"Was he fifty?"

"He might be; and then again he might not be," answered the man.

This was very definite, and it was plain to me that I could not find out from such a stupid fellow whether or not it was Mr. McKim who had sent him. I decided that Kate should not go to Madison Place that day. It would be much better for me to see her uncle first, for such a course would save her from an unpleasant scene, if he decided not to receive her. I told the hackman we should not go; and the fellow growled about his fare, but finally drove off, declaring that the people in Madison Place should pay him for his trouble.

I was annoyed by the incident, and was afraid it would prejudice Kate's uncle--if he had returned--against her, or if he had not, that his wife would be vexed. Before the hack was out of sight, I was sorry I had not permitted Kate to go. I talked the matter over with her, and with her kind friends, who thought I had been over-nice about the matter.

About seven o'clock, the same hackman came again. I was sent for, and met him in the office. He was as surly and cross as before, though his face wore something like an expression of triumph this time.

"It's a dale of throuble you're makin for your friends," said he, handing me a note.

"You shall be paid for all the trouble I give you," I replied, offended at the fellow's impudence.

I glanced at the note, and found it was directed to Kate. I carried it up to her, and after she had read it, she handed it to me.

"My uncle has returned," said she. "He seems to be real good and kind--don't he?"

I read the note, which was as follows:--

"MY DEAR NIECE: I learned from Mr. McKim, since I returned from Baltimore this afternoon, that you were in the city. I should call upon you myself, but I am quite ill, and do not feel able to do so. I desire to see you very much, and the bearer of this note will drive you to my house. I think Mr. McKim spoke of a young man with you, who called upon him. Let him come with you, if you please.

FREEMAN LORAINE."

"Your uncle is good and kind, and I am sorry I gave him the trouble to send twice," I added, when I had finished reading the note. "We will go with the hackman as soon as you are ready."

"How far is it?" asked Mrs. Macombe.

"Mr. Loraine lives in Madison Place; but I haven't the least idea where that is," I replied.

"Shall we see you again?" asked our kind friend.

"Why, yes, I hope so. I will come down and see you. But I don't know yet whether I am to stay with my uncle or not," said Kate, as she put on her shawl and bonnet. "I must see you again, and I shall tell my uncle all about you."

"I shall depend upon seeing you again, and I hope you will find a good and pleasant home," added the worthy old lady.

I escorted Kate down to the street, and handed her into the carriage. The driver closed the door when I had taken my seat, mounted his box, and drove off.

"I am quite sure, Kate, that you will remain with your uncle," said I, as the hack rattled up Broadway.

"You can't be sure," replied she, somewhat excited by the prospect that was opening before her.

"Not exactly sure; but the interest he manifests in you, and the trouble he takes to have you come to his house, convince me that he is a man worthy to be your father's brother."

"Perhaps he will scold me for running away from Mrs. Loraine," suggested she, timidly.

"I think not. He will not be willing that you should be shut up for a whole week for taking long stitches, or for treading on a flower. There may be some difficulty in the way, as your step-mother is legally your guardian; but your uncle will find a way to release you from such odious bondage. But we won't anticipate anything. If your uncle won't take care of you, I will, for I like you, Kate, and I mean to stand by you just as long as you need any help. Mrs. Macombe will be very glad to take you home with her."

"I seem to have plenty of friends now. But, however many friends I may have, Ernest Thornton, I shall always be grateful to you for what you have done for me. I shall always consider you my first and best friend on earth. But you are going off, over the ocean; and I shall not see you again."

"I shall return soon."

"When shall you go?"

"I shall not go till I am sure you are safe and well provided for. If, as I expect, your uncle takes you to his home, I shall start day after to-morrow."

"So soon?"

"Yes; I cannot needlessly waste a single day. My poor mother, for aught I know, is still in sorrow and suffering."

"How glad she will be to see you, if you find her!"

"I shall find her; I shall not give up the search until I do find her, if it takes me all the rest of my lifetime. But I expect to be successful without much trouble."

We were silent then for half an hour, I judged, in which I was thinking of the great mission that was before me; and I have no doubt Kate was anticipating the scene that awaited her at the house of her uncle. The carriage still rattled along, and it was beginning to be dark, for we had been riding nearly an hour. I thought it was about time for us to reach Madison Place. We must have gone at least six miles, and I came deliberately to the conclusion that New York was a bigger city than I had ever supposed.

"Haven't you got almost to Madison Place?" I shouted to the driver, when my patience began to be sorely tried.

"It's a good piece yet," replied the driver, in the same surly tones.

"I think we must be almost up to Albany," I said to Kate, as I glanced out at the window.

"Not quite so far as that," laughed Kate.

"This don't look like a very aristocratic part of the city," I added. "The houses are all of wood, and poor ones at that."

"You must be patient, Ernest Thornton. We must soon reach my uncle's house."

"Your uncle's, or Albany, I should say."

We were silent again. It did not seem to me possible that Madison Place could be so far off. While I was fretting about the distance, I heard a whistle like that with which one calls his dog, three times repeated. I should not have

noticed it, if the carriage had not stopped in the middle of the street immediately after I heard it. The halt was but for an instant--long enough to permit a man to get on the box with the driver.

"How much farther is it to Madison Place?" I demanded again.

"Only a little piece," answered the surly driver; but he seemed to be more pliable now.

I looked out at the window again. The houses were meaner and more scattered than before, and there were no signs of a mansion fit for the residence of a wealthy merchant. I began to wonder who the man was on the box with the driver, and why he had whistled. I changed my position to the front seat, under the window, which I had opened to enable me to speak to the driver.

I began to have a suspicion that something was wrong, and I determined to investigate as far as it was possible to do so. I waited to hear if anything was said by the two men on the box. I listened eagerly and painfully, for my suspicions almost made me mad. I reviewed the circumstances under which we had left the hotel. The letter was signed by Mr. Loraine, and the driver told me he had brought it from Madison Place.

My heart rose up into my throat, as the conviction flashed upon my mind that Kate and I were the victims of some villainous scheme. The rascally driver could not have gone to Madison Place in the time that intervened between his two calls at the hotel, if Madison Place was farther off than we had yet gone. I was so nervous and restless that Kate fathomed my painful anxiety. She could not help believing by this time that something was wrong.

"O, Ernest Thornton!" exclaimed she, when it was no longer possible for her to keep still.

"Don't be alarmed, Kate," I replied; but I was fearfully alarmed myself.

"Where are we going?"

"I don't know; but it is plain enough now that we have been deceived."

"Tom Thornton has done this!" gasped she.

"I suppose so; but be calm, Kate. Heaven will protect us."

"I am frightened almost to death," said she, with chattering teeth. "What shall we do?"

"I don't know yet. Keep as cool as you can, and leave it all to me. They can't go a great ways farther with this team. We must stop soon."

I was strongly impressed with the opinion that it was time something was done. Of course the wretches on the box had made their plans beforehand, and everything seemed to be working well for them. Doubtless they would have the means of securely disposing of their victims when they reached their destination. It seemed to me to be necessary, therefore, to derange their plans, if possible, and I waited for a favorable time to make a demonstration.

CHAPTER XX.

IN WHICH ERNEST STRIKES A HEAVY BLOW, AND TOM THORNTON HAS A BAD FALL.

THE chances for making a demonstration were not favorable; but the more desperate the circumstances, the greater was the need of doing something before we were committed to any place more secure than a carriage. If I had been alone I should have opened the door and jumped out; but Kate could not do this. While I was considering what I could do, I heard the driver speak. I raised myself up to the window, and listened for the reply of the other man.

Though I could not tell what was said, I recognized the voice of Tom Thornton. I had come to the conclusion, as soon as my suspicions were aroused, that it was he; for it was not likely that he would trust the execution of his scheme wholly to others. I confess that the sense of being injured was not the only emotion that disturbed me. I was filled with anger and indignation at the trick which had been put upon me. I wanted a weapon like my trusty base-ball bat, and I felt that, if I had it, I should do good service with it.

The thought of the bat suggested an idea. In going up to Chambers Street in the forenoon, I had seen a hackman oiling his wheels at the stand by the Park. When he finished, he put the iron wrench he had used under one of the seats in the carriage. I felt for one in this vehicle, and realized a savage gratification when I placed my hand upon the article. The implement was about a foot and a half in length, but not very heavy. Having decided upon the plan of the intended assault, I buttoned my sack coat, and thrust the wrench into the open space between two of the buttons.

Half paralyzed with terror, Kate asked me what I was going to do. I told her in a whisper to keep still. In a fair, stand-up fight with two men, I should be instantly vanquished, and it was necessary for me to obtain the advantage of a surprise, if possible. The rear window of the carriage was open. Though the aperture was small, it was large enough for me to crawl through, and I worked myself out upon the baggage-rack. The jar which I communicated to the vehicle by this movement attracted the attention of the men on the box.

"Be aisy for a minute more, and you'll be at Madison Place," said the driver.

"How much farther is it?" I asked, thrusting my head into the window, so that he would not suspect that I had got out of the carriage.

"Only a short piece farther," he added.

Placing one foot on a ledge at the side of the hack, and the other on the bottom of the back window, I scrambled to the top of the carriage, where I was obliged to spread out like a frog, and was in imminent danger of sliding off. Of course this feat of gymnastics could not be effected without considerable noise. It was evident to the driver that something decided had taken place, or was about to take place, and he began to rein in his horses.

Just as I reached my perch on the top of the hack, all sprawling, the vehicle was approaching one of those small public houses at the corner of a cross street, which abound in the upper part of New York and Harlem. In front of it burned a street lamp. Tom Thornton--and I could distinctly make him out now, though I did not see his face--had bent his head down to look in at the front window. He doubtless expected to find the cause of the noise and the jar within the hack; at least, thinking I was there, it was natural for him to look inside for it. I suppose he thought I was breaking out through the top of the vehicle.

With the wrench in my hand, I sprang forward; but my blood was almost frozen at the necessity of striking him a blow on the head which might kill him, and the thought that I might take his life partially paralyzed my arm. I struck, but it was a feeble stroke compared with what it should have been to effect my purpose. His hat appeared to break the force of the blow, and he sprang to his feet. Then I saw that he had a heavy cane in his hand, and I was sorry I had not struck harder.

"Drive on! Don't stop here!" said he to the driver, fearful, perhaps, that I might obtain assistance from the hotel.



ON THE WAY TO MADISON PLACE.--Page 224.

With his cane in one hand, he reached forward with the other to grasp me by the collar; or this was what I supposed he intended to do. He did not see that I had a weapon, and getting up on my knees, I hit him again, this time with better effect, for he fell over backward upon the horses. The driver hauled in his team again, and seemed to be appalled at the fate of his companion.

The instant he stopped I slid off the top of the hack to one of the hind wheels, and thence to the ground. I opened the door of the carriage, and told Kate to get out with all possible haste. I assisted her to the ground, and taking her by the hand, actually dragged her after me. The gloom of the night covered us, and we fled as fast as my companion's trembling limbs would permit. I turned into a cross street, on which there were no buildings, and followed it till we came to another avenue.

I expected to be pursued; whether we were or not, I do not know, for we were not molested, and I neither saw nor heard anything which indicated a search. Whether the hackman, knowing that he was engaged in doubtful business, did not call for assistance, or whether the pursuit was delayed till it was too late to catch us, I have no information. We walked down the avenue as rapidly as possible, till I was satisfied we should not be overtaken.

"O, Ernest Thornton," gasped Kate, out of breath with fatigue and terror, after we had walked a couple of miles, "I shall sink to the ground soon!"

"I am sorry for you, Kate; but what can I do?" I replied.

"I am tired out; and I am so frightened, I can hardly walk."

"Don't be alarmed; we are safe now," I added, drawing her arm through mine. "Now lean on me."

"But you must be tired, Ernest Thornton."

"No, not a particle; let me help you as much as I can."

"This is much easier than it was before," said she; and she clung to me like a frightened child--as indeed she was.

"Don't be afraid to lean your whole weight upon me," I added. "I would carry you if I could."

I think it was her fears more than her exertions that exhausted her; and, by the time we had walked another mile, as I estimated the distance, she declared that she felt better, and more able to walk than at first. As we continued on our way, I saw a horse car on another avenue,--street railroads at that time were not so abundant as now,--and we followed a cross street till we came to the track.

"I feel ever so much better now!" exclaimed Kate, as the circumstances became more hopeful.

"There is nothing more to fear," I replied. "I wish I knew how Tom Thornton was."

"Why, what is the matter with him?" asked Kate, with astonishment; and I perceived that she had no definite idea of what had happened before the public house. The poor girl was so terrified that she had hardly known anything from the time our suspicions were first excited till we had walked two or three miles from the scene of the affray.

"Did you think, Kate, that he permitted us to leave the carriage?" I asked.

"I didn't think anything about it; I was so frightened I couldn't think."

"I hope he is not badly hurt," I added, musing.

"Badly hurt! Why, what do you mean, Ernest Thornton?" she asked, her terror renewed by my words.

"Don't be alarmed, Kate; he deserved all he got, and more too, if the blow didn't kill him."

"Why, Ernest Thornton!"

"Do you see this?" I added, holding up the wrench, which, from an instinct of self-preservation, I had kept in my hand.

"What is it?"

"An iron wrench. I struck Tom Thornton over the head with it, and he fell from the drivers box on the backs of the horses."

"O!" groaned she.

"It could not be helped, Kate."

"I hope he is not much hurt."

"I hope not; but I can't help it if he is," I replied, desperately, for I had many fears in regard to the result, and was not half so confident of the future as I tried to appear. "There is a car, Kate," I added, throwing the wrench away. "Now be calm, and try to look as though nothing had happened."

She covered her face with a thick veil, and we entered the horse car. Riding in silence for a long hour, we reached the Park, where, taking a stage, we proceeded to the hotel. It was nearly eleven o'clock when we went into the parlor, where Kate sank exhausted upon a sofa. I found that Mrs. Macombe had retired, but I called her up. The poor girl's nerves were fearfully unstrung, but the good woman ministered to her like an angel. She slept with her, and was all that a loving mother could be to her.

For my own part, I ate a hearty supper, and went to bed. It was not without the fear that the police would visit me before morning, that I lay on my couch thinking of the startling events of the evening. Yet, as I repeated my prayer that night, I felt that I had done no more than my duty--my duty to Kate, my mother, and myself. I would have given half the money in my belt to know whether Tom Thornton was dead or alive. I had not injured him from malice or for revenge, only in self-defence; and I felt that a just God would burden him, rather than me, with the consequences of the blow I had struck. I went to sleep at last, with the prayer in my heart, that Tom Thornton would recover from the injury he had received.

Kate was quite ill in the morning; but Mrs. Macombe cared for her tenderly, and assured me nothing serious would result from the terror and excitement to which she had been subjected. After breakfast I hastened to the store of McKim & Loraine. Kate's uncle had returned the preceding evening, and I waited till he came down town. In as few words as possible, I told him what Kate's situation had been at the house of her step-mother, what abuse she had suffered, and in what manner she had escaped. He was indignant, and insisted that she should immediately make his house her home.

Then I showed him the note signed with his name, which the hackman had brought for Kate. It was a forgery, and Mr. Loraine could hardly control his anger. I related to him our adventure at Harlem, and described the scene on the top of the hack.

"Served him right!" exclaimed he.

"I may have killed him," I added.

"I hope you did," replied he, bluntly. "I will go and see Kate at once."

On our arrival at the hotel, we found the hackman there who had driven us out to Harlem.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN WHICH ERNEST VISITS MADISON PLACE.

"I'm waiting for you," said the hack-driver, as I entered the office of the hotel with Mr. Loraine.

"What do you want of me?" I demanded, supposing the villain was charged with the execution of some further design upon me.

"I want my money," he growled.

"What money?"

"For driving you out to Harlem."

"Do you expect me to pay that?"

"As the gentleman didn't pay me, I expect you to do so," he replied, with refreshing coolness.

"Where is the gentleman now?" I asked; and, wishing to obtain some information in regard to Tom, if I could, I did not decline to pay his demand.

"I don't know where he is."

"What became of him?"

"With the help of some people I found in the bar-room, I took him into the public house. Bedad, it was a hard crack you guv him," added the hackman, in a low tone. "If you pay me the tin dollars, I won't say anything agin you."

"You carried him into the public house," I repeated. "What then?"

"Wait till I tell you. Begorra, I thought he was kilt, sure," he replied, in confidential whispers. "A bad scrape it was, and I didn't want to be in it; so I jumped on my box and druv off telling 'em I was goin' for a dochter."

"Don't you know what became of him?"

"Faix, I do. Two hours afther, I sent a frind of mine, one Michael Mallahy, that lives convanient to the public house, to go and drink a glass of beer at the bar-room, and inquire for the man that was hurted. Now pay me my tin dollars, and I won't say a word."

"Did your friend find out about the man that was hurt?" I inquired, putting my hand into my pocket.

"Faix, he did. The gentleman wasn't kilt at all. He came out of it with only a sore head, and left the public house all alone by himself."

"Haven't you heard of him since?"

"Not one word; and I don't know where in the world is he."

"And he didn't pay you?" I added, withdrawing my hand empty from my pocket.

"He did not thin."

"He served you just right, then," I continued.

"Aren't you going to pay me my tin dollars?" said he, looking uglier than usual.

"I am not--not I."

"Begorra, thin, I will inform the police," replied he, savagely. "You struck the gentleman on the head with the wrinch, and I'll have you in the Tombs."

"What's the trouble!" asked Mr. Loraine, who had been impatiently waiting for me in another part of the room, as he stepped up to the hackman, his attention attracted by the fellow's anger.

"That is the man that drove us out to Harlem last night," I answered.

"What's your number?" demanded Mr. Loraine of the surly brute.

The hackman looked at him. The New York merchant was no tyro, and Jehu, preferring not to deal with one who understood the characteristics of his class, suddenly bolted through the open door, and ran for his hack. Mr. Loraine pursued him; but the rascal had left his carriage on the Bowling Green side of the street, and he distanced both of us. Leaping upon his box, he drove off as fast as his horses could go.

"Didn't you notice the number of his hack?" asked Mr. Loraine, as we returned to the hotel.

"I did not, sir."

"What did he want of you?"

"He wished me to pay him ten dollars for driving Kate and me out to Harlem last night," I replied, laughing.

"It did not take you long to give him an answer to such a demand."

"I wanted to know why Tom Thornton had not paid him. It seems that the scoundrel, when he found his employer was hurt, was afraid of getting into trouble, and left him. I put my hand into my pocket, as though I intended to pay him, so as to induce him to tell me what I wanted to know."

"You'll do!" added Mr. Loraine, smiling. "But what did become of Thornton?"

"When the hackman sent a friend of his to inquire about him, Tom Thornton had come to his senses and left."

"I'm afraid you'll hear from him again. If you do, let me know. Now, where is Kate?"

I conducted him up stairs to Mrs. Macombe's parlor. Mr. Loraine proved to be all I had wished him to be--sympathizing, noble, and decided. He asked Kate a great many questions, in order to assure himself that she was not a naughty, wilful, and disobedient girl; and, in answer to them, she told her whole story, as she had told it to Bob Hale and me in the standing-room of the Splash. I made a voluntary statement of my impressions in regard to the step-mother, and the interview I had had with her.

"I never liked the woman," added Mr. Loraine; "and, till the day of my brother's death, I did not cease to regret his marriage. Why didn't you write to me, Kate?"

"She would not let me."

"Why didn't you tell Mr. Windleton about the treatment you received?"

"It wasn't so bad till after Mr. Windleton went to Europe."

"We will have it made right at once. I have done some business for Windleton during his absence; for he was a friend of mine, as well as of my brother. He will be shocked when he hears of this business. I expect him back the next steamer, due to-day or to-morrow. I shall go and see this woman as soon as he returns."

"But I don't want to go back to her, uncle Freeman," said Kate, with a suppressed shudder.

"You shall not; you shall live with me, if you are so disposed."

"O, uncle!"

Kate cried; I am sure I don't know why, for there was certainly nothing to cry about. Mrs. Macombe, I know, was sorry that Kate was going to live with her uncle, for she had already become very much attached to her, and would gladly have given her a home, and been a mother to her. When they parted, Mr. Loraine promised that his niece should visit her at no distant day. I was taking my leave of Kate, when her uncle interposed, and insisted that I should go with them to his residence. My fair fellow-traveller would not permit me to leave yet, and a carriage was called, in which we started for Madison Place.

The ride was not so long as the one we had taken on the preceding evening. Kate was warmly welcomed by Mrs. Loraine and her family; and when I saw the kindness that beamed in their eyes, and was reflected from their actions, I was confident that Kate had found a good home--that best of earthly blessings. I was sorry to part with her; indeed, I did not know how strongly I was interested in her until the hour of separation came. I bade good by to the family, and she followed me to the street door.

"I don't want you to go, Ernest Thornton," said she, calling me, as she invariably did, by my full name.

"I don't want to go, Kate; but you know what work I have on my hands," I replied.

"Cannot my uncle help you? I know he would be willing to do so," she asked.

"I don't think I need any more help. If Tom Thornton troubles me any more, I shall apply to him. But I think I have given Tom his quietus for the present. He will carry a sore head around with him for some time. But I must go now. The steamer sails to-morrow, you know."

"Shall I not see you again?" she asked, beginning to be very much moved.

"I will call upon you this evening, if I can."

"You will come, Ernest Thornton--won't you?"

"If possible, I will."

"And when you get to England, you must write to me."

"I will certainly do that. Good by, Kate."

She extended her hand to me, and I took it. Then I hastened away, fearful that she would cry again. I walked down the street thinking of her. She was not as pretty as many young ladies I had met, but she was exceedingly interesting, to say nothing of the grace of her form, which I have never seen surpassed. She is as graceful and interesting now as she was then. But I will not anticipate.

I did not expect to hear any more from Tom Thornton, and I did not fear any obstacles to my departure for England the next day. I took from my pocket the card which the gentleman whose acquaintance I had made on board the Albany steamer had given me. His name was Solomons. I afterwards learned that he was a Jew; and my estimate of the whole Jewish people was very much increased after a few days' intimacy with him. His hotel was written in pencil under his name. I readily found it, and he was in his room.

He received me very kindly; but I had to tell him everything that had occurred after my arrival in the city, before I could introduce the topic which was uppermost in my mind. He was warmly interested in the affairs of Kate, and was delighted when I told him she was then with her uncle's family as happy as she could be.

"I shall sail for England with you to-morrow, sir," I added, when Kate's history had been disposed of.

"Ah, indeed! I'm glad to hear it. Have you engaged your passage yet?" he asked, briskly.

"Not yet, sir."

"Not yet, my boy! I am afraid you'll find no berth. The other one in my state-room was not taken yesterday, but I fear we are too late for it to-day. We will go down and see to it at once."

We rode down to the steamer office in a stage, and Mr. Solomons inquired rather nervously about the other berth in his room.

"It was taken not more than half an hour ago," replied the clerk.

"That's unfortunate," added my friend, apparently as much disappointed as I was. "What else have you?"

"Nothing just now. A gentleman has taken Nos. 41 and 42," he added, pointing to the plan of the cabins, on the counter before him; "but there is some doubt whether he will go. He engaged the room yesterday, and I promised to keep it for him till all the other berths were taken. He was here a while ago, and said he would give his final answer in an hour. It is time he was here."

"In that case we will wait a while," continued Mr. Solomons. "I engaged my passage a month ago, and the ship was half full then."

"Couldn't I find some place on board?" I asked, anxiously.

"I don't know; the officers sometimes give up their rooms for a consideration. I gave the third officer five pounds for his room the last time I came over from Liverpool."

"I have concluded to take that room," said a young man, rather dashily dressed, as he rushed hastily up to the counter.

My heart sank within me, for the announcement seemed to mean that I had lost my passage. But I was determined to go on board of the steamer, and make an arrangement with any officer who was open to a treaty for the use of his state-room.

"You take both berths?" added the clerk.

"No," replied the young man, glancing at me, as I had seen him do several times before.

"Then here is your chance," said the clerk to Mr. Solomons.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH ERNEST MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF E. DUNKSWELL.

MR. SOLOMONS examined the plan again to ascertain the locality of the state-room which contained the unoccupied berth.

"It is on the other side of the ship from mine," said he. "But we can do no better."

"Perhaps this gentleman will exchange with you," suggested the clerk.

"I am quite willing to take the young gentleman into my state-room," answered the stranger.

"Of course he will take the vacant berth in that room," added Mr. Solomons, who did not seem to think that the offer of the stranger was very magnanimous, since the berth in his room could be taken by the next applicant, whether he was willing or not.

The clerk had written the receipt for the passage money paid him by the young man, and pushed it across the counter towards him. The name on the paper was E. Dunkswell. I confess that I was not particularly pleased with Mr. Dunkswell, and did not care to occupy a state-room with him. Besides being rather jauntily dressed, he wore too much jewelry to suit my taste. His speech was somewhat peculiar, and I set him down as a fast young man. He appeared to be about twenty-one years old, though possibly he was more than that.

"I have the lower berth in this room," said Mr. Solomons, addressing the stranger, and pointing to his room on the plan. "It is about the same kind of a room as your own. If you would exchange berths with me, it would oblige me very much."

"I should be very happy to accommodate you," replied the fast young man, "but for particular reasons I desire to occupy the berth I have engaged."

"My room is just as good as the one you have taken," added Mr. Solomons.

"Very true; but I like the locality of mine better than yours."

It was evident that Mr. Dunkswell had a decided opinion of his own in this matter; and my kind friend was too much of a gentleman to say anything more about the exchange. He engaged the berth; but there was still a hope that an arrangement might be made with the person who had taken the upper berth in Mr. Solomons' state-room. Just then it occurred to me, as I saw the clerk writing the receipt for me, that my money was where I could not get at it in a public place; but it was only a short distance to the hotel, and I ran over to my room, and put the greater part of my funds in my wallet. The passage money was paid, and with a lively emotion of pleasure at the prospect which the ticket opened to me, I put it into my pocket.

Mr. Solomons then went with me to a banker's, for I had taken his advice, and resolved to procure a letter of credit on a London banker. My friend was very much surprised, and I think he was a little suspicious, when I told him I had over a thousand dollars in my pocket. The banker gave me a letter of credit for two hundred pounds, and I deposited a thousand dollars with him, as security. On my return I was to settle with him for whatever sums I had drawn, and he was to pay me back the balance, with four per cent. interest. Mr. Solomons was particular to have it understood by the banker in London that the money would be drawn by a young man sixteen years of age, and I left my signature to be forwarded to him.

My business was all done, and I parted with Mr. Solomons, to meet him again the next day on board the steamer. In the evening, I went up to Madison Place, and staid till nine o'clock.

"Who do you suppose has been here this afternoon?" asked Kate of me, as I was taking my leave.

"Not Tom Thornton?" I replied, inquiringly.

"No; the gentleman we saw on the steamboat--your friend; he was with you to-day."

"Mr. Solomons?"

"Yes; he told me what a lot of money you had, and wanted to know if you had come honestly by it."

"Well, what did you tell him?" I asked, anxiously.

"I told him the money was rightfully your own. He told me he supposed it was all right, though over a thousand dollars was a large sum for a mere boy to have, and manage himself."

I had almost concluded before to tell Mr. Solomons the whole truth in regard to myself; and the trouble he had taken to satisfy himself of my honesty, decided me to do so at the first convenient opportunity. I did not bid Kate a final good-by when I left the house, for Mr. Loraine promised to take her over to Jersey City, where the steamer lay, to "see me off." On my way to the hotel, I visited the post-office, as I had done every day since my arrival in the city. This time I found a letter from Bob Hale, and I hastened to my room at the hotel to read it.

It was a long letter, full of warm and generous feeling towards me--it was just like Bob. He informed me that my uncle was apparently as well as usual; he had gone to the cottage, and inquired of old Betsey. There had been a great deal of talk about my going off; but no one knew anything about the real circumstances. Mrs. Loraine had taken pains to "hush up" the facts in regard to Kate.

"When my father came home," wrote Bob, "I told him your story, as you wished me to do. He shook his head, and said it was a foolish story, and he feared you were a bad boy, after all. But when I showed him your father's will, and he had read it, he caved in like an avalanche. He told me he thought, from your uncle's singular life, that something ailed him, and your story explained it perfectly. He was sorry you had not come to him, instead of going away. I told him you wanted to find your mother, and cared more for her than you did for the money. He praised you then, and hoped you would find her. He put the will in his safe, and you may be sure it will be forthcoming when you want it."

Bob related all the news about the fellows in Parkville, and wished me to answer his letter immediately. I did so that night, giving him all the incidents of my trip to New York, and the events which occurred after my arrival, with my plans for the future. When I went to bed I could not sleep, I was so excited by the fact that I was going to England the next day. I trembled when I thought of my mother, and of what might happen to prevent my finding her. I heard the clock on Trinity Church strike three before I went to sleep.

It was eight o'clock when I awoke, and I was to be on board the steamer at ten. I ate my breakfast, paid my bill, and left the hotel with my valise in my hand. A stage up Greenwich Street carried me nearly to the ferry, and I reached the steamer half an hour before the appointed time. I found the state-room which I was to share with "E. Dunkswell," where I left my valise, the evidence of my respectability, and then went on deck. Mr. Loraine and Kate soon appeared, and I spent the time with them until those not going in the ship were required to leave. Kate cried then; I took her hand and kissed her--I could not help it. We parted as brother and sister would part, and I watched her on the wharf until she could no longer be seen. The ponderous wheels of the great ship revolved, and we moved slowly down the harbor.

I was excited by the scene and its surroundings, by the thought that I was leaving the land where I had lived from my childhood, and more than all by the reflection that I was going to seek and find my mother. Everything was new and strange to me. I wandered through every part of the ship open to a passenger. I gazed at the shores, and I studied the faces of my fellow-voyagers. Off Sandy Hook the pilot was discharged, and the prow of the noble steamer pointed out to the middle of the great ocean that rolled between me and my mother. The excitement on board began to subside; the passengers went below to arrange their state-rooms for the voyage.

When I first went on board I entered the dining saloon, where I found a few passengers selecting their seats at the tables. Mr. Solomons had told me in travelling to do as others did; so I took a couple of cards, wrote my friend's name on one and my own on the other, and pinned them to the table-cloth, as near the head of the captain's table as I could find two vacant places. This secured us pleasant seats for the voyage, and Mr. Solomons was pleased with my thoughtfulness, as he called it. Before we reached Sandy Hook, he proposed to his room-mate to exchange berths with me; but when Mr. Dunkswell was pointed out to him as the person whose state-room he was to share, he politely but regretfully declined to do so, leaving his reasons to be inferred, for he did not give them.

When the gong sounded for lunch, at twelve o'clock, I found to my surprise that Mr. Dunkswell had taken the seat next to mine. I was rather prejudiced against him; partly because he refused to exchange berths with my friend, and partly because Mr. Solomons' room-mate did not like him well enough to exchange with me. He was very polite to me, and seemed to be strongly inclined to cultivate an intimacy with me. I could not do less than be civil to him. He invited me to drink wine with him at lunch, and to smoke his cigars afterwards, neither of which I could do.

At four we dined, and Mr. Dunkswell renewed his efforts to be intimate with me; and the more he persevered, the more he didn't accomplish anything. I did not like him, and I could not like him. At dinner he drank more wine than his head could bear, and this did not make him any more agreeable to me. After dinner, Mr. Solomons and myself took seats upon the hurricane deck. He mentioned that he had called to see Kate the preceding evening, and this afforded me an opportunity to tell my story, to which my friend listened with the deepest interest.

He assured me that I had done right; that it was my duty to find my mother; that the fact of my uncle's misapplying

my father's fortune justified me in taking the money and the papers from the safe. He commended me for my spirit, and for my devotion to my mother. If I had not felt sure of his approbation beforehand, I suppose I should not have had the courage to tell him my history. At half past seven we went down to tea; and this time Mr. Dunkswell did not make his appearance.

After a promenade on deck till nine o'clock, I found myself tired enough to retire, and more inclined to sleep than I had been before since I left Parkville. I went to my state-room, and found the door locked on the inside. I knocked, but Mr. Dunkswell, politely but in rather muddled tones, requested me to wait a moment. I did wait a moment, and was admitted. My room-mate was tipsy, but not enough so to make him anything more than silly. He was lying in his berth, with his clothes off. Having occasion to open my valise, I found the contents in a very confused state, and not as I had left them. I was somewhat startled, and hastened to examine further. I had put my letter of credit, and about two hundred dollars in bank bills, in my money belt. The letters I had taken from my uncle's safe I had deposited in my valise. They could be of no value to any one on board but myself, and I thought they would be safe in the state-room.

They were not safe; to my astonishment and dismay, they were not to be found. I had placed them under my best suit, and they were certainly gone. The confusion in my valise indicated that they had been stolen.



CHAPTER XXIII.

IN WHICH ERNEST FINDS THAT E. DUNKSWELL IS A DISAGREEABLE ROOM-MATE.

I WAS vexed, and almost disheartened, by the loss of the letter addressed to Bunyard. My plan to find my mother rested mainly on the possession of it. I had placed the letters in the valise after I came on board, and they must have been taken out after the steamer discharged her pilot. There was not much room for a mystery, for I immediately jumped to the conclusion that E. Dunkswell was the person who had robbed me.

E. Dunkswell was at that moment in his berth, at least half drunk, and a bottle labelled "Old Bourbon" stood on his wash-stand. The odor in the state-room was quite equal to that of a third-class bar-room. Why had E. Dunkswell taken those letters? In what manner did they concern him? This was an interesting, and rather exciting question to me, and it suggested other pertinent inquiries. He had not taken his passage till after I applied for mine. He had practically insisted that I should occupy the same state-room with him. Why did he refuse to exchange berths with Mr. Solomons? Why did he labor so hard to become intimate with me?

The answer to all these questions was plain enough to me after a little consideration. He was an agent of Tom Thornton. He had been sent to worm himself into my friendship, and take from me the will, which Tom probably supposed I carried in my pocket, and the other papers which would enable me to find my mother. Force and violence had failed, and Tom had resorted to cunning and stratagem.

E. Dunkswell had drank too much wine at dinner, and too much whiskey after dinner. Perhaps the frequent libations he had taken increased his zeal, but they diminished his discretion in a corresponding ratio. He had begun his work too soon, and had done it in a very bungling manner. If whiskey was a curse to him, it was a blessing to me, for in his sober senses he would not have exposed himself and his plans by robbing my valise so early on the voyage.

My blood was up; and while I sat on the sofa debating whether or not I should take E. Dunkswell by the throat, and "have it out" with him, he got out of his berth, and took another pull at the bottle. It was plain that he had no intention of keeping sober, and I concluded to wait and let the whiskey help me do my work.

"How is it, old boy?" said he.

"First rate," I replied.

"How zhe head?"

"Sou'-sou'-west, half-west."

"I mus' zgo on deck an zee to it."

He put on his hat, straightened himself up, and walked out of the room as well as he could. I locked the door after him. If his key would fit my valise, it followed that my key would fit his trunk. I tried the experiment, and the logic failed. It was evident that he had other keys, or that he was a regular operator, and carried implements for the purpose of picking locks. I was not sure that the papers he had stolen from me were in his trunk; but I was determined to have them before morning, if I had to split the trunk open.

I unlocked the door, and presently E. Dunkswell staggered into the room. The first thing he did was to drink from the bottle again.

"Thornton--hic!" said he. "You're a good fellow. Take some whisk--good whisk zever you drank--hic--or any other man. Take zome whisk."

"No, I thank you; I never drink it."

"You dzon't zrink whisk! Then you are a to-tzeetler."

"I am," I replied, inclined to encourage him in talking, hopeful that he would say something which would be of use to me.

"I'm not a to-tzeetler. My name's Dzunkswell. You're a to-tzeetler, and I mus zrink for boze of us;" and, suiting the action to the word, he imbibed again. "If I'm zrunk to-night, 'll be your fault, Thornton--'cause I've got to zrink for boze of us."

But he was no longer in condition even to drink for both of us. He had already taken more than he could carry, and

he had just sense enough left to roll into his berth, all in a heap. I straightened him out a little, and in a few moments I heard him snoring in his drunken slumbers. The time for action had come, and I was determined to search him and his effects till I found the precious letters. I first examined his pockets, but without finding the papers. The key of his trunk, however, I did find. It was exceedingly disagreeable business to me; and if only my own rights, instead of the life, liberty, and happiness of my mother, had been at stake, I should have taken a less direct and more uncertain method of enforcing them.

The trunk, which he had placed under his berth, I pulled out into the floor. With trembling hand and eager heart I opened it. The package of letters had been thrust down between the clothing and one end, evidently in great haste, for I had probably disturbed him when I came to the door. After assuring myself I had all that belonged to me, I closed the trunk,--for I had no desire to explore it any further,--and restored it to its place under the berth. The drunken agent of Tom Thornton still snored unconscious of my proceedings.

I took the precaution to place the Bunyard letter in my money-belt; the others, being of minor importance, I put in my valise again. I looked at the miserable being who lay groaning and uneasy in the stupor of intoxication. The state-room was not fit for the occupancy of a decent person. The fumes of the whiskey were sickening to me, and I could no longer stay there. Taking my valise in my hand, I left it, resolved not to be the room-mate of such a filthy swine.

I deposited my valise in a corner in the passageway, and went into the saloon. Mr. Solomons was there, and expressed his surprise at seeing me. I freely told him what had transpired in the state-room.

"And you recovered your papers--did you?" said he.

"I did; I was satisfied the fellow had been sent by Tom Thornton, to prevent me from finding my mother."

"No doubt of it, my lad. You must keep away from him now."

"That I shall certainly do, for I would rather sleep in a hog-pen than in such a place as that state-room."

"You shall not sleep there," replied my friend, decidedly; "come with me."

I followed him below, and he conducted me to his own room, and told me to occupy his berth.

"But what will you do?" I asked.

"I will take your berth, and the fellow shall not turn the room into a pigsty."

I objected to this arrangement, and offered to sleep on a sofa in the saloon; but Mr. Solomons persisted, assuring me he should take good care of himself, and would not submit to any annoyance from his room-mate. As soon as this point was settled, I retired, and slept soundly till the breakfast gong roused me from my tired slumbers. When I went to the saloon, E. Dunkswell was in his place at the table; but Mr. Solomons had taken the place which I occupied the day before, so as to bring himself between the obnoxious individual and myself.

E. Dunkswell did not appear to have a ravenous appetite. He looked sheepish and disconcerted; and I could not tell whether it was on account of his spree, because he had discovered the loss of the papers, or because he found in the morning that he had a new room-mate. My friend was cheerful and happy, and so was I. We talked and laughed as though E. Dunkswell had been tipsy, or out of existence. We took no notice of him, either by word or look.

It was a beautiful day, and we adjourned to the hurricane deck to enjoy the cool air and the prospect of the ever-throbbing ocean. Tom Thornton's agent soon followed us. He walked up and down the uneasy deck; and occasionally glanced at me. I thought he had something to say to me; but he evidently did not like my close intimacy with Mr. Solomons. During the day, I occasionally saw him, and he always appeared to be watching me; but I carefully avoided him. On the following day, however, I went forward to the bow alone.

"Passengers not allowed forward of that mark," said a sailor, pointing to a chalk line drawn across the deck. "You are fined, sir."

"What for?" I asked.

"For crossing the line."

"Why don't you put up a notice, so that passengers need not cross it?" I demanded.

"Because they wouldn't go over the line if we did, sir."

"How much is the fine?"

"Anything you please, sir."

It was a practical joke, one of Jack's tricks, and I paid the fine, amid the laughter of half a dozen passengers, who had already been made victims. As I retreated, I encountered E. Dunkswell. He looked sour and savage.

"I want to see you," said he, gruffly.

"I don't want to see you," I replied, continuing on my walk aft.

"You have insulted me," he persisted, putting his hand on my shoulder.

"Insulted you!" I replied, pausing; for I was curious to know in what manner I had insulted so vile a creature as he was.

"You have insulted me!" he repeated.

"You said that before. How?"

"You exchanged berths with that old chap you run with."

"I don't know that it concerns you if I did."

"It was the same as saying that I am not fit company for you," said he, shaking his head.

"If it was, it was also saying that you were fit company for Mr. Solomons," I replied; and I regarded this as a clincher in the line of argument.

"It was not my pleasure to room with him."

"It is not my pleasure to room with you," I added.

"I consider your conduct as an insult to me, and I hold you responsible for it."

"All right," I replied, cheerfully. "Hold away."

"If the old fellow don't go back to his room, there'll be a row."

"The old fellow will do as he pleases about that," I added; "but whether he does or not, I shall not return to your room. I would sleep on the main truck first."

"Do you mean to insult me again?"

"Insult you again!" I exclaimed, indignantly, for my blood was up at the idea of a fellow like him putting on such airs. "No decent man could stay in the room with you, as you were the first night."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You were as drunk as an owl, and made the room smell like a low groggery."

"I confess that I took a little too much that night," said he, suddenly changing his front, and apparently relieved to find that this was the objection to him. "I shall not do it again."

"I shall keep away from you, any how," I added.

"Will you?" he continued, angry again. "That night I lost some valuable articles from my trunk. No one but my room-mate could have taken them. I intend to complain to the captain."

"Indeed! I had a similar experience. I had some valuable letters taken from my valise; and they could have been taken only by my room-mate; but I found them again, and I am satisfied. When you complain to the captain, one story will be good till another is told."

Not wishing to talk with him any longer, I walked aft. He followed me, uttering threats and imprecations, which I did not heed. E. Dunkswell was a disappointed man. He had undertaken a mission which he was not competent to perform. He had failed by his own folly. If he had kept sober he might have retained my papers. He evidently felt his own weakness, and realized that whiskey had caused him to make a mess of it.

His hostility was excited against me, and during the rest of the voyage he watched me with an evil eye, and appeared to be waiting for an opportunity to do something. For my own part, I felt that there was a heavy discount on E. Dunkswell.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN WHICH ERNEST LANDS AT CROOKHAVEN, AND PROCEEDS TO LONDON.

WE had a remarkably pleasant and quick passage, and on the eighth day from New York, while we were at dinner, I heard the captain say to a lady who sat near him, that we should be off Queenstown the next morning, at six or seven o'clock. I was sorry that we were to approach the land by night, for I wanted to see it.

"You can see it if you choose to sit up all night," laughed Mr. Solomons.

"It will be rather too dark to see anything," I added.

"Not at all; it is about the full of the moon, and it will be as light as day. You can turn in early, and sleep four or five hours. We shall be off Crookhaven, where they throw over the despatch bag, about five or six hours before we stop off Queenstown; that will make it about two in the morning. If you will retire at eight, it will give you six hours' sleep; and you can turn in again and finish your nap after you have seen enough of the shore."

"I think I will do so, sir. What is the despatch bag you speak of?" I asked.

"The despatches are put into a barrel and thrown overboard off Crookhaven, where a steamer picks them up. They are taken ashore and telegraphed to London. The despatches are simply the newspapers, from which the news agent transmits the important items."

After dinner, when I went on deck, I found the carpenter preparing a flour barrel for the despatches. A quantity of sand was put in the bottom to make it stand up straight in the water. A pole was set up in the barrel, like the mast of a vessel, to the top of which a blue-light was attached, to be ignited when it was thrown overboard, in order to enable the despatch steamer to find it readily. In the daytime a red rag is sometimes attached to it, I was told by the carpenter. The papers were placed in a water-tight can, and imbedded in the sand in the barrel.

At sea almost anything creates an excitement, and the preparing the despatch barrel was witnessed by many persons, among whom I noticed Dunkswell. I had observed that he listened very attentively to all that passed between Mr. Solomons and myself at the dinner table. I did not regard this as very strange, for all on board were deeply interested in everything which related to the progress of the steamer.

At eight o'clock I turned in, and went to sleep very soon. I had before made a trade with one of the stewards to call me at two o'clock, and at this hour he waked me. The night was beautiful; the moon shone brightly on the silver waters, and the sea was quite smooth. I did not see a single passenger on the hurricane deck. I made out the outline of some high hills on the shore, and the glimmer of a couple of distant lights. Three men were standing ready to throw over the despatch barrel as soon as the small steamer should appear.

I was a boy then, and had a boy's curiosity to see how everything was done. The hurricane deck was surrounded by an open railing, on the top of which I placed myself, where I could see over the stern of the ship. I was so accustomed to the water, and to high places, that I had no fear of anything. I put my legs over, and sat facing astern.

"Don't sit there, young man; you'll certainly fall overboard," said the officer of the deck, who had come aft to see that the barrel was ready to go over.

"No danger of that," I replied, easily.

"Better get down, and come on board," added a quarter-master.

"I'm an old sailor," I answered, laughing at the caution.

"Steamer on the port bow!" cried some one forward.

"Ready with the barrel!" called the officer.

"All ready, sir!" replied the quarter-master, whose attention was thus turned away from me.

The barrel was lifted over the rail, near where I sat, and held there till the order should be given to let it go. The quarter-master had a match in his hand to light the fireworks. Over on my right I could now see the little steamer, rising and falling on the long swells of the placid, moonlit ocean.

"Light up, Murray!" called the officer, when the despatch boat was but a short distance from the steamer.

The blue-light hissed and flared up when the match was applied, shedding its livid glare upon the weather-stained faces of the seamen.

"Over with it!" shouted the officer.

It soused into the water, and I leaned forward to observe the splash.

"Stand by the fore-braces!" called the officer; and the seamen rushed forward to execute the order.

At that moment I heard a step behind me on the deck; but I was too much absorbed in watching the blue-light on the barrel to heed anything else. The next instant I found myself spinning through the air, and then plunging deep down into the bosom of the tranquil sea. I was in my element now, though it was rather too much element; but I struck out, as soon as I rose to the surface, for the blue-light. I shouted for help; but the great steamer seemed to be hard of hearing, and went on her way as though nothing had happened. I swam as I had never swum before, and reached the barrel just as the despatch boat stopped her wheels to pick it up.

"Steamer ahoy!" I shouted

"Who's there?" called a voice from her deck.

"Man overboard!" I replied, puffing from the violence of my exertions.

"Where away?"

"On the barrel."

"I see him!" said one of the hands, as the bow of the boat ran up to the barrel.

A rope was thrown to me, and I was assisted on board.

"What's the matter? Did you fall overboard from the steamer?" asked a well-dressed, gentlemanly man, on the deck of the boat.

"Yes, sir; I suppose I did; I don't know exactly how it happened," I replied, spitting the salt water out of my mouth.

"You are fortunate to fall over just as the despatch boat was approaching you."

"Probably I shouldn't have fallen overboard if I had not been watching the barrel so intently."

"What shall we do for you?" asked the gentleman, kindly. "Come into the cabin, and get your wet clothes off."

The crew of the steamer were busy getting in the barrel, and my new friend, who was full of sympathy, conducted me to the cabin, where I divested myself of a portion of my clothing. By this time the despatches had been secured, and the captain came below. He gave me a flannel shirt and a pair of trowsers, and sent me to his state-room to put them on. I was very much alarmed about the safety of the contents of my money-belt; but, on removing it, I found that the oiled silk, in which the bank notes and the papers had been enclosed to prevent the perspiration of my body from injuring them, had protected them in a great measure. A few drops of water had penetrated through the folds of the silk, but no harm was done to the documents or the money.

I wrung out the belt and put it on again, after I had wiped myself dry. Clothing myself in the flannel shirt and pants, both of which were "a mile too big for me," I returned to the cabin. The captain then carried all my clothes to the furnace-room to be dried, just as the boat stopped at Crookhaven to land the despatches.

"I suppose you would like to follow the steamer, young man," said the gentleman who had been so kind to me.

"Very much, indeed!" I replied, eagerly; for I feared that the accident would render my mission to England fruitless.

"You are extremely fortunate again," added he. "This steamer is to proceed to Kinsale with me immediately."

Mr. Carmichael, the gentleman who addressed me, proved to be an agent of the telegraph company, who had come down to this station to look after its affairs. His business was finished, and he was in a hurry to reach London; but it was twenty miles, by a rough and tiresome road, to any public conveyance, and the steamer had been placed at his disposal. He told me he should have gone the day before, but the boat was required to be on the watch for the despatches.

"I hope to reach Kinsale in time for the nine o'clock train to Cork," said he. "If we do, you will not be much behind the steamer. Had you any friends on board?"

"Yes, sir, one gentleman," I replied.

"Of course he will be troubled about you. Perhaps you would like to telegraph to him."

I was pleased with this suggestion, for I felt that I had one good friend on board of the ship who would worry about me in the morning, when my absence was discovered. Knowing that Mr. Solomons intended to stay at the Washington Hotel in Liverpool, if he had to wait for a train, and at Morley's in London while in the metropolis, I wrote a brief despatch, to be forwarded to each, which Mr. Carmichael sent to the office. The steamer then proceeded on her trip to Kinsale, at three o'clock.

I was very grateful to Mr. Carmichael and the captain for their kindness to me, and I did not fail to express my obligations in the strongest terms. A berth in the cabin was assigned to me, and as the run to Kinsale would occupy between five and six hours, I turned in to finish my nap. I was too much excited to sleep, and I could not help thinking of what had happened to me. I had never done such a thing as to fall overboard without some help. Though I was not positive, I had a very strong impression that I had felt something on my back, while watching the blue-light on the barrel. Whether it had been the swaying of the signal halyards against me, or the push of a human hand, I was not certain; but I could not help believing that E. Dunkswell had helped me to my involuntary bath. I don't know now, but I still believe it.

I had no doubt he had been instructed by Tom Thornton to see Bunyard before I did. Whether the villain intended to drown me, or only to delay my arrival in London, I have no means of knowing. Doubtless he intended to land at Queenstown, and get to London eight or ten hours before the passengers who proceeded to Liverpool in the steamer. I went to sleep at last, satisfied that I was again the victim of a conspiracy. But when I was awakened at half past eight, in Kinsale harbor, I was also satisfied that the way of the wicked shall not prosper.

My clothes, thoroughly dried, were brought to me, and I dressed myself in season to land for the train for Cork, where we arrived as soon as the mails and those of the passengers who landed there. I breakfasted with Mr. Carmichael at the Royal Victoria, and at twenty minutes of eleven we took the train for Dublin, where we arrived at half past three. Though I made diligent search among the passengers, I could not find E. Dunkswell, and I concluded that he had gone to Liverpool in the steamer. In the evening I took the train for Kingstown, where I embarked in the steamer for Holyhead, at which place I again took a train, and at seven o'clock on Saturday morning was at Morley's, in London, at least eight hours before my fellow-voyagers could arrive.

After I had breakfasted, I took the Bunyard letter from my money-belt, and hastened to find Old Jewry.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN WHICH ERNEST VISITS STONY STRATFORD, AND E. DUNKSWELL COMES TO GRIEF.

THOUGH I was in a strange land, and in the midst of the wonders of the Old World, I had but little curiosity to see the grand sights which London can present. I had been whirled through Ireland, Wales, and England to the great metropolis, part of the time by daylight; and though I had kept my eyes wide open, I realized that my mission was higher and grander than studying landscapes, and wandering through the vaulted arches of old cathedrals.

When Mr. Carmichael told me, early in the morning, that I was in England, the thought that I was in the same country with my mother thrilled me with delight, which, however, was not unmingled with apprehension lest I should seek and not find; lest disease and death had robbed me of her I sought. At the station in Euston Square I had parted with the telegraph agent, with many thanks for his kindness. I took his address, hoping that at some future time I might be able to reciprocate the attention he had bestowed upon me. I may as well say here that Mr. Carmichael afterwards came to the United States, and that I helped him to a situation which paid him ten times the salary he had ever before received, when he was as grateful to me as I had been to him.

Morley's Hotel is in Trafalgar Square, at one end of the Strand. I had looked up Old Jewry in the Post-office Directory. The hall porter of the hotel had given me general directions, and I walked out into the Strand, and took an omnibus with the word "Bank" painted on it. On the top of the London omnibus there is a double seat along the middle, on which the passengers sit facing the buildings on each side of the street. I occupied one of these places. The Bank of England was my objective point, for Old Jewry was near it. I passed St. Paul's, whose towering height and blackened walls I recognized, and entered Cheapside--a name which sounded quite familiar to me. I descended from my perch when the omnibus stopped, and after several inquiries found the place I sought.

Old Jewry was nothing but a narrow lane, and I had no difficulty in finding the number of Mr. Bunyard's office. I followed his name, repeated on the walls, up three flights of stairs; and by the time I had reached the third floor, I came to the conclusion that my uncle's agent was a person of no great consequence. He was fortunately in his room, a little apartment ten feet square, with no furniture but a desk and two chairs. Mr. Bunyard was a man of fifty or more. He stopped writing when I entered, and looked at me.

"Mr. Bunyard?" I asked, as politely as I could, while my heart leaped with emotion.

"The same," replied he.

I handed him the letter, which he opened at once. He took from it a bill of exchange, which seemed to light up his face with satisfaction.

"I am very happy to hear from my friend Mr. Thornton. I hope he is quite well. He does not mention the bearer of this letter," continued the agent, bestowing an inquiring look upon me.

"He was not aware, when he wrote the letter, that I should be the bearer of it," I replied, evasively. "My name is Thornton."

"I am happy to meet you, Mr. Thornton," he added.

"How is Mrs. Thornton now?" I inquired, boldly, though my heart almost sank within me, when I put the question.

He looked at me--appeared to hesitate; but a glance at the letter and the bill of exchange I had brought apparently reassured him. Doubtless he concluded, as I supposed he would, that it was all right, since I came directly from his employer, and was the bearer of a payment to him.

"Mrs. Thornton is quite as well as usual," he replied.

"I wish to see her," I continued, squarely.

"Did your father desire you to see her?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Of course he did," I answered, which was quite true, though my conscience charged me with deceiving him. "I wish to make an arrangement with her."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir."

"It would be proper that any arrangement with her should be made through me," he added, cautiously.

"Of course, the actual business will be done through you," I replied, magnanimously.

"Certainly it should be, for I have served Mr. Thornton very faithfully for many years in this matter, and at a very reasonable compensation."

"I know that he appreciates your devotion, and is willing to do the right thing by you," I continued at a venture; and I thought there was no harm in committing my uncle to a liberal policy.

"I have been paid only one hundred pound a year for my services, and that only for a brief period. Really I must insist, before you see the poor lady, that you should explain your business with her."

"My time is short," I replied, rather brusquely. "I wish to know for what sum, cash down, you will terminate your relations with the lady."

"That will require some consideration," replied he, apparently pleased with the idea.

"Of course your client in this matter is entirely in your power. He cannot shake you off, and whatever arrangement is made with the lady shall be done through you. Now, if you will give me her address, I will go and see her, and in the mean time you can make up your estimate of the sum that ought to be paid to you," I said, with the most business-like air I could assume.

"I will do it," replied he, after some hesitation; and he wrote the address on a piece of paper.

How eagerly I took it! I felt then that the battle had been fought and won. On the paper was written: "Mrs. Thornton, Stony Stratford, Bucks. Inquire for Mrs. Challis." My business with Mr. Bunyard was done, and I hastened away, though he insisted upon my remaining longer. I think he was sorry he had given me the address before I left the room.

Being near the banker's, I drew fifty pounds, which was paid without question.

I went back to Morley's, and ascertained that Stony Stratford was on the road to Rugby, and that I must leave the train at Wolverton station. I called a Hansom cab, and reached Euston Square depot just in time for the train. I will not attempt to describe the emotions which agitated me as I sped over the country. I was on the point of meeting my mother, and though the rich panorama of an English landscape was passing before me, I could think of nothing else. In two hours I reached the Wolverton station, and there learned that it was four and a half miles to Stony Stratford. I engaged a team to take me over. My driver inquired till he found the house of Mrs. Challis. It was a small and mean dwelling, and I began to feel indignant that my mother was compelled to live in such a place. My knock, under the influence of this feeling, was a very decided one.

"Is Mrs. Thornton at home?" I inquired--my utterance almost choked by agitation--of the woman who came to the door.

"She is, but she don't see any one," replied the woman, sourly, as she abruptly closed the door in my face.

I rapped again, and my knuckles not proving sufficient, I used my boot.

"You can't see Mrs. Thornton!" snarled the woman, angrily, as she opened the door a little crack.

"I can and will!" I replied. "Mr. Bunyard sent me."

"O, did he?" she added, opening the door.

"Here's the paper he gave me."

She looked at it, and invited me to enter. My limbs trembled under me as I walked into the room.

"Mrs. Thornton is out in the garden, but I will call her," said Mrs. Challis--or I supposed it was she.

"Never mind calling her. I will see her in the garden," I added, going out of the back door, which was open, without waiting for the woman's permission.

Walking in the back part of the garden I discovered a lady, thin and pale, dressed in coarse but neat garments. It was my mother. I could hardly control myself. My eyes filled with tears as I looked at her.

"Mrs. Thornton?" I asked, tremblingly.

"I am Mrs. Thornton," replied she, gazing curiously at me.

"I suppose you know Amos Thornton?" I continued, not daring to tell her who I was.

"To my sorrow I do," she replied, shaking her head.

"I have heard that you had a son."

"He is gone--why do you ask?"

"Gone?"

"He is dead," said she, sadly.

"Are you sure?"

"For a long time I would not believe it."

"I think it is a mistake."

Her chest heaved with emotion, and the tears flowed down her pale cheek. She gazed at me a moment, and then threw her arms around my neck.

"You are my son--I know you are!" sobbed she.

"My mother!" was all I could say; and we wept for many minutes in silence, closely folded in each other's arms.

When I raised my head, Mrs. Challis was standing by us. She had a troubled look, as though she feared something had gone wrong.

"What does all this mean?" she asked; but neither of us took any notice of her.

"I have hoped all the time that you were not dead," said my mother, smiling through her tears.

"I must return to London immediately, and you must go with me, mother," I continued.

"To London!" exclaimed Mrs. Challis. "Indeed she must not go to London!"

"Indeed she must!" I added, as decidedly as though I meant to break through a stone wall, if need be. "Get ready as quick as you can, mother, for there is not more than time enough for us to reach the station."

"I say she cannot go!" interposed Mrs. Challis.

"And I say she can and shall! Get your clothes, mother."

"There is three pound five due for her board," added the landlady.

"Give me the bill, and I will pay it."

My mother seemed to be bewildered, but I led her to the house, and urged her to prepare for her journey. Mrs. Challis, after I had paid her bill, continued to object to the departure of her boarder. I told her if she wished to keep out of trouble, the less she said, the better it would be for her. My poor mother had been so long a prisoner, that she was confused by the sudden change in her prospects. I went into her room, and assisted her in packing her meagre wardrobe. She had put on a well-worn black silk dress, and an antiquated bonnet lay on the table. I told her to take only such clothing as she would need immediately, for I saw that most of her wearing apparel was not worth the transportation. Having thrust these articles into a carpet-bag, I hurried her out of the house to the carriage which was waiting for me at the door.

We reached the station in time for the London train. My mother was excited, and I did not permit her to speak of the past. I kept up a lively conversation, and did not allow her to think of her wrongs and her sorrows. On our arrival, we went to Morley's, where I obtained a room for her. Mr. Solomons had just arrived. He had received the telegraphic despatch in Liverpool. I hastily told him my story, and what I had done since my arrival in London.

"My dear boy!" exclaimed he, "you have done wonders. I was sure you were lost overboard. No one had seen you, or heard anything of you; only the officers and sailors had warned you not to sit on the rail."

"Where is Dunkswell?" I asked.

"He came to London in the same train I did."

At my request Mr. Solomons accompanied me to the office of Bunyard. When we entered, Dunkswell was there. Both of them had found out that "somebody" was smart.

"Young man, you have deceived me!" said Bunyard, savagely.

"The wicked deceiveth himself," I replied, in words better than my own. "I have called to say that you need give yourself no further trouble in regard to Mrs. Thornton. I wish to tell you now that she is in London, and that she is my mother."

"I must be paid--"

"Paid!" I interposed. "I'll pay you! We are not far from Newgate, and if my mother is willing, I will help you to lodgings there. As for you, E. Dunkswell, you can go back to Tom Thornton, and tell him you have burnt your fingers. You helped me overboard."

"I!" exclaimed he, with quivering lip.

"Did he?" asked Mr. Solomons.

"I believe he did; perhaps I can prove it."

E. Dunkswell sank into a chair, pale as a ghost. Bunyard looked cheap, and said no more about being paid, and I retired from the presence of my defeated foes. Mr. Solomons insisted that they should be punished, especially Dunkswell, but I told him I could not prove that he had pushed me overboard; and I could not stay in London long enough to follow up the criminal. I engaged passage in the Saturday steamer for my mother and myself before returning to the hotel.

We remained four days in London, during which time I kept my mother's mind fully occupied in replenishing her wardrobe.



CHAPTER XXVI.

IN WHICH ERNEST RETURNS TO PARKVILLE WITH HIS MOTHER, AND THE STORY ENDS ON THE SHORES OF LAKE ADIENO.

IF E. Dunkswell had not helped me overboard, as I think he did, he might have reached London before I did, and thus defeated me, at least for a time. Twice had he confused and confounded his own schemes. Bunyard, deceived by the letter I had brought from my uncle, gave me the address of my mother. If not before, he learned his blunder when Dunkswell arrived. I could fancy the confusion with which they confronted each other when the facts came out. But it was "all up" with them. They had been "whipped out," and I was satisfied. I did not wish to prosecute them, because it would delay me, and because it would expose our family affairs, and subject my mother to more excitement than she could bear.

She was weak and nervous, and I did not encourage her to talk much of the past. I went with her to Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London, and other places with which she was familiar. On Friday afternoon we bade adieu to Mr. Solomons, and went to Liverpool. My mother was now entirely changed in appearance. She had laid aside her worn-out black silk and her unfashionable bonnet. She looked like a lady, and she was one. I was proud of her. The future was now full of hope and joy to me, and I was the happiest young man in the world.

On Saturday we sailed for home. My mother seemed then to feel that she was out of the reach of the enemy who had persecuted her for so many years. She overcame her nervousness, and her strength increased every day. I had purchased a rocking-chair in Liverpool for her use on the hurricane deck, and every pleasant day we sat together there. On these days my mother told me what she had suffered. I had not permitted her to do so before, anxious as I was to learn the facts. I will state them briefly, as I derived them from these conversations.

My mother was born in Paris of English parents, but both of them died before she was eighteen. She was well educated, and being left without any means of support, she became a governess in an American family residing in the city. Here my father made her acquaintance, and married her. They lived in Philadelphia three years, and I was born there. When I was two years old, my mother's only relative, a bachelor uncle, died in London, leaving a considerable estate. She was notified that a portion of the property would go to her by will. My father's health was poor, and he had decided to take up his residence for a few years in the south of France, and my mother's affairs induced him to hasten his departure.

Leaving his property in the hands of his brother Amos, he sailed for Europe, accompanied by his wife and son. On his arrival in London he found the affairs of my mother's uncle in great confusion. Another will had been produced, in which my mother's name was not mentioned. My father believed there was fraud, or that the second will had been made under illegal pressure, and he contested it. The proceedings detained him in London a year; at the end of which time, having lost the case, his health was entirely broken down by fatigue and excitement. Conscious that he should not live to return to his native land, he sent for his brother Amos, to assist him in settling his worldly affairs. The will was made, and he died.

His death was a terrible blow to my mother, and being of a very sensitive nature, it affected her reason. She became insane, and Amos sent her to a private asylum, within a month after my father's funeral. Until this time, probably, the brother had no intention of defrauding her and her son. Amos had all the property of my father in his own hands. The temptation was great, and finding that my mother's health did not improve, he decided to return to America, with his son Thomas, who accompanied him, taking me with him in charge of a nurse. The care of my mother was left to Mr. Bunyard, who was to pay her bills. My mother was the inmate of the asylum for two years, though she was cured in less than one.

She was discharged, and Mr. Bunyard conveyed her to a small village in Hampshire, assuring her that Amos would come for her soon; but year after year she hoped to see her son, till she was told that he was dead. Her residence was changed every two or three years, for what reason she did not know; but every time it was for the worse, until her food, clothing, and accommodations were not better than those of the poorest class. I readily perceived that it was to enable Mr. Bunyard to make more money out of his victim, by paying less for her board. My uncle sent him two hundred pounds a year, but he did not spend fifty upon her.

My mother was never allowed to have any money, and could not help herself. She was continually told that her mind was disordered, especially when she spoke of her husband's property and her son.

This was the substance of my mother's story, and I readily supplied what was wanting. My uncle had gone with me to the cottage on Lake Adieno, and Tom Thornton had taken possession of the property. The will had simply been kept

out of sight.

"Mother, you are safe now," was my oft-repeated remark to her.

"I know that I am; and I thank God for giving me such a noble and devoted son," was her reply.

We enjoyed every day of the passage in talking over the past and the future. I told her everything I had ever done and said with the utmost minuteness. I described my life at the cottage, my excursions on the lake, all my friends, and related the history of "Breaking Away." In twelve days we reached New York. As soon as we had taken rooms at a hotel, I hastened with my mother to see Kate Loraine.

"O, Ernest Thornton! I am so glad to see you!" exclaimed she.

"My mother, Kate," I replied proudly.

"I am so delighted!" cried Kate, seizing her hand. "Now you must tell me all about it, Ernest Thornton."

I told her all about it, and she wondered, ejaculated, and wept.

"Mrs. Thornton, your son is the best boy in all the world, and I love him—I love him as though he were my own brother," said she, warmly.

"I am very proud of him," replied my mother, as she smiled upon me.

"All right," I added, feeling my cheeks glow. "What has happened, Kate, since I went away?"

"Mr. Windleton has returned, and Uncle Freeman is to be my guardian. He had a very disagreeable meeting with Mrs. Loraine, but she cannot help herself."

We spent the evening at the house, and the next day we started for Parkville. How my heart beat when the carriage in which we rode over from Romer passed the cottage of my uncle! We went to the house of Mr. Hale first.

"Bob, my dear fellow!" I exclaimed, when he entered the room; and in spite of boyish prejudices against the operation, I could not help hugging him. "My mother, Bob," I added, before he had time to say anything.

"I am glad to see you, Ernest—upon my word I am. I am happy to meet you," he added, bowing to my mother.

She took his hand, and told him she knew him as her son's best friend. Mr. Hale soon made his appearance, and gave us a hearty welcome. He said some very pleasant things to me, which my modesty will not permit me to repeat, though I have shamed that quality sometimes in this memoir. We talked of business then. I told him I did not wish to injure my uncle, however much he had injured my mother and myself.

"Your uncle is evidently under the influence of his son," added Mr. Hale, "and it may be necessary to take some decided steps."

"You are a lawyer, sir, and I leave the matter entirely with you; but I hope you will make it as easy as you can for uncle Amos, for I am pretty sure Tom is the author of the mischief."

"Our action must depend upon the position they take. It is best for us to see your uncle without delay. If Tom hears of your arrival, he may take the money and leave the country. It will be well for you to see him first; I will follow you soon," said Mr. Hale.

I procured a carryall at the stable, and drove my mother to the cottage. Old Betsey was delighted to see me. Leaving my mother in the parlor, I went to the door of my uncle's library and knocked.

"Ernest!" exclaimed he, starting back.

"Yes, sir; I have come to see you."

"But—" He paused, his lips quivered, and his frame trembled.

"You are not glad to see me?" I added.

"I am very glad to see you—more so than you can think. But how is it I see you? Thomas told me you started for England, and was lost overboard on the passage."

"Did he tell you that?" I demanded, astonished; and I saw at once that E. Dunkswell, on the arrival of the steamer at Queenstown, where a letter could be mailed, had written to his employer.

And Tom Thornton at that moment believed I was lying at the bottom of the sea, no more to disturb him, or threaten his ill-gotten possessions. I told my uncle that my life had been preserved.

"Thank God!" said he, so earnestly that I believed he was sincere. "I feared that Thomas, through his agent, had committed a crime greater than mine."

"If the intention makes the crime, I think he did commit it. Where is Tom Thornton?" I asked.

"He is here to-day," replied my uncle, going to the window and calling his son, who was walking by the lake. "You have been to England, Ernest?"

He trembled all over, and I pitied him.

"I have, sir."

"It was needless for you to go there. If you had listened to me--"

"It was not needless. My mother is in the parlor now."

"Your mother!" gasped he, springing from his chair, and then falling back again.

"You shall see her."

"No--no, Ernest!"

There was a knock at the door. I opened it, and Tom Thornton entered. He saw me, and turned pale. His victim had risen from the depths of the ocean to confront him.

"Ah, Ernest," stammered he.

"I am here. E. Dunkswell was a fool as well as a knave."

"What shall be done?" groaned my uncle.

"I was told that you were lost overboard," said Tom, with a struggle to recover his self-possession.

"E. Dunkswell pushed me overboard; but that act proved to be my salvation. I won't trouble you with particulars. My mother is in the parlor."

"Your mother!" exclaimed Tom; and from the height of guilty confidence he fell to the depth of hopeless despair.

"What shall be done?" repeated my uncle, in hollow tones.

"Justice must be done," I replied.

"You have been smart, Ernest," added Tom, with a sepulchral laugh. "How can we settle this business?"

"By paying over to Mr. Hale every dollar mentioned in my father's will," I replied.

"You are hard, Ernest."

"But I am your guardian and trustee, Ernest," said my uncle.

Tom said half the money was spent, and offered to give up fifty thousand dollars in United States securities.

"Every dollar," I added.

"I will look it over, Ernest, and see what can be done," replied Tom, moving to the door.

He rushed out, but only to fall into the arms of my old friend, Mr. Greene, the deputy-sheriff. Mr. Hale had taken one decisive step. The officer conducted Tom back to the library, and I went for my mother. I was afraid my uncle would faint again when she entered the room, but he did not; and then I was afraid my mother would faint, she was so agitated.

"Mr. Thornton, this is unpleasant business," said Mr. Hale. "As the attorney for Mrs. Thornton and her son, I purpose to settle this matter as quietly as possible. I understand that the property is in the hands of your son. I procured a warrant for his arrest on the criminal charge."

"Mercy!" groaned my uncle. "Do not arrest him."

"When he has paid over every dollar mentioned in the will of Ezra Thornton, we shall be willing to say that no one will appear against him. My clients do not mention nearly a hundred thousand dollars' income of which you have defrauded them. These are our best terms."

"That will leave me and my son beggars," whined my uncle.

"As you would have left your brother's legal heirs," replied Mr. Hale, sternly. "This poor lady has suffered twelve years of misery, but she does not ask you to pay the back income. Moreover, if you do not accept these terms, I shall be obliged to cause your arrest on the criminal charge. I shall go to Philadelphia, present the will for probate, and proceed against both of you. We have a just claim against you for two hundred and forty thousand dollars. We ask for but one hundred and fifty."

The terms were accepted, for Tom was already under arrest. He informed us then that the stocks and bonds of my father's estate had yielded him an income of nine thousand dollars, and that he had paid three thousand of it to his father. The principal had not been touched. On the following day, Mr. Hale, Tom, and the sheriff started for Philadelphia to recover the funds. They were paid over, and deposited for safe keeping in a bank. The will was offered for probate, and we all went to Philadelphia to attend the Surrogate Court. After a delay of several months, Mr. Hale was appointed trustee of the property, in place of Amos Thornton, who *declined* the trust.

When the business was done, my uncle seemed to be at peace. He had saved money enough from the income he had appropriated to support him. My mother and myself had several conversations with him about our affairs, and he solemnly assured her that he did not know she was deprived of even the luxuries of life. He had never made any bargain with Bunyard, though they understood each other. He had sent the money to pay her board, agreeing to give the agent five per cent. for his services. He had probably made from one hundred to one hundred and fifty pounds a year out of the business, and intended, at the right time, to "come down" on his employer for some thousands.

After the business in Philadelphia was settled, my mother and I went to Parkville. Mr. Hale built a cottage for us on the lake, half a mile from the village. We had plenty of money, and many a poor person in the town had occasion to bless my mother for her bounty. We were happy, very happy, for my mother was all I had hoped and dreamed in the days of my loneliness. I was the "man of the house," and my constant study was to make my mother happy, and to compensate her for the years of misery she had suffered.

I heard but little of Tom Thornton after the settlement; but I learned that Mrs. Loraine, when she found his possessions had melted away, was "not at home" when he called. I was told, a few years later, that he kept a gambling saloon and bar-room in a southern city, but I know not how true the statement was. My uncle occupied the cottage till his death, five years after my mother's arrival. I saw him occasionally, and I had reason to believe that he repented his crime, and found the true peace. In his last sickness, my mother, forgetting the wrongs of the past, was an angel at his bedside. She not only nursed him, but she read the Bible to him, and prayed with him; and finally she closed his eyes in his last sleep.

The Splash was moored in the lake by my mother's cottage, and I cruised about in her with Bob Hale, and often with my mother.

Mr. Windleton procured the appointment of Mr. Loraine as Kate's guardian, and I did not often see her, though she spent a month with us every summer. Two years after Mr. Hale had paid over to me the money, when I was twenty-one, according to my father's will, we made it perpetual summer at the cottage, for Kate was duly installed as the mistress of the house. The interesting occasion came off in Madison Place, and we were delighted by the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Macombe, Mr. Solomons, and Mr. Carmichael. Of course Bob Hale "stood up" with me.

As this last event properly ends our story, I shall only add, I believe in Kate, and so does my mother. She always calls me Ernest Thornton, in full. Though the Splash is now a little shaky in her timbers, she is still a good boat; and almost every pleasant afternoon in summer we sail over to Cannondale in her, Mr. and Mrs. Bob Hale being often passengers. We try to be faithful to each other, and strive to be good and true. Though we hope we grow better and wiser with each year that is mercifully added to our span, there is still always something of truth and goodness for us to SEEK AND FIND.

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