

Five Thousand Dollars Reward

A. Frank Pinkerton

The lower half of the page features a vibrant blue background with a complex, abstract pattern of bright pink geometric shapes. These shapes include various triangles (pointing up and down), squares, rectangles, circles, and lines, some of which are interconnected to form larger, irregular structures. The overall effect is a dense, modern, and somewhat chaotic visual composition.

Project

Project Gutenberg's Five Thousand Dollars Reward, by Frank Pinkerton

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FIVE THOUSAND
DOLLARS REWARD ***

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[Transcriber's note: The non-standard spellings of the original text have been retained in this etext.]

[Illustration: "I ARREST YOU FOR THE MURDER OF VICTORIA VANE."]

FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD

BY FRANK PINKERTON

1886

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAMP.

"Will you give me a glass of water, please?"

A ragged, bearded tramp stood before the door of a cottage near the outskirts of a country village, and propounded this question to a pretty girl who stood in the door.

"In a moment."

The girl disappeared, soon returning with a pitcher.

She went to the pump near, and soon had the pitcher running over with sparkling water.

"I will bring a cup."

"Needn't mind."

The tramp lifted the pitcher and quaffed the water as though he enjoyed it.

His eyes were not pleasant as he turned them keenly on the pretty face of the girl.

"Folks at home?"

"No."

"All alone, eh?"

"Yes; but Ransom will be around soon—my brother."

The eyes of the tramp glittered. He seemed to delight in reading the fresh young face before him.

"Nobody at home, eh?" he grunted. "Mebbe I'd better go in and rest a bit. Any objections?"

"Yes. If you are hungry I'll bring you food out here."

It was a pleasant day, and the sun was warm without being hot, a rare enjoyable day in June.

It seemed to the girl that there could be no excuse for a stout man like the one before her tramping and begging through the country.

"Why do you not work?" she said.

"I wasn't born that way," and he chuckled unpleasantly.

The girl hurried into the house.

His Trampship followed.

She was not a little alarmed at finding the ill-looking fellow close at her heels. She feared and dared not anger him.

Placing a chair at a table, she bade him be seated, and then she hastened to set before him bread, milk and cold meat.

"The best the house affords, eh?" he chuckled, as he sat up to the repast. "The very best."

"And it's good enough for a king."

Then he fell to and ate ravenously.

The girl walked to the door and gazed uneasily down the road.

"Brother comin'?"

"I do not see him."

"What's your name?"

The tramp was inquisitive.

"Vane."

"Eh? Is that a fact?"

The stout fellow started and regarded the girl fixedly.

"Is the name a familiar one?" questioned the girl after a moment, anxious to conciliate the man. Her nearest neighbor was at least a quarter mile distant, and the house was concealed by a clump of trees, so that the girl felt that she was at the mercy of this burly, ill-looking stranger, should he attempt violence.

"Vane, Vane," he muttered. "Reckon I've heard the name before. And you're Victory, I reckon?"

"Victoria."

"Exactly. Sister to Rance Vane. I know'd that chap onct, and I found him not a man, but a scamp. I never liked the Vanes, father'n son. The old man's dead, I s'pose?"

"Yes."

"How long sense?"

"More than a year."

"Good 'nough. He wa'nt o' much account."

The tramp's eyes seemed to become suddenly bloodshot. He shoved from the table, and rose to his feet.

The girl hoped to see him go, but he made no move to do so.

"You live alone with your brother?" he queried, suddenly.

"Most of the time."

"Victory, did ye ever hear Rance speak of Perry Jounce?"

The man leered at her in a way that sent a chill over her.

"Never."

"No? Wal, he didn't like me. I reckon I'll hev a kiss afore I go, anyhow."

He began to move toward her. She started to escape through the open door, but was not quick enough. The man's hand grasped her arm and she felt herself drawn toward him.

Then Victoria Vane uttered a piercing scream.

"Stop that yellin', you fool!" hissed the tramp. He drew her to him and bent to press his bearded lips to her cheek.

On the instant another person appeared upon the scene.

A bunch of bones collided with the bull neck of the tramp, sending him reeling across the floor.

Victoria darted to the arms of the new-comer, a young man, tall, slender and of prepossessing appearance, clad in hunter's costume.

"Oh, August, save me!" screamed the girl.

"Scoundrel!" cried the young hunter, presenting a rifle at the breast of the tramp. "What do you mean by this assault on a lady?"

There was a horrible expression in the eyes of the tramp, and on the instant he slipped from concealment a large knife to his hand.

"Stand aside, Miss Vane," the hunter said to the girl. "I will learn this scoundrel a lesson."

Victoria obeyed, standing back against the wall, pale and frightened, while the last comer confronted the burly tramp with his rifle cocked for instant use.

"Let me go out, August Bordine."

So the tramp seemed to recognize the youthful hunter.

"I ought to turn you over to the authorities for punishment," declared the young man, sternly.

"'T won't do you no good," grunted the tramp, "I hain't done nothing."

"I will leave it to Miss Vane."

Then he glanced at the girl.

The tramp began to glide toward the door.

"Stop!" thundered August Bordine. Then to the girl, "Miss Vane, I await your decision."

"Permit him to go then. I wish no further trouble," said Victoria.

"But he really ought to be punished. He certainly deserves ninety days in prison at the least," declared the young hunter.

"Let me go, Miss, I didn't mean nothin' wrong," whined the man who had called himself Perry Jounce.

"Let him go," said Victoria.

The hunter lowered his gun and the tramp passed into the outer air. He hurriedly left the vicinity, but before he had passed from sight, he turned his face toward the cottage, and shook a chинched hand toward the open door in which stood two forms—Victoria and August Bordine.

"Curse you, August Bordine!" hissed the coarse lips. "I'll make you repent this interference, I swear I will. You shall swing some day, and I'll be there to hear your neck crack!"

Then he turned about and disappeared in a clump of trees beside the road.

Victoria Vane and the young hunter were near enough to notice the movement of the baffled tramp, but neither heard his vindictive words. It might have been well for them had they done so.

Victoria clung to the young hunter's arm after the departure of Jounce, and seemed a long time in recovering from her fright.

"There's no further danger," declared Bordine, "so just calm your fears. I will remain until your brother returns."

"You are very kind, August."

After a little the young man quietly disengaged her hands from his arm and led her to a seat.

"There, rest yourself, Victoria, while I look about the premises."

He snatched his gun and moved toward the door.

"Don't leave me, August."

"There is not the least danger now. That tramp will not return."

"He may."

"I will not be far away. If you were so fearful why did you not permit me to take him to prison?"

"I don't know. I did not wish to appear against him, I suppose."

August Bordine smiled at the look that came to the face of the girl.

He had known Victoria Vane and her brother for several months. He was never prepossessed in favor of her brother, and he often thought her "soft," to use a vulgar expression.

"I do believe the girl would make love to me if I would permit it, by giving her the least encouragement. The Vanes are queer and no mistake," remarked Bordine, to a young lady of his acquaintance, living in an adjoining town.

Rose Alstine was plain and sensible, and took no offense at her lover's referring to Miss Vane. Why should she? She knew that genial August Bordine was true as steel and generous and sympathetic to a fault.

Trouble was coming, however, that was to try the young girl's faith as it had

never been tried before.

Back of Ridgewood village was a forest of large extent, bordering on a narrow stream. This woods was owned by an Eastern capitalist and he had as yet permitted no woodman's ax to resound in its depths.

Game abounded, and the woods was the frequent resort for amateur hunters, among them the young civil engineer, August Bordine.

It was his frequent visits to Eastman's woods with gun and game-bag that brought him in frequent contact with the Vanes, and especially Victoria, who, during the short space of a few months, had become violently smitten with the handsome face and gentlemanly bearing of the young engineer.

It was this fact that determined Bordine to shorten his stay at the cottage on the day in question.

"There isn't the least danger," assured August, as he lifted his gun to the hollow of his arm and prepared to depart from the Vane cottage.

"Then you will not stay?"

Tears actually stood in the blue eyes of Miss Vane.

"Good gracious! Vic, what a baby," and he laughed aloud.

He stepped to her side, however, and as her face pale, pretty, even though babyish, was upturned to his he could not resist the temptation, and he bent and kissed her full upon the pouting lips.

Then a pair of soft arms were wound quickly about his neck, and a voice whispered softly:

"Why can't you stay with me always, August?"

He tore himself loose instantly, a guilty feeling entering his heart. He was acting the hypocrite with a vengeance, and it did not agree with his honorable nature.

"Confound it, Miss Vane, what a tease you are. There comes your brother now, and I must away."

"You will call when you return from your hunt?"

"Perhaps."

He then passed outside.

A single horseman was riding slowly down the forest road toward the village.

He must needs pass the cottage.

August Bordine had called the traveler Victoria's brother. He saw his mistake as he passed out, but did not deem it necessary to rectify it.

He swung his rifle to his shoulder, and moved, with a long stride, toward the nearest point of woods.

Vaulting a fence, he crossed a bit of clearing and entered a clump of trees.

Here he paused and looked back.

The strange horseman had halted at the cottage, and was conversing with Victoria.

Bordine saw him lift his hat politely, and knew that it was no tramp this time who craved favor at the cottage.

"I don't think the girl will require my presence this time," muttered the young engineer.

She did, however, as the sequel proved.

Bordine, whistling softly, turned away and plunged deeply into the forest.

CHAPTER II.

MURDER.

For several hours August Bordine scoured the woods in search of game. His hunt proved unsuccessful, however, and with weary limbs and anything but pleasant mood he retraced his steps.

At length he stood in the road within sight of the Vane cottage.

Everything looked quiet and peaceful about the place.

No smoke curled up from the kitchen chimney, although the sun was low in the western heavens.

"Vic hasn't begun to prepare supper it seems," muttered Bordine. "Wonder if I had best go up that way and call. Of course Ransom has returned. I believe I will and inquire who the gentleman was who called just as I was entering the woods."

And so Bordine turned his steps in the direction of the Vane cottage. The front door was closed, and a dead silence reigned over the place as he came up.

"Wonder if the folks are gone."

Bordine rapped.

No answer was vouchsafed.

He rapped again.

Silence profound as the grave.

"Well, there seems nobody at home. Vic sometimes occupies the back porch with

the cat and her book; I will see."

He walks swiftly around the house.

He came to a sudden stand as he gained the broad side porch of the cottage.

He stood staring, struck dumb with an awful, deadly fear. Then he moved forward a step.

His eye fell on the interior of the porch, and he started and stopped.

What was it that held his steps?

[Illustration: HIS EYE FELL ON THE INTERIOR OF THE PORCH, AND HE STARTED AND STOPPED.]

An object on the ground—Victoria Vane, lying at full length, with open, staring eyes, her masses of yellow hair stained a horrible crimson.

She lay within the porch, while at her side was a basket overturned, its contents scattered about, as though she had been holding it in her lap at the time of the accident.

Was it an accident?

As soon as he could recover his self-possession, August Bordine sat down his gun and bent over the prostrate girl.

There was a subdued horror in his eyes as he gazed.

Blood had trickled out in a little pool from a wound in her neck, that wound had proved the death of poor Victoria Vane.

Who had made it?

Suicide!

This was the young man's first thought—yet he soon convinced himself that this was not likely.

A letter, torn and blood-stained, lay near. August picked it from the ground and examined it. It proved to be from a gentleman, and was written in a friendly, not to say lover-like strain. At the bottom was signed a name, "A. Bor——"

The latter part of the name was completely obliterated by a blot of blood.

While the young engineer stood in an attitude of shocked irresolution, a step sounded on the gravel behind him.

He turned to look into the face of a young man whose countenance showed resemblance to the dead girl.

"My God! what is this?"

The new-comer darted forward, gazed for a moment into the dead face of poor Victoria, then staggered back, clutching the arm of August Bordine to save himself from falling.

"Suicide, I fear," answered Bordine for lack of words.

"Suicide! My soul, is Victoria dead?"

Then the last comer knelt down beside the prostrate girl, and lifted her golden head to his knee.

His cries and moans were heartrending.

In vain Bordine tried to soothe the young man, but he found that a brother's grief was beyond assuagement.

For many minutes Ransom Vane sat and moaned and wept beside his dead sister.

Then he became calm suddenly, and sprang to his feet, glancing about him in a way that caused Bordine to fear for his reason.

"Suicide you said?" turning fiercely upon August Bordine.

"I said it might be."

"It is not. Vic was happy; why should she take her own life?"

"I do not know."

"She was murdered."

"It may be so."

"You know it is. Look! See where the steel of the assassin entered her poor neck, and cut to the life. Oh, Vic, my poor darling! you shall be avenged. I will go to the ends of the earth but I will find your slayer and have his life."

Ransom Vane was white as death, and trembled like a leaf.

"I will go for a doctor," said Bordine.

"A doctor? See the life-blood there. Think you a doctor can be of service?" groaned the young brother.

"No, but it is customary in such cases, and the coroner must be notified."

August Bordine turned to depart.

"Stop!"

Ransom Vane laid a detaining hand on the arm of the young engineer.

"See; what is that?"

It proved to be a spot of blood on the hand and sleeve of the young engineer's shirt, a point of which peered below his outer sleeve.

"It came from this," explained August, holding out the letter.

"Where did you get that?"

Vane took the stained and torn letter from the hand of Bordine.

"I found it on the porch."

Ransom Vane read the note hurriedly.

"MY DEAR:—Expect me on the 10th of June. I have been anxious to see you for a long time, dear girl, and I know you will forgive me when you hear what I have to say. If you cannot, then we must part forever, unless—but I will tell you more when I see you. Till then, good by, dear.

"Your faithful

"A. BOR——"

Quickly Ransom Vane turned upon the man before him, casting a fierce look into his face.

"This letter is yours—"

"No; you may keep it," answered Bordine quickly. "It may lead to some clew."

"But I say the letter is yours. You wrote it."

"Certainly not." "But see here;" and Vane pointed to the mutilated signature.

Bordine started when he saw how closely the name resembled his own.

"Do you deny that you wrote that?" demanded Ransom Vane, fiercely.

"Certainly; I did not write it."

"By heaven, you did, and it is *you* who murdered my sister!" hissed young Vane, trembling with the maddest emotions that ever whelmed a human breast.

"Vane clutched the arm of young Bordine, and glared furiously into his face.

"Calm yourself, my dear Ransom," urged the engineer. "You are beside yourself now. I had no quarrel with Victoria. In fact, we were the best of friends, and I parted from her this morning on the best of terms. I—"

"But this letter?" demanded Vane, fiercely.

"I know no more about it than you do, Ransom. I found it there on the porch."

"But it is yours?—you wrote it?"

"No; a thousand times no," articulated August Bordine, in a convincing tone.

Ransom Vane groaned and reeled against a post, the letter falling from his nerveless hand to the ground.

For some moments not a word passed between the two. Both were evidently thinking.

The thoughts of Bordine were not pleasant ones. He remembered the tramp who had that morning made himself so disagreeable to Victoria. It must be that he was the author of this horrible crime.

Another figure too came up before the vision of the young engineer, the man on horseback who sat with lifted hat, bowing to Victoria Vane, just as he (Bordine) entered the woods.

One of these men had committed the deed. Which one? Most likely the tramp.

Such were the thoughts that passed through the brain of August in the five minutes that he stood silently regarding vacancy.

"August."

The voice of the sorrowing brother fell sadly on the ear of the engineer.

"Well, Ransom."

"Assist me to carry poor Vic—"

He could go no further, but moved with tear-dimmed eyes toward the dead.

August bent to the work without further speech, and assisted the brother to move the body into the house to the pleasant front bed-room, the especial resort of the poor girl in life. Here they placed her on the low, neatly-covered bed, and then Bordine turned away, leaving brother and sister in solemn, silent companionship.

That was the saddest moment of August Bordine's life.

Not even when his own sister died six years before had he felt the solemn weight of sadness more deeply. Victoria had been his friend. She was not over-bright,

yet she was kind and tender of heart. He felt her death deeply, and found himself wondering who could have been so wicked as to murder a pretty girl, who he believed, had not an enemy in the wide world.

There was something of mystery about the affair.

Once outside Bordine examined the ground closely. He saw nothing of the letter, and was about to move away, when a shadow fell athwart the grass giving him a sudden start.

CHAPTER III.

ALL A MYSTERY.

"I beg your pardon, but does Mr. Vane live here?"

A man of small stature, smooth face and the keenest eyes Bordine had ever seen in human head, stood before him. He lifted a broad-brimmed straw hat and fanned himself as though heated, although the air was quite cool for the season.

"Do you mean Ransom Vane?"

"Yes, sir."

"He lives here."

"Very good—"

"But, sir," interrupted Bordine, "he is in no mood to receive visitors now."

"Indeed?"

"A terrible thing has happened."

Then glancing down, the small stranger caught sight of the blood. He did not shrink, but an interested look at once came to his face.

"A tragedy?" he questioned, quickly.

"Yes. Victoria Vane is dead."

"How?"

"It seems to be either murder or suicide."

"This is bad. When did it happen?"

"Some time to-day."

"No witnesses to the deed?"

"None who have yet appeared."

Just then Ransom Vane appeared on the porch. The moment his gaze rested on the face of the new-comer he uttered a glad cry and extended his hand.

"Of all men in the world you are the one I most desire to see," exclaimed Vane. Then he turned to Bordine. "Mr. Bordine, this is my old friend from Newport, Silas Keene. You may have heard me mention his name."

"Yes. I have read of him as well. I am happy to clasp the hand of the most noted detective of Gotham."

This was no flattery.

Silas Keene was not a secondary man. He was first in everything pertaining to matters criminal. He had traced down more crime perhaps than any man of his age in Gotham, and he was verging on forty.

It was opportune indeed, the great detective coming at this time.

Ransom Vane had known the man for years, and the twain had been bosom friends.

"I cannot remain with you, Ransom," said Bordine, "but I will come again soon. If you require any help from me, you know, you have only to call on me."

"Certainly."

A minute later the man in hunter's costume had disappeared.

Silas Keene went in to look at the dead girl, then he examined the ground closely, the porch, the letters, and finally investigated the extent and shape of the death-wound.

It proved to be narrow but deep, evidently made with a dirk or blade with two edges.

Then, after the house was searched and it was discovered that a bureau had been rifled of several hundred dollars left there by Ransom, the young cottager placed the torn, blood-stained letter he had found in Bordines' possession, in the hand of the detective.

"Where did you get this?" questioned Keene, after he had read the short epistle.

"It was found near my poor sister, on the porch."

"You found it?"

"No, Bordine."

"By the way, who made the discovery of the tragedy first?"

"Mr. Bordine. He was standing over Victoria, with this letter in his hand, when I arrived."

"He is your friend?"

"Well, yes, I have supposed him to be."

"What is his full name?"

"August Bordine."

The detective glanced at the letter, then gave vent to a low whistle. This was natural with him at times, especially when he had made a gratifying discovery.

"Now you must be frank with me," proceeded Keene. "Tell me truly, what relation this man, Bordine, bore to your sister."

"They were friends."

"Nothing more?"

Detective Keene eyed his companion sharply.

"Well, I suppose it possible that they might have enjoyed a nearer relation had Victoria lived," said Ransom Vane in an unsteady voice.

"You think they were lovers?"

"Yes."

"How did he seem to take this tragedy?"

"I cannot tell, I don't think he was unduly agitated, however."

"Hum."

Then the detective fell to thinking deeply. He folded the note carefully, and placed it in an inner pocket.

"I will retain that," he said. "Of course the coroner must be notified. This is indeed a sad case. I had no thought of such a thing when I left the depot to visit you. This will astound the neighborhood. I came from New York intending to visit Chicago, where it is thought a forger has found a hiding place. I was not employed to run him down, but thought I would place the case in the hands of the Pinkertons."

"You will not desert me in the hour of my trouble, Silas?"

"No, I will not."

"You will remain to hunt down the murderer of poor Vic?"

Emotion choked the young man's utterance then, and he turned his haggard face away to hide his feelings.

"I hoped for a brief rest, and an enjoyable visit, old friend," returned Keene.

"It seems that it is not to be. I seem destined to be forever on the trail of some criminal. Poor little Victoria. When I saw her last she was a pretty, playful child. I cannot conceive of a heart wicked enough to take such an innocent life."

"It was done for plunder?"

"Do you think so?"

"I had two hundred dollars in the bureau. That was taken."

"Yes."

"That convinces me that my poor sister was murdered so that the villain could rob the house."

"I am not sure of that."

"No?"

"This robbery may be only a blind."

"Do you think so?"

"I will not say that. It will never do to jump at conclusions. My suspicions, if I have any, turn toward that man who just left us."

"August Bordine?"

"Yes. He evidently wrote that letter. In a fit of jealousy, he may have struck the blow."

Ransom Vane was silent.

He had thought of this himself, and yet it did not seem possible that his friend could be such a demon. The detective must be left to take his own course, however.

"They seemed always on friendly terms," said Ransom, at length, "but of course there may have been secrets kept from me."

"True, I will investigate thoroughly." The detective hastened away, and a little later the coroner appeared. A jury was summoned and an examination had. This was on the morning following the tragedy.

August Bordine had been summoned by telegraph, and was the most important witness in the case.

When he told the story of the tramp the silence was oppressive.

"Did you know the fellow?"

"I did not; I believe, however, that Miss Vane stated that he had called himself Perry Jounce."

At the mention of this name young Vane started.

He plucked at his blonde mustache and seemed exceedingly nervous.

Nothing of grave importance was elicited from Bordine, only some present thought he had neglected his duty in leaving the girl so soon after the departure of the tramp.

Ransom Vane was the next witness.

He testified to finding his sister dead, with August Bordine standing over her.

"He was in hunting costume?"

"Yes."

"How armed?"

"I saw no arms. He had placed his gun against the end of the porch I think."

"You saw no knife?"

"None whatever."

Evidently the coroner had sighted the suspicious circumstances connecting August Bordine with the case.

"Did you have a knife that day?" said the coroner, turning abruptly to young Bordine.

"Yes, sir, I had a small hunting knife, but not when I found Miss Vane."

"What do you mean?"

"I lost the knife in the woods."

"Yes."

A short silence fell.

Many suspicious glances were cast at the young engineer. He felt that he occupied a delicate position, but remained calm under it.

The jury decided, after due deliberation, that Victoria Vane came to her death at the hands of an unknown party, and so the inquest ended. Murder was fully established, but the murderer was not found.

In the mean time Detective Keene had made some discoveries that he kept to himself for the time.

No one in or about Ridgewood knew Sile Keene, and so he did not at the outset deem it necessary to assume a disguise.

The bereaved brother did not live at the cottage after the murder, but found a room at the village tavern. Oft times, however, he wandered to the lonely cottage, and in silence brooded over the scene of the murder. He stood thus one day when the sound of a step startled him. He raised his eyes to peer into the face of a ragged tramp.

CHAPTER IV.

WAS IT A CONFESSION?

The city of Grandon was only a few miles distant from Ridgewood and connected by rail. It was a small city of mushroom growth, as is characteristic of many Western towns.

It was here that the engineer August Bordine resided.

He was well to-do, supporting a widowed mother, giving her a comfortable home from his earnings.

About a week after the tragedy at Ridgewood as Bordine was walking down the street his eyes was attracted by a poster on a dead wall near.

He paused and read:

\$5,000 REWARD.

The above reward will be given for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person who murdered Victoria Vane at her home in Ridgewood on the 10th of June.

"BUCK BRADY, *Sheriff.*"

Other pedestrians paused, attracted as Bordine had been by the flaming poster.

"By gosh! that ought to fetch 'im," uttered a queer-looking Yankee, who had been studying the poster for some minutes.

Bordine regarded the speaker now for the first time.

He was lean and thin, with swallow-tailed coat, tall hat, battered and worn, a huge necktie and heavy boots—a veritable Yankee from way back the young engineer thought.

"They consider the girl pretty valuable," said another.

"That reward ought to fetch the villain," uttered Bordine. "I have a notion to try for it myself."

"S'pose you dew!"

The Yankee regarded him curiously.

"It is a tempting reward."

At this moment a carriage halted, and a bearded face peered out. Beside it was a pale, pretty woman's countenance. Evidently they had been attracted by the same thing that caused pedestrians to stop and stare.

"Drive on."

It was the woman in a pleading tone.

"But see, my dear, here's something worth looking at. A big reward for the arrest of the murderer of poor Miss Vane. Did you notice it?"

"It's in all the papers. *Do* drive on, Andrew," pleaded the woman's voice again.

Then, seeing people gazing at them, she dropped her veil. Her companion, a heavily bearded man, seemed intent on gazing at the flaming reward poster.

"It's worth the trial," he muttered.

Then he lifted the reins, spoke to his horse, and was soon moving away.

"Who was it?"

This from the Yankee, who seemed unusually excited as he gazed after the moving carriage.

"It's Mr. Brown, I believe," answered Bordine. The gentleman had been but a short time in town, but as he spent money freely and drove a fast horse he had attracted attention, and the young engineer had heard his name mentioned freely by some of his friends.

"Brown?"

"From Denver."

"Is that so? Where does he hang out?"

"At the 'Golden Lion'."

Without speaking again the inquisitive Yankee hurried on. In a little time he sighted the carriage and its occupants. He followed at a respectful distance, and saw it halt in front of a small house in the suburbs.

The lady alighted.

"Now, Andrew—"

"Curse you! Why will you speak that name?" the man flung back, savagely. "Iris, you have been trouble enough to me, and I won't be dogged in this way."

"Dogged! Has not a wife a right to be with her husband?"

"Confound it, no! I will call on you to-night and have this matter settled—settled forever."

Then he wheeled his carriage and drove away. The woman, with veil down, remained standing at the gate for some time, watching the retreating carriage.

And the Yankee leaned against the trunk of a tree near, seemingly intent on watching a flock of sparrows near the gutter.

"It looks suspicious, anyhow," muttered the Yankee. "It would be strange enough if I should run upon Andrew Barkswell here—funny, indeed."

And the woman?

Her voice was suffused with tears as she murmured:

"Andrew, Andrew, how can you treat me so? I have sold my soul for your love, and now—now this is my reward! I feel that I shall die, yes, die, or—or go mad!"

She clasped her hands tightly, breathed hoarsely for a moment, then turned and reeled to the house. With a key she opened the door and entered; which fact convinced the Yankee that she was alone.

Slowly he shuffled down the walk and paused in front of the house.

It looked silent and gloomy enough, as though no human soul occupied the interior.

He was soon rapping at the front door. The woman he had seen enter answered.

Pushing his way in without ceremony, our Yankee friend seated himself, and removing his hat, began smoothing the crown with a greasy elbow.

"Well, sir," demanded the woman, "who are you, and what do you wish?"

"Specs, marm, specs," uttered the Yankee, grinning from ear to ear.

"Sir!"

"I've got 'em, a heap of the best specs sold in America."

Then the Yankee drew from an inner pocket a leather case, which he proceeded to open, displaying a lot of cheap spectacles.

"I kin fit old or young, rich or poor, fat or lean, I'm a ginooine malefactor o' the human race, a honor to my profession; in fact I'm an eye doctor, and if you've weak eyes, as I see you hav', let me—"

"Sir, it is useless; I want none of your wares," said the woman, tartly.

"Yeou look sick, madam."

"I want none of your wares I tell you."

"Law now—"

"Please go."

"But see here, mebbe yeou don't know who I be. I'm Jathom Green, from Goose Creek, down ter Vermont."

"But this is nothing to me I tell you."

The Yankee glanced carelessly, yet keenly, about the room. He noticed everything without seeming to do so. Folding up his spectacles, he finally returned them to his pocket and retired.

Just at dusk a man ran up the steps and opened the front door.

He did not resemble the man we have seen in the carriage some time before. He followed the woman at once to a back room, flung his elegantly clad frame into a chair, and gazed fixedly at the trim figure of the woman before him.

Producing a cigar he lit it before uttering a word.

A second figure stole up the steps and opened the door cautiously, tiptoeing down a narrow hall to the room occupied by the man and woman. The last comer was the Yankee, who had not been far from the vicinity during the afternoon.

Kneeling the Yankee peeped through the keyhole. He started then and came near uttering an exclamation.

"Now, sir, what have you to say regarding your conduct," demanded the woman, who, with hat and veil removed, was rather a pretty lady of medium size, although her white face and hollow eyes betokened much suffering.

"Nothing."

"Nothing? Oh, And—"

"Stop! Utter that name here and I will brain you," hissed the man, suddenly, furiously, half rising to his feet.

"What must I say?"

"Brown, call me Brown, Jones, or anything but that."

"Well, Brown, you know I have been a faithful wife, and you have treated me with anything but affection."

"Why did you follow me? I told you I'd kill you if you did."

"It is because I love you, Andrew—"

"That name again!" he uttered, with an imprecation. "Madam, if you were a true wife, you would assist me in my schemes, and we might live in a mansion. I have a plan."

"Well?"

"We might win that reward."

The woman shuddered and covered her face with her hands.

"Do you know, Iris?" he proceeded, with the utmost coolness, "I saw that girl, Victoria Vane, before she was killed. I tell you, she was quite sweet on me."

A groan alone answered him.

"There was money in the house, and I managed to handle some of it," continued the man. "I supposed, or rather, I expected to make more out of that haul, but only got a few paltry dollars. I expect some poor tramp will be arrested for the murder of the girl, and hang, like enough."

"And you—you killed her?"

"That would be telling, my dear. These girls get a fellow into a deuce of a scrape sometimes, let alone a fellow's wife. But, my dear, let's drop this subject and talk of something more agreeable."

The creak of a door startled both.

The man seemed startled.

He turned his head, then came to his feet with a hissing cry.

He was peering into the muzzle of a glistening revolver, behind which stood the form of our Yankee friend.

The light in the room was not brilliant, yet faces were plainly discernible.

"August Bordine, I arrest you for the murder of Victoria Vane!" cried the Yankee, in an awful voice.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRAMP ON DECK.

For full a minute not a word passed between the two men. The sodden eyes of the tramp were fixed in a sullen gaze on the face of Ransom Vane.

"What do you want here?" finally demanded Vane in a harsh voice.

"I came to see you."

"To see me?"

"That's what I said."

"I have no money to give you, so you can travel," retorted Vane impatiently.

"I hain't just ready to travel," grated the tramp. "You act jest as though you didn't know me, Rans Vane?"

"Know you?"

The young man glanced fixedly into the face of the ragged, filthy looking being before him.

"Wal?"

"I never saw you before."

"Sure?"

"I am sure."

"Didn't you once live in New York State?"

"Yes."

"Near Rochester?"

"Yes."

"On a farm?"

"Yes."

"Hev' you forgot the young feller that drove the team, the chap that got his walkin' papers in the dead o' winter, and was actually kicked into the road jest because he was absent one time to see his sister who was tendin' school in the city? You called me lazy then, Rans Vane, and you struck me, yes *you* did, and don't you remember, I swore I'd get even? More, you insulted my sister by speakin' ill of her, and that chit of a gal, Miss Victory, laughed. I was mad—"

"You are Perry Jounce."

"That's it the fust time guessin'."

"And you have come to this. I knew you would never amount to anything, even if you did have a smart sister."

"Hush, now! Don't you dare speak of her."

"Did she do well?"

"Better 'n yours."

A deadly pallor struck the face of Ransom Vane. His sister was dead, had been cruelly murdered, and at that moment he believed that this villainous tramp had had a hand in her death.

"Scoundrel!" exclaimed Vane, advancing toward the tramp. "You are the wretch who murdered my poor Victoria."

"Stand back."

There was an evil glare in the eyes of the speaker.

Vane continued to advance threateningly.

"Stand back, I say, or you'll get a taste o' *this*."

He displayed a huge knife, the same with which he had threatened Bordine on a former occasion.

"Scoundrel!"

"It won't do no good to sling words. Rans, I ain't afeard of em."

For several minutes the two stood glaring at each other with glittering eyes and gleaming teeth.

"Rans Vane, I swore I'd git even with ye fur all you did agin' me and mine ten year ago. I reckon you're gittin' a leetle o' the sufferin—"

"Stop," hoarsely.

"No I won't. I want ye ter know that I hain't forgot. I know'd you'n the gal came West arter the ole man died, but I didn't know whar. I've been a tramp fur a year, and I 'lowed I'd run onter ye sometime, but 'twas all unexpected when I seed the gal t'other day."

"And you murdered her, murdered my sister?"

"Wal, 'twould a-b'en justice ef I had."

"Oh, you wretch—"

"'Twont do no good to call names, pard; they never hurted anybody yet 'at I knows of," sneered the tramp, still holding his knife ready for instant use.

The slender frame of Ransom Vane trembled, and his white hands were clinched fiercely. He well understood the vicious nature of the man before him, however, and realized that a movement of aggression on his part would lead to his own doom.

Now, more than ever, was he convinced that Perry Jounce was the one guilty of

the death of poor Victoria. Vane was placed in a terrible position just then. The tramp had him completely in his power, and it might be that he meditated another murder.

"Perry Jounce, listen to me."

The young man forced a calmness he did not feel, while speaking to the man before him.

"Perceed, Rans, old boy."

"Why did you murder an innocent child like my poor Victoria? Surely she had not harmed you."

Ransom Vane began now, with the intention of talking against time, with the hope that some one might happen along, and assist in capturing the tramp.

"Nothin' but a child, eh?" with a brutal sneer. "I'd like ter know whar you git yer old gals then, ef Miss Vic war a spring chicken."

The young man's blood boiled to resent the insult.

Nevertheless, his prudence still held his passions down.

"Perry, why will you speak so brutally?"

"Look a-here, Rans, I ain't none o' your kid-glove kind. I allus speaks out what I hev to say. I hate you and yourn, and I jest tell you in plain English 'at I'm glad your sister's dead; not fur her sake, but because it makes you suffer."

"And this is why you murdered her?"

"Who said I did it?"

"You have just admitted as much."

"That's a lie! I never make such foolish admissions as that. I'd look well owning up to somethin' I didn't do."

"Do you mean to tell me that you did not murder Victoria?" cried the young man in a tone of intense feeling.

"Of course I didn't. I ain't no fool."

"I cannot believe you."

"I don't ask ye to."

The tramp polished the blade of his huge knife on his greasy sleeve.

"I might spill a little blood I s'pose," he muttered aloud, "but I reckon I'll let you live awhile yet."

Then he turned as if to depart.

"Don't go yet," cried the young cottage-owner, as his eye caught sight of a man approaching from the wood road. His thought was that with help he might capture the tramp.

"Wal, why not?"

Perry Jounce halted.

"I want you to answer a few questions."

"Heave ahead."

"Tell me what you know about my poor Victoria's death. You were here just before."

"Who told you so?"

"It doesn't matter."

"I know now. It was that engineer from Grandon. I've forgot his name. He peached on me, I reckon."

"You have guessed the truth."

"Rans, don't you trust that man."

"Why not?"

"*He* kin tell you how Vic come ter die, he kin. 'Twas jealousy and the like that did it."

"Do you mean that?"

Ransom Vane sprang forward and clutched the arm of the tramp.

"Let go. Yes, I mean it. *He* killed Victoria 'cause he thought she'd make trouble atwixt him an' another gal, that's the truth ef I hang fur it."

"My soul! it is as I feared."

Ransom Vane still clung to the arm of the tramp, however. The man was rapidly approaching, and carried a gun. Young Vane recognized him as Bordine, and he was anxious to secure his assistance in securing the tramp.

"Let go, Rans, I must be traveling."

"But wait. Will you testify to what you have jast said?"

"Mebbe."

"Then remain—"

"Let go, I tell ye."

Vane, however, still clung to the arm of Jounce. The latter became angry, and flung him off furiously.

"Help! Murder!" shouted Vane.

"Take that, you fool!"

The tramp struck a vicious blow with his knife at the heart of young Vane.

The latter sunk bleeding to the ground.

"Hello!"

A tall, slender young man in hunter's costume peered upon the scene.

Perry Jounce walked forward, glanced keenly into the young hunter's face, then said:

"I've fixed him, I take it; but don't you peep, or—"

He did not finish his sentence, but strode swiftly away.

"Stop, August Bordine. I am badly hurt by that scoundrel. Will you help me?"

Ransom Vane sat up, with blood streaming from a wound in his breast.

The hunter at once sprang to his assistance, and made a swift examination of the wound.

He tore strips of cloth from the wounded man's shirt and succeeded, after a little, in staunching the blood.

"How do you feel?"

"Weak as a cat, but I don't believe the blade touched a vital spot," answered Vane, who now sat on the bench at the end of the porch.

"Of course he didn't. Shall I help you to the doctor's office?"

"No. You are going to the village?"

"Yes."

"Then you may send Dr. Helling to me."

"I will do so."

"Stay one moment."

The hunter turned about and waited for what his young friend had to say.

"You saw that tramp, August?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you stop him? He gave me this wound, and I believe he is the man

we need for—for the murder of poor Vic."

"No?" in evident surprise. "I was so startled I didn't think far enough to stop the fellow."

Then the young hunter proceeded on his way with his gun under his arm and a peculiar smile on his countenance.

"There's a little mistake it seems," he muttered.

Just then a man stepped from a clump of bushes near and touched the hunter's arm.

He halted and turned about quickly.

"Andrew Barkswell, I'm glad to meet you."

It was Perry Jounce, the tramp, who uttered the words.

CHAPTER VI.

DETECTIVE AND WIDOW.

When the Yankee crept in upon his prey he felt sure of securing him.

There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip, however.

Our Yankee friend failed to take into consideration the fact that there was a second person in the room.

The young man stared at the Yankee and his revolver as if more surprised than frightened.

"What's the matter, old chap?" uttered the man, with a sneer. "This is my house —"

"You are my prisoner," uttered the Yankee, sternly.

"Who are you?"

"You will learn soon enough, August Bordine."

"That isn't my name."

"You have a dozen. I know you, however, as the forger, Andrew Barkswell."

"Well, I suppose I may's well come."

He was going in without resistance.

The Yankee was keen, but he failed to notice the movement of the woman.

Of a sudden she sprang forward behind the Yankee, and flung her arms about him, pinioning his arms for an instant. He soon tore loose, but precious time had been lost.

With a sweep of his hand, the man, whom our Yankee friend had taken for August Bordine, dashed the lamp to the floor, leaving the room in total darkness.

"Good-by, Mr. Keene. I hope you'll have better success next time," chuckled a voice, and then the outer door slammed, denoting that the outlaw had passed out into the night.

All this was the work of less than a minute.

The detective, for he it was, wrenched himself from the woman's detaining arms, and dashed down the hall to the street. Darkness reigned outside, and it soon became evident that the outlaw had made good his escape.

The baffled detective went back to the house in no enviable mood.

"I'm a little out in my reckoning," he muttered. "That man was certainly Barkswell, and yet he resembled Bordine. Can it be that the two are identical? They certainly look enough alike to be twin brothers."

Once more the detective entered the house. Groping along the hall, he scratched a match, and entering the back room, soon had the lamp burning once more.

The woman was gone.

"I might have arrested her," muttered the detective, "had I not chased her husband into the darkness. I am confident that it's the same couple I saw in the carriage, yet then he was in disguise."

Sile Keene searched the house from top to bottom, but made no important discoveries. He was prone to believe, however, that Barkswell was the assassin of poor Victoria Vane.

"Is this man and Bordine identical? That is the question," mused the detective. "I am inclined to think they are."

Then he left the house and hurried swiftly away.

The city of Grandon was small, and it did not require much time to traverse its entire length.

In a little time the detective stood before an unpretending dwelling which had been pointed out to him as the house of the young engineer.

There was a cheerful glow in the windows, although the curtains were down. Keene had cast aside his Yankee togs, and appeared undisguised.

The bell was answered by the widow Bordine herself, who at once invited him into her cozy parlor.

No one was here.

The detective glanced keenly around and noted the comfort of the little house. How could the young man who had built such a snug nest turn his attention into criminal channels? The widow was but sixty, with a plump form, pleasant eyes and agreeable manners. Detective Keene was at once prepossessed in her favor.

Could the son of such a woman be the villain appearances indicated? or had there been a grand mistake somewhere?

"My name is Keene," said the detective, introducing himself. "I called to see your son."

"My son is not in."

"When will he return."

"Not until late. His business requires him to keep late hours sometimes."

"Which is unpleasant for you."

"Somewhat, but it won't long be so."

"Indeed?"

"When they are married, he will bring Rose here, and then he'll keep better hours."

"Rose?"

Detective Keen smiled at the simplicity of the old lady.

"Rose Alstine. They've been keepin' company a long time."

"The young lady is wealthy?"

"How do you know? Have you seen 'em?"

"No, but I've heard of the Alstines," returned Keene.

"Well, I suppose Rose is quite an heiress, especially if the old man's mine turns out well, he's been buying out in Colorado. He's out there now looking after it."

"Yes."

"I expect August'll be married as soon's he gets home."

"And that will be when?"

"Can't tell. It may be a month and it may be a year."

"Quite an uncertainty, indeed."

"Yes," heaving a deep sigh, "I'll be proper glad when they are settled."

"I should think so. You have friends in Ridgewood."

"None to speak of."

"The Vanes—"

"Oh, yes, I know. They wan't my friends in petic'lar. Victoria was a pretty girl, and some folks called her smart, but I never could see it. Poor thing, it was an awful end she came to at last," and the widow wiped away a sympathetic tear.

"It was, indeed," agreed the detective. "Your son thought much of the girl?"

"Of Victoria Vane?"

"Yes."

"Law, no. Didn't I tell you that August was keepin' company with the Alstine girl?"

"Yes; but young men sometimes have more strings than one, you know."

"But August ain't that kind."

"Artless, old mother!" thought Keene. "She knows nothing of the doings of this son of her's." Then, thinking of the forger whom he had come so near capturing that evening, Keene said: "You are from New York, I believe, Mrs. Bordine?"

"Formerly, yes."

"From the neighborhood of Rochester?"

"Yes."

"Do you know a family by the name of Barkswell?"

"Never heard of 'em."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, I'm not given to telling wrong stories, Mr. Keene. Why should I? Our family was never ashamed of its name—"

"No, certainly not; but I knew the Barkswells, and I thought you might have forgotten. I am from York State myself."

"Glad to hear it. I think I heard August speak of you. He met you down to Ridgewood?"

"Yes. I am quite anxious to see your son on important business."

"Come in to-morrow, then. I expect he'll be to home."

The detective rose to go.

It did not seem possible to him then that the villain Barkswell and Bordine could be one and the same, yet it was nevertheless certain that there was a strong resemblance between the two men, and Keene was determined to watch Bordine

closely.

Detective Keene hurried away.

Soon he was traversing one of the narrowest streets of the city. Just ahead of him he saw a man standing so that the light from a saloon window flared in his face.

Silas Keene halted an instant and gazed fixedly at the man.

It was certainly the same person he had attempted to arrest that night—either Andrew Barkswell or August Bordine.

The detective suddenly advanced.

The sound of his step caused the young man to turn about.

Both men regarded one another fixedly, a surprised look shooting over the face of the younger.

"Ah, it is Mr. Keene. Glad to see you, sir. Will you come home with me?" cried August Bordine, as he grasped the detective warmly by the hand.

CHAPTER VII.

CAUGHT!

It will be remembered that the young hunter who had assisted the wounded Ransom Vane, was hailed on his way to the village by the tramp, who has so far occupied a prominent place in this narrative.

A curious smile flitted over the face of the hunter as he looked at the ragged creature before him.

"I am glad to see you, Andrew," said the tramp, extending his hand.

"Are you?"

The hunter refused to touch the dirty paw extended toward him.

"Won't you shake?"

"No. You have made a mistake. I am not Andrew Barkswell."

"Not Andrew Barkswell?"

"No."

"Who then?"

"My name is August Bordine."

"Lord, is that so?" cried Jounce with a grin. "Didn't you just come from the man I knifed down yonder?"

"Certainly, and you'll have that to answer for."

"Will he die?"

"I expect so."

"You wouldn't dare appear agin me?"

"I will, as you shall see."

The tramp fell back a step and made a move as if to draw a weapon, but the muzzle of a cocked rifle cooled his ardor a little.

"Now, see here, what's the use of fooling, pardner?" whined the tramp.

"No use of it. I am in deadly earnest I assure you," returned the hunter. "I am of the opinion that you murdered that poor girl last week, and do you know, sir, there's a big reward offered for you dead or alive?"

"No. How much?"

"Five thousand dollars."

"No-o!"

"It's true."

"Who makes the offer?"

"The proper officer—sheriff, I suppose. Come, now; I think I will take you into custody, and haul in that reward."

"But I ain't guilty, and you know it, Andrew."

"Andrew again—"

"No more foolin', old chap. I know you, though, by gum! you *do* look a heap like the ingineer from Grandon. Mebbe you'n him's related. But see here, I kin tell you by that, allus."

With a quick movement, the tramp sprang forward and pushed up the hat of the hunter, revealing in the roots of the hair a red, ragged scar.

"Your loving wife made that, pardner, and I 'spose you'll acknowledge the corn now."

"Confound you!"

The hunter seemed angry enough to annihilate the tramp, but the latter stood back and grinned complacently in his face.

"Couldn't fool me, brother," chuckled Jounce. "I 'member when Iris gin ye that rap. She sticks to ye like a burr, pardner, and won't let ye play sweet on the ladies, as you'd like. Kinder mean fur a wife to keep sich a sharp eye out fur her lord, but I tell ye, Iris is grit to ther backbone, and she's jealous, too. But I won't tantalize yer, coz 'taint jest; but 'sposin' you gin me a little rhino? I'm busted—dead broke; out o' rocks, and wrecked on a lee shore."

The man uttered an imprecation.

"I see that you know me," he finally articulated. "I've fooled a good many, but it seems a loving relative can't be deceived. Don't you give me away, Perry, and I'll have money enough for all of us soon."

"No lying?"

"It's true as preaching"

"What lay are you on?"

"I make no confidants."

"Then you'll rue it mebber."

"I certainly should if I did. I've got the softest snap but for one thing."

"Wal?"

"An infernal man-tracker from Gotham is out here on my lay. He may prove troublesome."

"I've seen him—Sile Keene."

"Yes. Put him off the track, Perry, and I'll make it an object."

Then the hunter laid a gold eagle in the hand of the tramp. An avaricious gleam filled the man's wicked eyes.

"You can count on me, brother."

"Never mind brothering me. I don't want you to trouble me again, you understand, until—"

"Till that man-tracker goes under?"

"Exactly."

"You bet I won't."

Then Barkswell moved on his way, and the tramp disappeared in the bushes.

"Ho! So Mr. Andy don't like for me to call him brother," uttered the tramp, gutterally. "Wonder if he's forgot that he married sister Iris. I must look up the old girl. Mebbe she can do something for me. I'm aware that she'd be ashamed of me in these togs but I reckon I kin sleek up a bit with a part o' this"—clutching the gold-piece as he spoke.

In the meantime Andrew Barkswell made his way to the village, and finding the village physician, sent him to the cottage of Ransom Vane to attend the wounded man.

It will be seen that the man in hunter's costume was not August Bordine, although he had deceived Ransom Vane into believing him to be the engineer. It was this close resemblance to Bordine that put a scheme into the head of a villain.

"I had no idea that I looked so much like somebody else," mused the young villain as he rode toward Grandon that night. "I'll profit by this, or I am a fool. If Iris had only remained away. She's so squeamish, I can't do anything. I really wish an accident would happen to her."

All this happened on the day before the adventures of Mr. Barkswell with the detective in the guise of a Yankee, already recorded.

We now return to the city.

Silas Keene was not a little puzzled as he found himself clasping the hand of the young man in front of the low saloon.

Was this the same man he had dogged to the house in the suburbs?

He looked like him, and yet there seemed to be a slight difference in the voice.

The detective was puzzled.

"Where do you stop, Mr. Keene?"

"At the Golden Lion."

"Good hotel; but I would like to have you accompany me home. I would talk of the late crime at Ridgewood. I notice that a large reward has been offered for the perpetrator."

"It seems so."

"Of course you will strive to win the reward."

"Certainly."

The two men were now walking away from the vicinity of the saloon.

"This is the hardest part of the city," said Bordine. "It's seldom that I come this way."

"What called you here to-night?"

The detective was suspicious now of the man, and had his revolver convenient to his hand.

"Well, simply because I saw a fellow coming this way that I recognized. The man entered that saloon. You see I brood continually over the murder of poor Victoria Vane."

"Yes; that is natural enough."

"Is it? I suppose it's because I was connected with it in such a way."

"You connected with the murder?"

Sile Keene seemed to think his companion was about to make a full confession, for he almost stopped in his walk to stare at the face of Bordine.

"I was connected with it, as you will remember. Sometimes I blame myself for not remaining until her brother returned, and not giving that tramp the opportunity he desired," said Bordine, in a solemn voice.

"So you think it was the tramp that committed the murder?"

The detective asked this question simply for the want of something better. He was now pretty thoroughly convinced that the real assassin walked at his side, and that it might be well to arrest him at once, when, if necessary, sufficient evidence could be hunted up afterward.

"I am almost sure of it."

"What motive?"

"Robbery and revenge."

"Indeed."

"Yes. Poor Victoria!"

"See here, Mr. Bordine, what was that girl to you?" demanded the detective, suddenly and sharply, laying his hand on the arm of his companion.

A dark form dogging their steps—had not been seen by either.

"She was nothing to me, sir."

"A friend?"

"Certainly, and nothing more. If you knew her you will bear me out in the statement that she was something of a coquette in her way."

"I know nothing about that."

"You hadn't met her in some years perhaps."

"I admit that I had not. See here, Mr. Bordine, *alias* Barkswell, we may as well come to an understanding. I consider you a dangerous man, and propose to put you in a safe place."

At this moment a ring of cold steel touched the temple of Bordine, who regarded the detective in silent astonishment.

A revolver was against his temple.

"What does this mean?" demanded Bordine.

"That you are my prisoner, forger and assassin!" hissed Silas Keene.

The next instant a pair of handcuffs were snapped over the young engineer's wrists.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DETECTIVE PUZZLED.

August Bordine stood handcuffed and a prisoner, his face the picture of utter astoundment.

It was too dark, however, for the detective to note the look on the face of the young engineer.

"I hope you will go with me peaceably," uttered Keene, as he clutched the arm of his prisoner to lead him away.

"Mr. Keene, this is astounding. I thought you were my friend," finally uttered the young engineer, in a voice quivering with emotion.

"You are a skilled and slippery villain, young man, but you cannot throw me off the scent by any such pretense as this. I've trapped too many criminals, and heard their smooth talk. Let me tell you that I heard your confession to your wife, that you murdered Victoria Vane and robbed the house."

Bordine trembled under the detective's hand.

"Come."

"But I tell you there is some mistake, sir. My name is Bordine, and—"

"I do not care to listen just now," interrupted Silas Keene. I know my duty."

"I doubt it," retorted Bordine angrily. "I will make you smart for this."

The young man walked on, however, and when in the vicinity of the city lockup, the detective turned from the street to cross a vacant lot. They were thus in a

gloomy spot, and compelled to pass near the edge of a deep hollow, an excavation made a long time before for a cellar.

Just at this point a dark form glided up behind the detective and dealt him a stunning blow on the head, felling him to the ground.

"Thar, pardner, I reckon that beak won't git no furder with his pris'ner."

Bordine was dumbfounded.

Who was the rough-spoken man who had come to his rescue by perhaps dealing the detective a death-blow?

"He put the darbies on, did he?"

Bordine held up his manacled hands. The gruff-spoken individual fumbled with them a moment, and then, to his great joy, Bordine found his wrists free.

The stranger had done him a good turn indeed.

Now the young engineer was anxious about the detective's fate; who he realized, had been acting in good faith no matter how foolishly he had blundered.

"I'm allus on hand like a thumb," chuckled the man who had rescued Bordine.

"You had keys to fit the handcuffs?"

"Took 'em from the bloke's pocket."

"I see."

Then, as he cast the bracelets from him, August bent over the prostrate form of Silas Keene.

"I'm afraid you've seriously injured the man," said August lowly.

"Wal, nobody'll cry ef I have," grated the rescuer, "I expect we'd better make sure of the job and then I kin claim the reward."

"Reward."

"Why, confound it, the rhino you promised me ef I'd knife the cursed beak who was on yer trail."

"Oh yes, to be sure," returned the young engineer, who by this time began to "catch on" to the true situation.

It was evident that a grave mistake had been made, and Bordine resolved to carry on the deception with a view to learning something of the intentions of the villain or villains who had plotted the destruction of Keene.

"Let's see, how much was I to give you for this?"

"Durn it, that was fur you to say, Andy. I want you to be liberal now."

"Yes, you've done me a good turn to-night and I'm not unmindful of it, but I don't happen to have any money on my person just at present. Suppose you call 'round to-morrow evening about this time."

"When you'll be out of the kentry mebbe," retorted the other with a growl of dissatisfaction.

"You ought to know me better than that," rebuked the engineer.

"I know ye fur jest that caper, Andy Barkswell."

So that was the man he was supposed to represent. There was something familiar in the ring of the man's voice, too. Where had he heard it before?

"Well, sir, I can't pay you anything to-night. You appoint a place of meeting and I will be there, don't you fear," returned the young engineer, after a moment given to reflection.

"Wal, ef that's yer game, I'll meet ye at Billy Bowleg's saloon, to-morrer at this time. Is't a bargain?"

"It's a bargain, Perry."

Then the two clasped hands.

August Bordine recognized the man now as the tramp who had assaulted

Victoria Vane, that day, when he was up at Eastman's woods on a hunting excursion. He was the same man he had seen enter the saloon so Silas Keene came along, and it was this saloon that the tramp had named as the place for the next meeting. It was well. The engineer resolved to be on hand and make sure of the burly scoundrel who, August Bordine was sure, had murdered Victoria Vane.

"Now, pard, hadn't I better gin the hound another tap on the head?"
Referring to the insensible detective.

"No, leave him to me, old fellow. You have done your complete share in disposing of the man-tracker. I will complete the work."

"Better dump him in yender."

"No."

Perry Jounce said no more, but moved swiftly away in the gloom.

Then August Bordine hastened for assistance.

He found a hack, and had the insensible detective borne to his home, which was not reached until nearly midnight.

When the man-tracker opened his eyes, he found himself in a cozy room, snugly ensconced on a huge sofa, with the fumes of a hot sling in his nostrils.

"Taste this, Mr. Keene, and you will feel better."

It was August Bordine, with a hot drink for the detective. For a moment the man-hunter could scarcely believe his senses.

He sipped the hot sling, and afterward felt better, so that he sat up and gazed about him. It was the same room he had visited earlier in the evening, but the picture of home comfort was not the same, on account of the absence of the comfortable form and motherly face of Mrs. Bordine, who had retired long since to rest.

Silas Keene's senses were yet in a daze, and his head ached enough to split. He glanced at the pleasant face of the young engineer, then about the room, as if wondering where he was.

"You are puzzled, Mr. Keene."

"Well, I should say so," returned the detective. "I cannot account for it, nohow."

"This is my home, Mr. Keene, and you are welcome to remain here until you choose to depart. I would like for you to make it your home while you remain in the city."

"But," gasped the detective, "how does it come that I am here?"

"I had you brought here in a hack."

"Was it you that knocked me over?"

"No, indeed," smiled Bordine. "I was never known to assault an officer."

"Then how—"

"I will explain."

The young engineer did so, telling all the circumstances and concluding with:

"I am as deeply puzzled as you can be, at the man's motive in rescuing me from your hands. Evidently he mistook me for another person, since he addressed me as Andrew Barkswell."

"And is not that your name?"

"Certainly not. I hope you did not make the same mistake. Evidently you did, for, if my memory serves me, you addressed me by that name as well as my own when you arrested me last night."

"Last night?"

"Yes. It is quite morning now."

"And you have been with me all night?"

"Yes, and summoned a physician. You see I was afraid you had been seriously injured."

Silas Keene bowed his head in thought for some moments. At length he looked up and held out his hand.

"Mr. Bordine, I have been a confounded fool."

"I hope not."

Yet the young man could not repress a laugh at the queer expression resting on the countenance of the detective.

"I arrested you for murder."

"Yes."

"For the murder of the Vane girl."

"Yes. You were in a hurry to win the reward—I forgive you, sir. It was simply a mistake."

"And might have proved a grievous one."

"Certainly. I am satisfied that it is no worse."

"And you can forgive me?"

"Certainly."

The two men clasped hands in apparent friendship.

Nevertheless the detective had a lingering suspicion that he was making more of a fool of himself than ever. He tried to smother this, and to appear frank and genial before Bordine. If the man before him was not Barkswell, then he resembled him so closely as to defy detecting the difference.

"I will watch and wait," thought Keene, "and not make another move until I am certain of the facts."

"Now that we understand each other," proceeded Bordine, "I wish to make a bargain with you."

"Proceed."

"I promised to meet this tramp, whose real name is Perry Jounce, I believe, at Billy Bowleg's saloon to-morrow evening, for the purpose of rewarding him for his villainy."

"Yes."

"I find that my other duties will compel me to remain away, but if you will look after the appointment I shall be glad. You can take all the help you need, and make sure of this tramp, and may help break up a bad nest as well. What do you say?"

"I will do it of course."

"Thanks. Now lie here and rest. You need to be recuperated, for the work is hard." "I will do so."

Then bidding his guest good-night, the young engineer left the room.

As he had said it was almost day dawn, and one person was early astir, at least in the city, a man who had been listening at the slightly raised window to the conversation going on between Bordine and the detective.

"It is well," he muttered with a chuckle of delight as he hurried away.

CHAPTER IX.

A BIBULOUS LOVER.

In a pretty bijou of a room one evening sat a girl of nineteen, tall and stately, with a comely face and eyes that were lustrous as stars.

Rose Alstine was not a beauty, but she was good at heart, generous to a fault, and beloved by all who knew her.

She was an heiress to wealth that was reputed bordering on a million. Her money prospects, however, in no way marred the goodness of her character. Had she been overly proud she would certainly not have permitted the attentions of the humble engineer, August Bordine.

There was genuine love between them, too, not of the effusive, sickish sort, but that love that enobles and glorifies.

On the evening in question, Rose sat alone gazing thoughtfully at the carpet. There was a troubled look on her countenance, for only that day she had heard bad news. A horse had run away with her lover and flung him so violently against a post as to injure him severely.

In the evening paper she read the account, and now she was debating whether or not it would be unmaidenly for her to call on her lover. In the main Rose was a sensible girl, yet she was seldom known to fly in the face of the proprieties.

August might die!

It was this thought that brought a moisture to the eyes of the heiress, just as Miss Williams, her cousin of uncertain age, entered the room.

"It would certainly never do, Rose, never."

"What is that, Janet?"

"It would never do for you to visit a man. Just think what the gossips would say. As a relative, and one who would not like to see our good name trailed as a garment, I warn you not to think of such a thing as visiting that man Bordine."

Rose regarded the speaker keenly.

Even with a sad feeling tugging at her heart, she could not but understand that it was sour grapes with Janet Williams. She had once tried desperately to win the attention of the young engineer.

"But, Janet, August may be fatally injured," said Rose, after a moment, in a faltering voice.

"Which would not alter the status of the case in the least."

"Are you heartless, Janet?"

"No. But—"

[Illustration: WITH A LITTLE SHRIEK SHE RUSHED INTO HIS OPEN ARMS AND SEALED HER WELCOME ON HIS LIPS]

A bounding step on the stair cut short the words of Miss Williams. The next instant the door was flung open and a man crossed the threshold, and, hat in hand, confronted the two girls.

His face was somewhat pale, yet his lips were wreathed in a smile. Rose sat for an instant staring at the man as though about to faint, so astonished was she.

Then with a little shriek she rushed into his open arms and sealed her welcome on his lips.

Miss Williams stood dumfounded.

Rose lay sobbing on the breast of her stalwart lover.

"There, Rose, darling, that will do," said the gentleman, leading her to a seat.

"Were you not expecting me?"

"No indeed," cried Rose, as she brushed away the tears. "I read of the terrible accident, and my mind was full of forboding."

"Indeed! What a little goose you are, Rose."

"But you might have been killed, you know, and then—"

"Well?"

"And then what would have become of poor me?"

"Sure enough; but I wasn't killed, nor even seriously hurt, my dear, so we will discard such disagreeable thoughts from our minds."

He settled himself on the wide, cushioned couch at her side, and pressed a kiss on her cheek just as Miss Williams swept, with upturned nose, from the room.

"Faugh!" ejaculated the elderly girl, as she closed the door behind her with a bang. "I can't abide such sickly slush as that. Rose is a fool, and that man isn't one whit better."

Then she flounced down the broad stairs and sought relief from her overwrought feelings in smelling-bottle and snuff.

Yes, dear reader, Miss Williams, dear old girl, was given to snuff, and she would soon cross the boundaries to that old maid's paradise where cats and parrots abounded.

With her it was indeed the sourest of sour grapes.

And Rose?

She felt that this was the happiest moment of her life, as she nestled against her lover's breast and realized that no harm had come to him after all.

"It was wholly a false report, August, but it made me miserable for some hours."

"Not wholly false," he said, as he toyed with a diamond ring that glittered on her finger. "I was thrown out and injured, but not very badly. I came here just as

soon after the accident as possible to alleviate your fears."

"Oh, how good you are."

"This ring," he said, seeming to wish to avoid the subject of the accident. "A genuine diamond, is it not?"

"Certainly. Have you forgotten—"

"That it was my own gift. No, darling, but I believe I have forgotten the cost," he said, quickly.

She stared at him in astonishment.

Then she burst into a laugh.

"How absent-minded you have become," she declared. "I fear that accident injured your brain, August."

"It's barely possible," he said, forcing a laugh.

"Why, you goose, you know that ring was a present from papa on my last birthday, and he said it was worth a good thousand. How could you forget?"

"Surely, how could I?" he returned, with a glittering eye. "I—I don't feel just right, that's a fact."

"And it may have been very imprudent for you to come out so soon after your fall," evincing anxiety.

"Oh, no; I guess not," was his light reply. He lifted her hand again.

"It's your ring you miss?"

"Yes."

She rose and went to a little stand, from a drawer taking a golden circlet, and resuming her seat once more.

"Why do you not wear it?"

"It's a little large."

"Indeed. Permit me to take it. I will bring you another that you can wear."

She resigned the ring to his keeping.

"And this one. How beautiful!" he exclaimed, turning the diamond ring about on her finger.

"Strange you never noticed it's beauty before."

"Well, you know I've been too deeply absorbed in the owner."

Then he slipped the ring from her finger and held it up to the light.

"Well, it *is* a beauty!" he murmured, toying with it as a delighted boy might with a new plaything.

"I thought you did not admire diamonds?"

"Well, can't a person change their opinions?"

"Certainly, but—"

"Ah, that pain again!" exclaimed the engineer, clasping his stomach suddenly and groaning.

"Oh, August, you are hurt, in pain, and trying to keep it from me!" she cried in alarm.

"It's a mere nothing, but—but have you any, brandy in the house? I feel that I need something of the kind."

He seemed trying to smother his distress, and this caused poor Rose to grow pale with alarm.

She sprang up at once.

"I believe there is a flask of brandy in the pantry; I will go for it."

"If you only would."

She passed out quickly.

In about ten minutes she returned having a flask and glass.

"I feel much better," he said, "but I will taste the spirits since it may prevent a recurrence of that ugly pain."

He tossed off a rather ample glass of the liquid, and declared that he felt twenty per cent better.

"If you weren't a strict temperance man I should think that you liked brandy," said Rose, with an amused laugh.

"I'm temperate to the backbone save when it's necessary to use liquor as a medicine," and he laughed, too, in unison with Rose.

She placed the flask and empty glass on the little stand.

"I must return now, Rose. I don't feel that I ought to remain out late to-night."

"Well, I hope you will not suffer from the effects of the accident."

"No danger. That diamond ring, Rose. I dropped it and can't just put my finger on it. Will you help me find it?"

He peered under the couch and chair.

"Never mind, August, I can find it in the morning."

He rose up then, kissed her good-night, and hurried away.

The next morning, when Rose came to look for the diamond ring, it was not to be found. She went to the stand and opened it; her case that held a set of diamond bracelets was there, open but empty.

Rose Alstine uttered a great cry.

Her diamond bracelets, valued at five thousand dollars were gone!

What did it mean?

CHAPTER X.

THE BOWLEGS SALOON.

The saloon of Billy Bowlegs was a low resort, and Detective Keene realized that it was not a safe place for a member of his profession were he recognized by any of the law-breakers who frequented the place.

The detective was deeply puzzled with regard to August Bordine. He could not remove from his mind the idea that the young engineer was the same man who visited that woman, his wife, apparently, in another part of the city. It seemed that the young man was playing a double game.

"He has befriended me, and I will not move against him until I make sure, hereafter," thought Keene. "He has an estimable mother, and it seems a shame that he should be such a villain. It will break her heart, I believe, when she comes to know what a scoundrel she has for a son. I will investigate this mixed state of affairs thoroughly before I jump at conclusions. It is barely possible that I was a little premature last night."

The detective wandered about the city in disguise during the greater part of the day, but made no discoveries, save only that he saw the tramp, Perry Jounce, pass down and enter Bowleg's saloon in the early part of the day.

Late in the afternoon an elderly looking gentleman, in the office of the Golden Lion, purchased an evening paper and began perusing the locals.

"RUNAWAY.

"While Mr. August Bordine was driving down the street, near the depot, his horse became frightened at a passing train and ran. Mr. Bordine was hurled out

against a telegraph pole and severely injured. He was removed to his home by a friend. At the hour of going to press we have not been able to obtain further particulars."

After reading this, the old gentleman came to his feet.

He passed from the hotel, and turned his steps in the direction of the Bordine cottage.

In a little time he was ringing the door-bell.

"You wish to see my son?" queried the old lady who opened the door.

"Yes."

"He is not able to see visitors."

"He is badly hurt, then?"

"Mother, tell the gentleman to come in," called a voice from the cozy front room, and so the visitor was permitted to go before the engineer.

"Ah, beg pardon, but I thought that it was a friend," uttered the pale young man, who sat in the great armchair, propped by pillows.

"My voice sounded familiar?"

"Yes."

"And I am a friend," cried the old gentleman, at the same time removing hat and wig.

"Silas Keene!" exclaimed Bordine.

"Good lord, who'd a thought it?" interjected the motherly widow, with upraised hands.

"Only a bit of disguise," laughed the detective. "I adopt such frequently. It sometimes becomes highly necessary you know, Mr. Bordine."

"I suppose so."

"I saw a notice of your injury in the evening paper and hastened here at once."

"Thanks. You are very kind," returned the young engineer. "I assure you it is nothing serious, but may lay me on the stocks for a day or two. I meant to assist you to-night, but, as you see, now, it is wholly out of the question."

"Certainly."

"Have you made any discoveries?"

"None of consequence."

"We are no nearer the solution of the murder mystery than ever," muttered Bordine. "I think, if you succeed in arresting Perry Jounce, you may wring something from him. He is a low villain, and would as lief commit a murder as eat."

"Yes. I mean to look after the scoundrel to-night."

"Don't attempt to do anything alone, Keene."

"I think there is little danger."

"But that tramp may have discovered his mistake by this time. He undoubtedly mistook me for another person, as *you* did last night."

"True."

The detective eyed the engineer keenly.

If this young man was a dissembler he was certainly a keen one.

"You will be on your guard?"

"Certainly," with a smile. "I have trailed too many criminals to their lair to fear now."

"One thing more," as the detective rose to go. "I want you to consider my house open to you at all times during your stay in Grandon."

"Thank you. I will not forget it."

And then the detective was gone.

"What a strange man," remarked Mrs. Bordine.

"Yes," agreed August. "I have heard of him as a great detective, and I hope that he will prove his name good in this instance. Surely it does seem as though this murder mystery might be cleared up. Of course there may be no evidence to convict him, yet it seems plain to me that Perry Jounce, the tramp, is the guilty man."

"I should think they'd arrest him at any rate."

"I am of the opinion that it would be good policy."

In the meantime Silas Keene had resumed his disguise and returned to the Golden Lion. He remained here until after darkness fell, then, going outside, he secreted a revolver and set of handcuffs on his person, and congratulated himself that he was ready to pay the saloon of Billy Bowlegs a visit.

He counseled with a member of the police force afterward.

"I'm going to make an onset to-night, at Bowleg's saloon, and I want you to be within call in case I should need you," explained the detective, at the same time revealing his badge of office. "There's money in it if you're alert, my friend."

What member of the force could resist such an inducement?

Silas Keene sauntered down the narrow street leading to the saloon in question, paused for a moment on the threshold, then passed in.

Soon a man in blue halted in the shadows without, and waited developments. He expected that the detective would soon give the signal for assistance, but the police officer waited in vain.

Slowly the minutes passed.

An hour drew its length along, and then, becoming impatient, the man of clubs walked into the saloon.

Two men were drinking at the bar, and from beyond a screen came the sound of voices, where numerous gamblers were engaged in play.

Billy Bowlegs was himself behind the bar. He seemed to recognize the officer, for he nodded and set out a decanter of brandy and shoved it toward him.

After drinking the officer said:

"An old gentleman entered a short time since. I had my eye on him, and would like to see him."

"Man with long hair, and one eye?"

"No. A real gentleman, with gray hair and beard."

"Seems 's though I do remember seeing such a chap," uttered the barkeeper. "How long ago was it?"

"Nearly an hour."

"Probably he went away."

"Not by the front door."

"Eh! Then you've been watching him? Suspicious character, eh?"

"Yes."

"You can look through the rooms."

Billy Bowlegs led the way behind the screen.

Half a dozen men sat playing at the tables, as many more smoking and reclining on settees at the side of the room.

The air was thick with smoke, yet the keen glance of the police officer showed that his friend, the detective, was not present.

"Strange!" muttered the officer.

"He doubtless went out the side door," and Billy Bowlegs pointed to a narrow

door at the side of the room.

"Possibly."

The officer was not the brightest member of the force, and believing that he had been sold by the old man who had pretended to be a detective, the guardian of the night returned to the bar-room, partook of another horn of brandy, and then passed out upon the street.

"Sold!" he muttered, angrily, as he strode from the dangerous vicinity.

Meantime what *had* occurred to detain Silas Keene so long?

CHAPTER XI.

ENTRAPPED!

When Silas Keene, the New York detective, entered the bar-room, his glances met no familiar face. The tramp had been thoroughly described to Keene, so that he felt that he should know the fellow the moment his glances fell upon him.

The detective did not know that his man was on the lookout for him.

It will be remembered that a man had been listening through an open window to the conversation between the detective and August Bordine in the early morning.

That man was no less a personage than Andrew Barkswell, whose strong resemblance to the young engineer had so complicated affairs. He, of course, preferred to meet the detective in a way that the latter little suspected.

Keene sauntered into the card room, after partaking of a cigar.

While here watching the players, a hand touched his arm.

"Be you lookin' for somebody, mister?"

Keene looked into a dark, repulsive face, and at once recognized the man who had been described as the tramp, Perry Jounce.

"Yes," returned the detective.

"Who mout it be?"

Bending to the man's ear, Keene whispered the name of Barkswell.

"Loud o' liberty!" exclaimed Jounce, "I was expectin' him, too."

"When did you meet him last?"

"'Bout this time last night."

"Exactly; on a vacant lot—?"

"Eh?"

The tramp started and evinced alarm.

"Don't worry, old fellow," uttered the detective in a low voice. "I know all about it, my friend. You were to meet a gentleman here by appointment?"

"Yes."

"I am the man."

"You?" incredulously.

"Yes. Mr. Barkswell couldn't come, and so he sent me to take his place. I would like mighty well to see you in private for a few minutes."

"I kin fix that."

Jounce left the room, going to the bar-room for a minute. The detective didn't mean to lose sight of his man, so he managed to watch him from a convenient position behind the screen.

He saw him procure a key from Billy Bowlegs, and whisper something in his ear. Then he came swiftly back to his room beyond the screen.

"I'll find a quiet place whar we won't be disturbed, pardner," uttered Perry Jounce, at the same time leading the way to a small screen that seemed to be tucked back in the corner to be out of the way. Turning this, a narrow door was revealed.

Unlocking this, guide and detective passed through, and stood in total darkness.

The detective was resolved to learn from this man all he could about Andrew Barkswell before he placed him under arrest, and it was for this reason that he seemed to fall in with his wishes so condescendingly.

In the darkness, with the sound of the key grating in the lock as Jounce secured the door. Silas Keene became slightly nervous for the first time.

Might he not be walking into a trap? It was possible, and yet it did not seem probable, since this man could not know who he was.

Keene clutched the butt of his revolver with one hand and waited developments with considerable anxiety.

"Come on, pard."

Then Jounce led the way down a dark and narrow passage to another door, which he pushed open.

"Go in, boss."

The detective hesitated.

Noticing it the tramp strode on in advance, struck a match and lit a gas jet that stood out from the wall.

"A pokerish place," said Keene, as he followed Jounce into the room and gazed about him.

"Its private anyhow," returned the burly fellow with a laugh.

There could be no disputing this fact.

A round table occupied the center of a small room, with a chair on either side of it. A pack of cards and decanter of liquor occupied the center of the table, also a couple of glasses.

"Everything as snug's pigs in clover," chuckled Jounce. "This ere's the boss' private room, where he entertains peticler guests. Them as wants a private confab comes in here."

"Indeed."

One fact the detective noted, the room had no window, and was evidently entirely within the building. Not a sound from without, or from the barroom

penetrated the place.

Jounce locked the door, an unnecessary precaution, the detective thought, and threw himself into one of the chairs.

"Sit down, pardner. We kin confab here without bein' disturbed, you bet yer buttons."

"I should think so," was the dry response.

"Help yerself to refreshments."

Jounce tapped the bottle with a dirty finger.

Keene, however, was wise enough not to indulge. He saw before him but one man, and if treachery was meditated, he believed himself a match for this one easily.

"Now, then, perceed."

"First, Mr. Jounce, we'd best come to an understanding," declared the disguised detective.

"Sartin, sir."

"You expected to meet my friend Barkswell tonight?"

"I did."

"For what purpose?"

"Didn't he tell yer?"

"It was about the payment of money?"

"Exactly."

"For what service?"

"Don't yer know?"

Jounce leaned his face between his hands and grinned.

"For the murder of the detective from New York, Sile Keene?"

"Putty nigh it; but you call it by a hard name, stranger. Did the kurnel send the rhino?"

"The colonel?"

"I mean Andy Barkswell, of course."

"He wanted to make sure that you had completed the job."

"Why, condum it, wasn't he thar? What more could he ax?"

"Nothing, so far as Keene is concerned."

"Wal?"

The detective realized that he was treading on dangerous ground, yet he resolved to risk it.

"It's about that other affair."

"The t'other affair?"

"Over at Ridgewood."

"What the Satan you drivin' at, pardner?"

"You ought to know."

"Speak right out plain, pardner, and don't beat about ther bush," growled the tramp, showing his teeth.

"Well, it's that little affair about the girl that died so suddenly over at Ransom Vane's. You haven't forgotten that, of course?"

"Of course not."

The ugly eyes of the tramp regarded the disguised detective in a way that was

not pleasant.

Was the tramp really the guilty person in that tragedy? If so, how much or how little did Andrew Barkswell know of the affair? The letter that had been found with the dead girl would indicate that she had been on somewhat intimate terms with either Barkswell or Bordine. As yet Keene was not satisfied as to the identity of the two. He resolved to make a bold venture at the present time, and learn if possible what there was to know or at least how much the tramp knew on the subject.

"It seems that our friend Andrew isn't exactly satisfied with the way you bungled that job."

"How's that?"

"You left too many straws for the beaks to take hold of." A low, guttural laugh was the only answer vouchsafed to this by Mr. Perry Jounce.

"You know the job was a botch?"

"I don't know nothin' about it."

"Well, anyhow, Andrew does, and he refuses to pay a cent until somebody goes up for the murder of that girl. Do you understand?"

"No, I don't!"

The eyes of the tramp still fixed themselves in an ugly glow on the countenance of Keene.

"Well, so long as the hounds are on the scent there's danger to Andrew, that to you must be plain enough; and danger to yourself as well. Now, why not fix the crime on some one, and thus make it safe for Andrew and you beyond peradventure? That is the plan, and until that is carried out my friend Barkswell doesn't propose to pay out any money."

"And he wants me to fix that thing of killin' the gal onto an innersent man."

"Exactly."

"Good land, what does he take me for?"

"A man who is ready to work on any line for money."

"Wal, when he pays me fur puttin' a head on Sile Keene, then I'll look to 'tother biz. But I hain't no fool, and I reckon you ain't 'goin' cordin' to orders from Andy!"

"Why do you think so?"

"Because, sense he didn't kill the gal, why shu'd he keer 'bout gittin' someone else in the limbo. Partner, you ain't sharp."

"I may not be. Of course Andrew didn't kill the girl, but he knows who did, and —"

"Does he? Then somebody's peached."

"Not necessary. Andy Barkswell's not a fool, Mr. Jounce."

"No?"

The look on the tramp's face was comical in the extreme.

The detective believed the hour for action had come. He had been anxious to get from his companion a confession, but it seemed the fellow was too shrewd to give himself away.

"Of course he knows that you put the girl out of the world—"

"That's a lie."

"What?"

The detective was on his feet in an instant.

"I say that's a lie! I didn't tech a hair o' Victory Vane's head, but I know *who* did."

"Well?"

"I aint a-goin' to tell you, *Sile Keene!*"

The tramp came to his feet and bent threateningly across the table.

"Ha! you know me?"

The detective whipped out his revolver.

"Too late, pardner!"

There was a horrible grin on the face of Perry Jounce. On the instant an object shot from above full upon the head of Keene, and he sank lifeless to his chair!

CHAPTER XII.

A YOUNG GIRL'S DISMAY.

Robbed of her precious jewels!

No wonder Rose Alstine was dismayed.

How had the robber gained entrance to her room?

An examination of the windows, in fact all openings to the house, proved them intact, and yet the fact remained that the robbery had been committed.

Miss Alstine sent word to the chief of police, who came at once, looked over the premises, and promised to use every effort to discover the burglar.

Rose never once thought of her lover in connection with such a crime.

It was Miss Williamson who first called her attention to her visitor.

"There's no telling what men will do, cousin Rose."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded the heiress quickly.

"I mean that it is easy enough accounting for the loss of your jewels."

"Well?"

"Your friend, Mr. Bordine borrowed them, doubtless to tide over a financial difficulty."

"Janet!"

"Well, you can't trust these men."

"But you shall not insult August with such insinuations," cried Rose, reddening indignantly.

"Well, he was your only visitor. If a burglar had entered the house there would be some signs by which you could determine how he gained your room. None exist, so I say that it was undoubtedly that lover of yours who borrowed his lady's jewels."

And then Miss Williams gave vent to a tantalizing laugh, that only served to roil the feelings of Rose more deeply than ever.

"You ugly girl!" exclaimed Rose, "I ought to turn you out of this house for such vile aspersions. I won't, however, for I know you are only doing this to tease me."

"After all it is true."

"You don't believe any such thing, Janet."

"Yes I do."

Rose left her cousin, hot with indignation. She went to her mother, a weak invalid, who had no consolation to offer. That was not in her line. The word peevish would pretty well describe the condition of Mrs. Alstine, who had a chronic ailment that prevented her enjoying the hospitality of friends.

Two days passed with no solution of the mystery.

And during the time August Bordine did not come to the Alstine house. For this there was good reason. He was not yet able to move about comfortably on account of his hurt. He read of the burglary in the morning paper, and wondered if the police would prove any more successful in capturing the burglars than they had in elucidating the Ridgewood murder mystery.

After the passage of twenty-four hours the young engineer became not a little anxious with regard to Silas Keene.

The detective had promised to report before now, his visit to the saloon and

interview Perry Jounce, the tramp.

"Why did he not come?"

"I can't stand this much longer," murmured August, as he sat still under the burden of pain, waiting for some news from Keene.

Rose Alstine was not a strong-minded female, yet she possessed a will of her own, and once she set her mind on an object she was destined to obtain it or make a desperate effort at least.

A sudden resolve entered her mind to visit the home of August Bordine and consult with him on the mysterious burglary.

No sooner thought of than the impetuous girl proceeded to carry it into effect. She took a street car to the suburbs, and then, with directions from the driver, set out to find the house of Mr. Bordine, which she had never visited.

These were among dwellings in Grandon similar to the one occupied by August Bordine and his mother.

In a little time the girl came to a halt in front of a cottage.

"This must be the place," thought Rose, opening the gate.

She went to the front door and rung the bell. No answer was vouchsafed, and concluding that no one was at home, Rose turned to retrace her steps, when she espied a summer-house at a little distance, from which the murmur of voices proceeded.

The house was almost hidden by dense foliage.

"August and his mother are out yonder, it seems," thought Rose. "I will go to them, and give August a glad surprise." Then, with a light heart, the maiden tripped down a grass-lined path toward the summer-house.

She was to encounter a scene she little expected. Soon she was in the vicinity of the cool bower where August and his mother had retired for friendly chat.

"Don't speak that way, Andrew; it hurts me."

It was the voice of a woman, and involuntarily the steps of Rose Alstine halted. Could that be her lover's mother thus addressing her son? The girl was too deeply excited to notice that the name uttered was not that of her lover.

Moving on, Rose soon stood where she could gaze into the summer-house. Then she came to a halt. It was a picture that poor Rose never forgot—that presented to her at that moment.

She saw two persons in the little leaf-embowered room—a man and young woman.

The latter stood with hand clasped about the neck of the young man, who was handsome in the extreme. Was there a handsomer man in Grandon than August Bordine?

Rose did not believe it, and there he stood with that woman's arms about his neck, her pale face upturned to his, the light of a pleading, all-enduring love in her dark eyes.

It was a love scene in every sense of the word.

Rose shuddered and grew white, yet she dared not advance, dared not interrupt the scene presented to her gaze. Eavesdropping was foreign to her nature, yet at that moment it was not in her power to recede, and so she was held in her tracks—compelled to listen to words that rent her heart like death itself.

"My dear, you wrong me when you imagine that I care for any one but you. I did disapprove of your following me here, for you know that I must depend upon my wits for a living, and I think I might do better without the incumbrance of a wife."

"Oh, that is the same old argument. You have put me off with it time and again. I wish you would consent to do as other people do, and live an honest life."

"But I cannot. I must ever appear as a single man, for it would not do to let it be known that I have a wife. Zounds, Iris, I would be out of business in short order."

For some moments silence followed these words.

The rather pretty woman whom the gentleman had termed his wife still clung to the neck of her liege lord, evidently too much wrought up to speak again.

"Come now, Iris dear, let this scene end here and now. I have a little business of a most important nature on hand, and time is precious."

He tried to disengage her hands, but she clung to him with wonderful tenacity.

Neither saw the girl in the shadow of the vines outside, who regarded the twain with blanched cheeks, clasped hands, and eyes dilating with a weird and awful suffering.

"Time is precious," uttered the lips of the young wife. "Alas! that it should be so precious that you must needs neglect me. I wish to ask you a question, Andrew."

"Well?"

"Did you have aught to do with this robbery at the Alstine mansion?"

"Sh! my dear, that would be telling."

"I know you were up there two nights since."

"Ah, you were dogging my steps."

"No, but—"

"I cannot permit this to go on, Iris," uttered the man, sternly. "You are ruining my business, Iris. I do wish you would return to New York."

"I will go when you go."

"Not before?"

"Not before."

Then fell a silence. There was a worried, half-angry expression on the countenance of the man, that did not escape the notice of the girl, who, in spite of her inclination, was a listener to all that was taking place within the walls of the summer-house.

"Release me now, I must go," uttered the man, in accents that were harsh and stern.

Still the woman clung to his neck.

"Oh, my darling, my darling!" she wailed, half-sobbing in the strength of her emotion. "You must not go from me again, Andrew. I am your wife, and you have no right to flirt with other women!"

Seizing her hands, he tore them loose and flung her violently aside.

"This is enough of this foolishness," he declared, angrily. "I want you to remain here in seclusion and behave yourself. When I can settle down with a fortune, then I will acknowledge you before the world, and we will cut a swell; but let me tell you that if you envoke any further trouble simply because I visit other ladies occasionally, you will hear from me in a way that you little expect."

[Illustration: "OH, MY DARLING—MY DARLING!" SHE WAILED, HALF SOBBING IN THE STRENGTH OF HER EMOTION.]

The woman sank to a seat and covered her face with her hands, while a groan escaped her lips.

One glance he cast at her, then he turned and strode from the place. Another instant and he stood facing Rose Alstine, whose pallid face and flowing eyes quite startled him. "Heavens! you here?" he ejaculated, settling back in a tremor of dismay.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DETECTIVE'S LAST STRUGGLE.

Perry Jounce uttered a grunt of satisfaction when he saw that the detective was beyond power to know him for the time.

Jounce had been thoroughly posted by Andrew Barkswell, and knew that in the disguised man before him the noted detective was presented.

"So," muttered Jounce, as he touched a spring with his foot that sent the weight back to its place in the ceiling, "I reckon you won't trouble us gents agin."

Then he went over to the side of the stunned detective, secured his arms and removed his beard and gray hair. "Thought you was sharp enough to fool me," chuckled the villain. "I reckon you'll l'arn ef you ever git yer mind agin, that two kin play at ther game o' twist."

After these movements the tramp left the room. He was gone but a short time when he returned, accompanied by Billy Bowlegs.

"So you've thumped him?" muttered the saloon proprietor. "How much did you find?"

"Notting."

"See here, chum, that's too gauzy."

"Didn't ther boss pay yer a good hundred fer this room?" questioned Jounce, turning upon Bowlegs.

"He hasn't paid it yet. I'm not going to permit any snap games. This fellow doesn't go out of here till you pay the full price."

"That's ther snap!" returned Jounce. "You jest hang onter ther cuss, will yer? He ain't no good to me," and then the tramp chuckled audibly.

"But I can make you trouble."

"Kin yer?"

"Yes, I can."

"All right; heave ahead."

The saloon-keeper found that he was dealing with a man who was not to be frightened or deceived into paying over money unnecessarily.

"Never mind," he said, finally. "It's all right. You wish to dispose of this fellow effectually?"

"In course."

"I've never permitted bloodshed in my house," proceeded Billy Bowlegs, "but I'll tell you what we will do. We will drop the fellow down to the lower room, and leave him until the boss comes; then his fate will be decided upon."

"That suits me."

Bowlegs touched a spring with his foot, and the chair containing the stunned detective sank from sight.

The tramp stared at the opening in the floor wonderingly.

"I declare!" he finally exclaimed, "you've got this thing in shape to work to perfection, pardner."

The saloon-keeper smiled without reply.

"Where's the chap gone ter?"

"He is safe," answered Bowlegs. "I'll excuse you now."

"Wal, I swar, that are's cool."

Nevertheless the tramp departed. At the bar he swallowed a huge glass of brandy, and then passed upon the street.

From this it will be seen that Billy Bowlegs was in league with the notorious scoundrel who is known to the reader as Andrew Barkswell.

This, it will be remembered, was on the same night that the robbery was committed at the Alstine mansion.

When the detective returned to consciousness he found himself in a small, dark room, with solid walls of masonry about him, a close prisoner.

There was an awful pain in his head, indicating that he had been struck a severe blow.

He felt over his person, to discover that his weapons had been taken from him.

Then, with an effort, he came to his feet, and began groping about the room. Solid walls on every side met his touch.

"Well," he finally muttered, "I have learned one thing at least to-night—the fools of this world are not all dead. One of them, however, came pretty close to it."

It seemed an age to the imprisoned detective before the creaking of a door announced the coming of some one.

The door opened and closed, and a light filled the room, proceeding from a lantern in the hand of a man. This did not prove a brilliant illuminator, yet it served to reveal the countenance of the new-comer fairly well.

"So you are safely caged at last, my dear Keene," said the visitor, in a sarcastic voice.

"And this is your work, August Bordine, after all the confidence I placed in you," uttered the detective, in a rebuking voice.

"It was merely a game of wits, Mr. Keene. I was too smart for you, in spite of the fact that you're reputed to be the sharpest man-tracker in Gotham. I think it would pay you to hire me for a spell."

"This, then, was a put-up job?"

"That's about the size of it."

"That runaway and injury to yourself that the papers speak about was only a blind?"

"Only a blind, my dear Keene."

The villain smiled and stroked his mustache complacently. "I don't mind telling you, seeing you're not likely to give me any further trouble, that I shall marry the heiress to the Alstine estates and quit the precarious work that I have all along been following, and hereafter live a gentleman."

"Indeed!"

The detective could not help admiring the villain's coolness, even while despising his villainy.

"You congratulate me on my plan?"

"No. You cannot carry it out."

"And why not, pray? You won't be there to interfere, Mr. Keene. I have provided against such a contingency."

"You have a wife living."

"So you imagine, so *she* imagines; but it is a mere show. Iris is not my wife."

"You deceived her with a mock marriage?"

"That is about the size of it."

"What a consummate scoundrel."

"Don't use such pet expressions, my dear Keene, you hurt my feelings, you really do, I assure you."

"I expect to hurt your neck some time," retorted the detective, curtly.

"Oh, you do? Let me tell you, Mr. Keene, that that time will never come to you, never."

"It may come sooner than you imagine."

"I'll risk that."

"I would like to ask you a question."

"Go on."

"How about that old lady who occupies your house on —— street? Is she your mother?"

"Yes."

"Does she know what a scoundrel she has for a son?"

"She has no knowledge of my private affairs," returned Barkswell, not seeming to notice the offensive manner of putting the question used by Keene.

"And Iris is not your wife?"

"That's what I said."

"And Miss Alstine knows nothing of this, of your plans, your scheming to win a fortune through her?"

"Certainly not. I haven't been fool enough to give myself away."

The detective remained silent for a moment. Then he looked sharply into the face of Barkswell and said:

"I am puzzled to know why you saved me from the tramp last night, and took me to your home and nursed me so tenderly. Since you are so anxious to have me out of your way, why did you not leave me to die on the vacant lot, or give the finishing stroke there. It would have been the wisest plan, it seems to me, for such a reckless villain as you are, to pursue."

A low laugh fell from the lips of Barkswell.

"You do not understand me yet, Mr. Keene. Truth to tell I am one of the most tender-hearted creatures in the world. I haven't the heart to strike a man when he's down. I sympathized with you, and what is more, I wished to blind your eyes to my true intentions. You had put the bracelets on me and proclaimed that you were going to lead me to prison. I wanted to prove to you that you had made a mistake."

This to the detective seemed a lame explanation. He felt certain that the villain before him had not stated the case as it actually was.

"It seems I made no mistake after all," uttered Keene. "You are the right person, and I never ought have permitted you to go free an hour after I made the discovery of your villainy."

"What discovery do you refer to?"

"The murder of Victoria Vane."

"Then you still hold to the opinion that I committed that deed?"

"Certainly I do."

"Well, see here, Mr. Keene, I have you completely in my power, and do not intend that you shall ever again see the light of day. Under such circumstances I have no reason for uttering a falsehood. I solemnly assure you that I did not harm that poor girl. I am as innocent of that as you are. I did flirt with her a little I admit, but there was nothing serious took place, I would be willing to swear to this."

Of course the detective did not believe a word of this, although Barkswell uttered it in a solemn and apparently sincere manner.

"I believe you will yet swing for that murder," was Keene's sharp reply.

That Barkswell was the forger who was wanted in New York the detective was assured. He judged this from a photograph that he had in his possession the subject of which, however, had a full beard, and this had prevented Keene's recognizing the likeness when he was first introduced to Barkswell, alias Bordine, by young Ransom Vane.

It will be seen that the detective still believed that the young engineer and Barkswell were one and the same, which goes to prove that the two men resembled each other as twin brothers might. It was this resemblance that was to produce no end of trouble to all concerned in our story, which, by the way, has more of truth in it than most of the fictions of the present day.

"Well, you and I cannot agree if we talk all night," said the man with the lantern, "so I suppose this interview may as well come to an end at once."

From the tone of the man's voice, Keene judged that he meant to perpetrate a murder. With hands and limbs free, though weak from the blow he had received on the head, Silas Keene was not the man to give up life without a struggle.

The moment the last word fell from the lips of Barkswell Keene darted forward, full at the throat of the villain before him.

"Thunderation!"

With this exclamation Barkswell dropped his lantern and clinched with the detective.

Both went to the floor in a terrible struggle for the mastery.

Weakened though he was, the detective proved no mean adversary, and he might have conquered had not a third party appeared upon the scene, who at once went to the assistance of Barkswell, and by beating Keene over the head with the butt of a revolver he succeeded in quieting him so that he could be secured.

Keene, nearly senseless, was rolled upon the damp floor, upon his face, and his hands secured with a cord at his back.

"There, I reckon he won't give no more trouble," said a voice that the detective recognized as that of Perry Jounce, the tramp.

"Confound his picture," grated Barkswell. "I believe the scamp would have been too much for me if you hadn't come just as you did."

"Even the service of a brother-in-law hain't allus to be despised; eh, Andrew?"

"No. You did me a good turn just now, and I'll not forget it."

Detective Keene heard these remarks, and tried to profit by them.

"This man is fooling you, Mr. Jounce," cried Keene, faintly.

"Shut up."

This from Barkswell.

"I tell you that this man is fooling you. He is not—"

A blow on the head from the fist of Barkswell effectually silenced the tongue of the helpless detective. His senses reeled, and for a few minutes he was oblivious of his surroundings.

"What was the feller tryin' to git through him, Andy?"

"Nobody knows. Bear a hand and we'll put him where the hogs won't bite him."

Both men laid hold of the bound detective and dragged him to one side of the room.

The lantern, that had been overturned in the struggle, still burned, giving a faint light. Jounce hung it on a pin in the wall, and then turned to his companion, who had lifted a small trap door not far from the center of the room.

A gust of damp air, full of a moldy smell, came up.

"What's that?" questioned Jounce.

"An old well. They say it's forty feet down to the mud and water. It hasn't been used in years."

"What'll you do—?"

"Drop our friend into it. Nobody'll ever be the wiser."

"Good heavens, what a doom!"

Even the tramp shuddered at the thought of consigning a human being to that

awful tomb. Nevertheless he assisted Barkswell to lift Keene and bear him to the mouth of the well.

An instant later and Detective Keene shot from sight. A hollow cry came up, then solemn silence, as Barkswell closed the trap and turned away.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE HANDS OF A VILLAIN.

It will be remembered that Andrew Barkswell was startled to find that Rose Alstine had been listening to the confab between himself and wife. This was after the infamous plotter had consigned Detective Keene to a horrible doom at the bottom of the old well under Billy Bowlegs' saloon.

Now that the man-tracker was off the trail, Barkswell felt better. He had concocted a tremendous plot that his theft of the diamonds came near despoiling. It was not his wish to have Rose know of the existence of his wife. If necessary, the villain had resolved to put that wife out of the way forever.

There never was a plotter less scrupulous than this man, whose smooth tongue and jaunty exterior had stood him so well during almost a lifetime of villainy.

Now, at one fell stroke, his villainy lay exposed.

He regarded Rose for some moments with painful silence.

"I have found you out at last," cried the maiden, her cheeks flaming, a lofty scorn in her great dark eyes.

"Rose, don't misjudge me."

"Misjudge you?"

"Yes; I repeat it, you misjudge me, Rose Alstine."

For some moments she did not speak. Then, of a sudden, she made a movement as if to enter the place where this man's wife sat bowed and weeping.

He put out his hand.

"Do not go in there."

"Stand aside, sir."

She pushed her way forward in spite of his interference, and stood confronting the woman in the summer-house.

A white face, marked with the most intense suffering, was uplifted to the gaze of the young girl.

"Are you August Bordine's wife?"

Rose put the question hotly, so full of indignation as scarcely to contain herself in calmness.

"His wife?"

"Yes."

"I am Andrew Barkswell's wife, I do not know the parson you mention."

"Indeed! So he has more than one name, the infamous wretch!"

Then, with a great sobbing cry, Rose Alstine turned and fled from the place, dropping her veil to hide the haggard woe that revealed on her countenance. Slowly Barkswell came back into the presence of his wife.

"And it is thus you would betray me," he said in an angry tone. "Iris, I am sorry that you are determined to ruin me."

"Ruin you?"

"That is the word."

"How can you talk that way, Andrew, you who have made my life a hell since the hour I first met and loved you. It was that mad and hopeless love that has led me to do things that, if they were known, would shock the minds of men.

"You know how I have suffered to please you, Barkswell. I almost feel that it

would be a relief to end all in death."

"I wish you might," he uttered in a heartless tone. "You have been my evil genius always, Iris Jounce. It was a sorry day that I married you. You deceived me by leading me to believe that you had money."

"I know now that it was for money alone that you married me. I did have money, and you spent it, and would now kick me aside, if I would only permit it, but I will not, I mean to continue pleading until you consent to quit your evil ways and settle down to a quiet home life—"

"Bah!"

"Andrew Barkswell, who was that beautiful girl? One you have deceived, no doubt."

"You seem capable of answering your own question," he said, with a sneer.

"Have I answered it correctly?"

"Possibly."

He plucked at his mustache and looked into vacancy. He was deeply angered, both with himself and with the woman before him. It was an unfortunate thing to have Rose Alstine come upon them as she did.

At that moment the schemer felt like strangling this woman, whose love for him, through good and evil report, passed understanding.

"You have not answered my question, Andrew," persisted the wife.

"The lady was Miss Alstine, I think."

"You think?"

"Well, I suppose I *know* that she is. A very eccentric girl, and somewhat flighty in the upper story."

"Crazed?"

"That's about it, Iris."

"And you have been the cause of it?"

There was a look in the woman's eyes at that moment not pleasant to see. In fact, even he recoiled from it in evident annoyance and alarm.

This woman had long been his simple tool, doing many things that at one time she would have shrunk from in horror and loathing. Andrew Barkswell had dragged her down to his own level, and was even now meditating her complete destruction. He had never scorned her, or told the truth, that she was no longer loved. He understood her nature too well. He pretended the most extravagant affection at times, and it was thus that he held her confidence, in spite of the facts that bade her hate and despise him.

"No, Iris; you are mistaken," said the man, in answer to the last words of his wife. "I have never harmed the girl, nor do I wish to do so. I hope you won't borrow any trouble over her."

"I ought not to, I suppose."

And then followed a bitter laugh.

"If you had done as I wished, and remained in Rochester, it would have been much better."

"Do you think so?"

"Certainly I do."

"You wish me to return?"

"I do."

"That you may make love to this girl you have the cheek to tell me is crazy? Bah! I tell you there's method in her madness. I believe you have pretended to be a single man, and that, as you ruined and murdered Victoria Vane, you would ruin and slay this beautiful girl. I will not permit you to do it!"

"What! You will step in and destroy my plans? By Heaven you shall not! I will strangle you first!"

She uttered a terrified scream as he sprang at her, and clutched her throat furiously.

CHAPTER XV.

HIRAM SHANKS.

"Help! Murder!"

It was a startling cry that echoed through the grounds and fell on the ear of the man who was passing.

He listened a moment, but the sound was not repeated.

Vaulting the fence, the man hastened in the direction of the summer-house.

He soon gained a position where his black eyes took in a somewhat startling scene—a tall, slender man bending over the prostrate form of a woman, the latter lying still and white on a low, wide bench.

"Have I killed her?" muttered the man, in audible tones. "Well, if I have, it is not my fault; she forced me to do it, and—"

He started then, and uttered a great cry. A hand touched his face, and a man's visage peered into his.

Instantly the hand of Barkswell sought his hip.

"Don't draw, brother, it's only me."

Barkswell stared in a startled way into the face of the new-comer.

It was indeed Perry Jounce, but he had changed so in the past four and twenty hours as to seem like another man.

His beard was gone, and a new hat and suit of clothes altered his appearance

wonderfully.

"What have you been doing to yourself, Perry?"

"Fixing up so't I kin go sparkin' as well as you, brother darling," returned the tramp, forcing a gurgling laugh. "What's up here? Iris dead—you *her murderer!*"

"Don't be a fool, Perry, she's only fainted."

"But I heard her scream murder."

The eyes of Perry Jounce pierced the guilty villain to the quick. If there was one being in the wide world whom the miserable tramp loved, that person was his sister, the wife of Andrew Barkswell, and the only kin he had in the wide world.

"She was in one of her tantrums, that is all."

"Man, I believe you're lyin' now."

"Be careful."

Barkswell drew his revolver.

The threat did not appear to affect Perry Jounce.

"It wouldn't be good fur you ter snap that pistol at me, Andy. I jest heard you say't mebbe you had killed her, meanin' Iris. Now what hev you ben up to?—let's hear right down quick, or thar'll be a tussle right hyar and now."

There was a determined ring in the man's voice not to be mistaken.

Barkswell wished to avoid a quarrel, and so he said with a smile:

"You misunderstood my meaning entirely, Perry. Iris was determined on quarreling with me over an unimportant matter. You know she's terribly jealous, and she worked herself up into a fainting fit."

Perry Jounce accepted the explanation with a growl. He did not attempt to push matters to a crisis. He had received some money from Barkswell, and was anxious to keep in with that gentleman.

"Lead the way, pardner, and I'll take her to the house."

Perry Jounce lifted the seemingly lifeless form of his sister in his arms and strode from the summer-house.

Barkswell led the way to the cottage, and a little later the woman revived. When questioned by Jounce she refused to make any explanation.

"Confound it," growled the tramp, "that man of yours'll kill you some time, Iris, and you'll let 'im do it 'ithout making complaint."

"I should not care to see Andrew in prison."

"He may go thar yet."

"Anything new?"

"Somebody's got ter swing fer the crime at Ridgewood; why mayn't it be Andy?"

The woman started and grew pale as death.

Her brother thought she was on the point of fainting again.

"Don't worry," he cried, quickly. "It may never be fetched home to Andy."

"Do you believe he is guilty?"

"Don't you?"

He sought to evade the question.

"I—I cannot say. I have thought—"

"That *I* had a hand in it, eh?"

The eyes of the tramp regarded his sister's face fixedly.

But Mrs. Barkswell refused to make reply. She shuddered and drew her shawl about her as though experiencing a sudden chill.

All this time her husband sat on the porch enjoying a cigar, his busy brain dwelling on the latest scheme it had conjured up.

It was unfortunate, he thought, Rose Alstine's coming at that inopportune moment. He could not understand how it was that she put in an appearance at his house.

"She mistook me for her lover, that is evident," he mused. "It was unfortunate, and I may now have some trouble in convincing her that I am true. It is highly important that August Bordine does not meet her again. What a strong resemblance there must be between that man and myself to deceive the eyes of love.

"If I could only get rid of my wife and marry the heiress what a grand stroke it would be. Well, there's a saying that nothing venture nothing gain, and I mean to go in on that principle. I'll win the heiress, but first *two* persons must cease to breathe."

Who these two persons were the reader can readily guess.

While the young schemer sat there smoking and meditating, a queer team halted in front of the cottage—a team of dogs attached to a small wagon, in which sat a man, with deformed shoulders, and queer little face, framed in red hair and beard, a black patch tied over one eye, while the other was exceedingly red and inflamed.

"Hello!" called the man from the street.

A smile touched the face of Andrew Barkswell.

"A confounded notion peddler," he muttered, "yet a queer-looking specimen."

"Hello!"

At the second call Barkswell rose to his feet and walked out to the gate.

"Be you the man of the house?"

"I am."

"Wal, I've got the neatest set o' table-clothes you ever set eyes on. Irish linen, direct from the green sod, warranted to be the best article of the kind for the money in North America."

"I don't wish any."

"But you'll look at 'em. You're a gentleman; I can tell by the looks of your countenance."

"I don't care for any."

"Hair oil, toilet articles, the neatest—"

"You needn't mind showing them," as the little, elderly man sprang out of his low wagon and hobbled to the walk with a tin box under his arm.

"Where's the woman—your wife? Mebbe she'd like to look at something."

The man pushed his way through the gate and insisted on entering the house.

This was wholly unnecessary Barkswell thought, but he permitted the peddler to have his way.

Iris and her brother entered t spread out his wares.

He talked glibly, but was such a repulsive-looking personage as to render his long stay objectionable. In order to be rid of him Mrs. Barkswell made a small purchase, after which, finding that he could sell nothing further, the peddler thrust his wares back into the tin box and shuffled out of the room.

"Pretty place you've got here," he remarked, as he stood on the porch and gazed about him.

"Yes," admitted Barkswell.

"You own it?"

"Yes."

"Your name is—"

"Bordine."

The man uttered the name involuntarily. He had been acting as Bordine, and somehow, he seemed growing into that personage more and more.

"Well, well," grunted the peddler, holding out his hand, "You an' I ought to be acquainted. My wife is your own aunt, did you know it?"

Andrew Barkswell regarded the speaker in astonishment. He thought he detected an ironical ring in the man's voice, but when he glanced into the fellow's face he seemed honest enough, in fact the red eye failed to show the least feeling on the subject—the one under the black patch was, of course, as unspeakable as the tomb.

"I was not aware of the relationship," said the plotting villain, as he clasped the hand of the queer-looking peddler.

"Lor', that's funny."

"You don't live in town?"

"I reckon not. So you don't remember me, August?"

"I can't say that I do."

"You've certainly heard your ma speak of Hiram Shanks, the man that married her youngest sister, Lucretia?"

Again the young man shook his head.

"Well, it beats all," grunted Mr. Shanks. "I thought you must have heard of me. Since my wife died I've kinder gone to rack and ruin. I ain't the man I used to be in my young days, oh no!" with a long-drawn sigh.

"I should judge not."

"Call your ma, August. I know she'll recognize the man that married her sister Lucretia."

"Mother isn't at home."

"Bad again. When will she return?"

"Not soon."

"Visitin'?"

"Yes."

"Would you mind lettin' me stop over night with ye? Hotel bills is powerful large, and for the sake of relationship, I think you will let me bunk one night. My team won't eat much, and as for me, a crust of bread and cup o' tea will set the inner man in good shape."

"I am sorry, but—"

"Oh, no 'pologies. Of course, if you can't keep me it's all right. I'm no beggar."

Once more the peddler shook the hand of Mr. Barkswell, and then shuffled away. As he passed through the gate a bit of paper fluttered to the ground from one of the peddler's pockets. After the queer fellow's departure Barkswell secured the paper and could scarcely repress an exclamation as he read the lines it contained.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ENGINEER PUZZLED.

A young man ran up the steps at the Alstine mansion and rang the bell. The servant who answered stared at the gentleman as though there was some noticeable curiosity about him.

There was nothing curious, however, in the make-up of the gentleman.

He was young and handsome, and the reader knows him as August Bordine, the young engineer.

The young man had been laid up for more than a week by the hurt he had received when his horse ran away.

He had seen or heard nothing of Rose during this time.

The unaccountable absence of the detective troubled the young man not a little as well, and he resolved to make an investigation immediately.

"Is Miss Alstine at home?"

The servant answered in the affirmative, and showed the young gentleman to the elegant parlor.

Usually Rose received him in person, thus doing away with the ceremony of servants.

She was not expecting him.

This of course accounted for her not coming at once to meet him.

Ten minutes passed, and then the maid returned.

August looked up, expecting to see the smiling face of Rose.

"Miss Alstine can't receive visitors."

"Is she ill?" questioned the young man in sudden alarm.

"No, she's as well as usual."

"Did you tell her who called?"

"Yes, sir."

The face of the young engineer was a puzzle to look at.

He refused to depart until the maid went once more to see her mistress.

On her return she brought a note from Rose, that was as great a puzzle to the engineer as was the curious acting of his betrothed.

"MR. BORDINE:—There can be no necessity for an interview. No explanation you can make will sunder the facts. I beg you not to come again, as, under no circumstances, will I consent to see you. Your coming now assures me that you have impudence as well as a double nature. R. ALSTINE."

The young man walked from the room like one in a dream.

What did, what could it all mean? It was impossible for August to understand.

His was a dejected mien as he walked slowly homeward. A pair of bright eyes watched him from a curtained upper window of the great house, and in a maiden's heart was the suddenest longing possible to one broken under the cruel treachery of its hero.

"What is the trouble, August?" questioned Mrs. Bordine the moment he entered the presence of his mother.

"Nothing."

"Ah, you cannot deceive me in that way, my son. I know something is wrong, and—"

"Yes, something is wrong," he interrupted with bitter vehemence. "I have been spat upon by a girl, and never until now did I realize what a fool I was to think of losing my heart to a flirt like Rose Alstine."

"August, what do you mean?"

"That Rose has jilted me."

"I am glad of it."

"Mother!"

"I always warned you not to look so high," proceeded the old lady, with arms akimbo, regarding her son. "Not that I consider Rose Alstine high only in money matters, but such girls are always heartless."

Then she went back to her work leaving the young man to fight out his grief as best he could alone.

That evening, while the young engineer sat meditating over the events of the past few days, a sharp ring at the door-bell roused him from his somewhat bitter thoughts.

He went into the hall, opened the door, and peered out into the dimly-lighted street.

No one was to be seen, but a small bit of folded paper fell at his feet, evidently having been but slightly attached to the edge of the casing.

Seizing the paper, the young man closed the door and went back to the cozy cottage parlor.

"Who was it, August?"

But just then the young man was too busy imbibing the contents of the bit of paper to heed the words of his mother.

"MR. BORDINE—Be ever on the alert. A conspiracy has been formed for your destruction. It is time you were up and doing. Silas Keene has already fallen, and you have been marked. I implore you, be on your guard.

"A. FRIEND."

After a moment given to thought, August handed the note over to his mother.

"What does it mean?"

This was her comment after she had possessed herself of the contents of the mysterious note.

"It may mean a good deal," he answered. "I hope, however, that no harm has come to Silas Keene; yet I am at a loss to understand why he remains away so long."

"He promised to return?"

"Yes."

For some moments a silence fell between mother and son, broken at length by a second ring at the bell.

"We seem to have visitors in plenty," uttered the young engineer, as he went again to the door.

On the step stood a small boy.

"Well, my little man."

"A letter for you, sir," and the lad placed an envelope in the hand of the engineer.

Would wonders never cease?

"Wait a moment."

But the boy was gone.

August went slowly back into the house.

"Another letter?" questioned Mrs. Bordine.

"It seems so."

He opened it slowly.

"MR. BORDINE,—It is important that you come at once if you would see Silas Keene alive. He has met with a terrible and unexpected accident, and has something of importance to communicate before he dies. He has importuned me all day to send for you. I have been unable until now, but I sincerely hope this may reach you before the poor man is no more. A hack will be at your door at precisely nine o'clock to take you to Keene's side. If you disappoint him it will certainly hasten his death. Confidently expecting you, I remain 'HENRY JONES.'"

After reading this to himself, the young engineer read it aloud to his mother.

"So the poor gentleman has met with an accident," murmured the kind old lady. "How sad. If we had only known this at the outset we might have had him brought here."

"Certainly we might."

Bordine came to his feet and began pacing the floor.

He was not yet wholly recovered from the shock he had received from being thrown against a telegraph pole some days before, and he would much rather have remained at home than venture out into the chill air of night. He had a duty in the premises, however.

This was the first word he had heard from Silas Keene since he left his home to meet the notorious tramp, Perry Jounce, in Billy Bowleg's saloon.

August thought of the first note he had received—a warning to be constantly on his guard, and found himself wondering who wrote it. Not the detective, for in this note was a statement that Keene had been stricken down. And this bore out the statement of the last letter. It seemed evident that a terrible accident had happened to the detective, or else he had been criminally assaulted. In either case

it seemed evident to the young man his duty to visit Keene if possible.

"What had I best do, mother?" finally questioned the young man.

Before asking the question August had fully determined upon his course, but he was anxious to have his mother's approval as well.

"Go, by all meant, August."

"That was my determination," assured the engineer.

She was wholly unsuspecting, and had no thought that her son might go to his own doom.

Why should she feel suspicious? Who would care to harm her son, who, she fully believed, had never injured a human soul?

August had suspicions, however, and he secured a revolver upon his person ere venturing out upon his mission.

Promptly at nine the sound of wheels was heard, ceasing in front of the engineer's cottage.

Kissing his mother good-by August hastened forth. A hack stood near the sidewalk, the door standing open.

It was dark within, but the young man noted the outlines of a man upon the forward seat.

August stepped inside and closed the door. Then the hack rattled away. For some moments silence reigned. August wondered who his fellow-passenger was. Perhaps the one who had sent him the note requesting his presence at the side of the dying detective.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DAGGER!

Mrs. Bordine sat listening to the rattle of departing wheels, and wondered if she would be able to sit up until the return of her son.

She little imagined how long he was to remain away.

Half an hour after her son's departure the good widow was startled at hearing a sound at the front window.

Slowly the sash was being raised!

The hour was late, and the old lady thought of burglars at once. But what could they possibly want in her house? All the money for the past year's earnings, save what was needed for necessary expenses, was snugly in the bank.

Slowly and cautiously the sash slid upward.

Mrs. Bordine came to her feet, and stood chilled with an awful fear in the centre of the room.

Crash!

A heavy body fell to the floor directly under the window-sill.

Then the curtain was parted, and a man's face peered into the room, with eyes so devilish in their glitter as to make the woman's flesh creep. "Keep it. August sent it. He won't be home to-night," said a deep, guttural voice.

Then the face disappeared.

The window-sash fell with a loud crash, followed by the most solemn silence.

For fully five minutes Mrs. Bordine stood petrified, without articulation.

What had happened?

The moment she could gather her senses sufficiently, she crossed the floor and gazed at the object that lay under the window.

An ordinary newspaper was twisted about it, and when Mrs. Bordine took it in her hand, she realized that the substance was of metal.

Swiftly she unwound the paper.

As she held up her prize an involuntary exclamation fell from her lips.

She held in her hand a glittering dagger, with gold hilt, and point as keen as a briar. It was a beautiful weapon.

There was something in the glitter of the dainty weapon that was fascinating.

The hilt was of gold, and the serpent's head that formed the design held a pair of glittering eyes that made the woman's flesh creep.

"Why was this dropped in here?" uttered Mrs. Bordine, as she laid the ugly, yet beautiful, weapon aside, and went about securing the window against further intrusion.

"August sent it, that horrible man said. If so, why did he not come to the door like a decent person would?"

Sure enough.

The door to her son's room stood ajar, and mechanically Mrs. Bordine entered here with the delicate dagger in her hand.

The plush-lined dressing-case in front of the mirror stood open, and into this the widow laid the glittering toy.

Shutting down the cover she left the room, and resumed her seat in the big arm-chair.

As may be supposed, no sleep visited the old lady that night. She was too deeply worried on account of the strange happenings of the night. Nothing occurred to mar the quiet of the night, and when at length day dawned the widow breathed easier as she went about her work.

The hour was late ere she placed breakfast on the table. She had waited for the return of August, but waited in vain.

"He will not come. I must eat alone."

She was yet at her breakfast when a furious ring at the door-bell startled her.

When she hastened to answer the summons, she was met in the hall by two men, both wearing the uniform of city police.

"Mercy on us! what do you want here?" cried the widow in startled tones.

"We are here on important business," said the foremost officer. "We come to see your son."

"He is not at home."

"Permit *us* to judge of that."

Pushing her aside, the two men went through the different rooms of the little cottage, rummaging through everything, much to the dismay and indignation of Mrs. Bordine.

They were dissatisfied with their search, and looked their anger as they had confronted the widow after it was all over.

"Where is your son, Mrs. Bordine?"

"I—I'm sure I can't tell you."

"But you must tell."

"How can I tell when I don't know?"

"A likely story," sneered the officer.

"It is the truth, sir."

The officer went outside, leaving his companion within, with injunction to keep a close watch on the woman.

There were two members of the force outside who had been watching the front and rear of the house.

"Have you seen the young villain?"

"Haven't seen a live soul, sergeant."

"Then he must still be in the house. The old woman is obstinate as death."

"Better not go too fast, sergeant," said the man in charge of the front entrance. "It is possible that we have made a mistake."

"Not the least possibility of it," retorted the sergeant of police. "The young man claims to have positive evidence that Bordine murdered his sister."

"I know, but he may be mistaken."

"He said that the weapon used was a dagger of slender make. If we could find that."

"Have you searched for it?"

"Not exactly. We have been looking more particularly after the man."

The police sergeant returned then to the inside of the cottage.

Mrs. Bordine was still defiant.

Poor old woman, she could not understand why officers of the law should seek her son, much less why they should insult an old lady by discrediting her word.

"I order you out of my house."

Mrs. Bordine was becoming indignant at last.

The men paid no heed to the order. The sergeant began the search once more.

"You'll pay for this outrage," declared the widow.

"Hold your tongue," retorted the second man, laying his hand on the arm of the widow. "We have the law and the right on our side."

"You have not," retorted Mrs. Bordine. "I haven't heard you read a search-warrant."

"It's not necessary."

At this moment an exclamation fell from the lips of the police sergeant. He came from August Bordine's room, bearing in his hand a small dressing-case, which he held up before the eyes of the widow.

"Madam, who owns that?"

"You don't, I can tell you that."

"No. Is it yours?"

"It belongs to August."

"Your son?"

"Yes, sir."

"I thought so. And this is his, also?"

With these words the officer opened the case and took therefrom a slender dagger.

At sight of this the wrinkled face of Mrs. Bordine blanched, a fact that did not escape the notice of the keen-eyed sergeant.

"So, ho!" he exclaimed.

"Ah, ha!" uttered the second one, with a grunt.

"Now, what does this mean?" Mrs. Bordine finally gasped.

"Exactly what I would ask," returned the sergeant. "I've no doubt you will deny

that this natty little weapon belongs to your son."

The eyes of the police sergeant regarded the widow fixedly.

He prided himself on being an expert detective, and for many days he had been investigating the murder at Ridgewood, with a view to winning the five thousand reward offered by the county sheriff.

The wound given Ransom Vane by the tramp proved but a trivial affair, and immediately on his recovery from the nervous shock into which it had thrown him, the young man came to Grandon and communicated his suspicions to the police.

"I do deny it," uttered Mrs. Bordine at length. "I never saw that dagger until last evening."

"Indeed!"

"Hasn't it been in your son's possession for a long time?"

"It was never in his possession."

"But we find it in his room—"

"I know, and I put it there last night during his absence. He has never seen the weapon."

"Preposterous."

"Yes, thin!"

Mrs. Bordine became exceedingly angry at these incredulous remarks. She at once told how the dagger came into her possession.

Her story was greeted with contemptuous laughter.

The suspicions of the officers now became convictions.

"I am sorry for you, Mrs. Bordine," said Sergeant Railing. "I had hoped that you had no guilty knowledge of your son's iniquities. It seems that you're no better than he, and I must therefore take you with me."

"Take me with you?"

"That's it exactly."

"Where to?"

"To the county jail!"

Poor Mrs. Bordine.

She reeled under the blow, and began to cry—broken utterly under the stroke.

Sergeant Railing was merciless, however, and the poor widow was obliged to keep him company to prison.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DESPERATE ENCOUNTER.

"How far do we have to go?" queried August, after the hack had rattled on for some minutes in silence.

"Eh?"

"How far do we go?"

"How far?"

"Yes," cried the young engineer impatiently, not relishing the apparent obtuseness of the man outlined before him.

"Excuse me," said the man; "I was in a brown study and did not catch on to your remark. If you will please repeat it, I will then try to answer."

"Aren't you the gentleman who sent the note?"

"Certainly."

"Then you must know how far it is to the place where Silas Keene is lying wounded and dying."

"Certainly I do. Mr. Keene is about four miles from your place, at a small cabin in the woods—"

"Indeed! How did he come to be in such a place?"

"He was on somebody's trail."

"You are acquainted with Mr. Keene?"

"Yes."

"Your name is Henry Jones?"

"It is."

"Why did you not come for me in person without writing the letter?"

"That might have been the proper way, but I am not like other people, Mr. Bordine. I am considered a peculiar man. It was a freak of mine, I suppose, that I did not do as you say. Fact is, I did not think it possible for me to leave Keene at the time I wrote the letter."

"You afterward found him better?"

"Slightly, yes."

"Is he badly hurt?"

"He will die."

"In what manner was he injured?"

"He was flung from a horse."

"In the city?"

"No, in the woods while he was in pursuit of a burglar."

"Indeed!"

Then the young engineer fell to thinking deeply. He was not exactly satisfied with the situation of affairs. He was well assured of one thing, however, and that was that something had happened to Silas Keene, and it seemed that the mystery of the detective's disappearance was likely to be revealed this night.

After a time the lights of the city disappeared and the hack rattled on over a country road.

When at length it came to a halt, intense darkness surrounded them.

Mr. Jones rose and opened the door.

The two alighted.

Jones paid the driver for his services, and then the two men stood alone beside the road, with the dying rattle of swift-flying wheels in their ears.

"What now?"

This question fell from the lips of August Bordine as he gazed about him in the darkness.

"This way."

A hand fell to the shoulder of Mr. Jones. "See here," cried the engineer, "I am not fully satisfied with these proceedings."

"Aren't you?"

"I am not."

"You can return if you like, only it will be hard on the poor man who lays on a rude cot in the shanty over yonder, dying. He said you was his friend."

"An acquaintance only."

"Very well, you can do as you choose about continuing the journey. I have acted in good faith all along."

"How much farther is it?"

"About half a mile."

"Go on, I will follow."

And then the two men moved from the road, following a path into the woods.

August began to suspect something wrong, but he felt that he had gone too far to turn back now, and with his hand on the butt of his trusty revolver, he went

forward, resolving to see the adventure through to the end.

Every now and then a bush would brush the face of Bordine, showing that the path was narrow and the wood dense.

Presently a light flashed through the darkness, and soon our two pedestrians found themselves in front of a log cabin, that stood a few yards back from a narrow, brawling creek, whose waters were lashed to foam over rocks and stones.

"This is the place."

Mr. Jones pushed open the door and bade his companion enter.

"Go on; I will follow."

Thus urged, the man walked into a dimly-lighted room, which was almost entirely bare of furniture.

August followed and gazed about the cabin, not a little surprised to find it empty. A light burned on a shelf at one side of the room—a tallow dip—that sputtered and threatened soon to leave the place in total darkness.

The cabin presented no evidence of having been inhabited of late.

One glance about the room, then August regarded his guide for the first time in the light.

He started involuntarily.

He had seen the man before. It was the same person he had seen in the carriage with the woman on the day that he first noticed the placard announcing a reward for the capture of Victoria Vane's murderer.

He had heard him called Mr. Brown.

This fact at once roused the suspicions of the young engineer to fever-heat. He believed now that he was the victim of a deep-laid plot.

With his hand on his revolver, he looked the bearded stranger squarely in the

face, and said:

"Mr. Brown, what does this mean?"

But the man addressed thus abruptly was not looking at August. Instead, he gazed beyond, into the depths of the night outside, the door standing open.

There was the sound of a step outside.

Bordine turned quickly.

A stalwart form was framed in the narrow door—the form of Perry Jounce, the tramp!

There was the gleam of a devil in the man's eye, and in his right hand he clinched the haft of a huge knife.

Instantly the young engineer realized that murder was intended.

Self defense is the first law of nature, and Bordine acted upon it with the quickness of lightning. His right hand shot forward, a bright flash followed, and the next instant the burly form of Perry Jounce disappeared from the doorway.

He had fallen, bleeding, to the ground, from the bullet August Bordine sent hurtling into his face.

Before the young engineer could turn, a pair of strong arms encircled his waist, and he was crushed to the floor under the weight of the man calling himself Henry Jones.

Our young engineer had not yet regained his full strength since his hurt in the runaway accident, and taken at a disadvantage, he labored in vain to throw off his antagonist.

"Confound you!" hissed the man in a voice full of intense wrath, "I'll fix you so you won't shoot any more honest men."

He clutched his antagonist by the throat, and attempted to throttle him.

August prevented this, turned suddenly, and hurled his foe backward against the

wall.

With a leap like a tiger the engineer came to his feet.

"Hold up!" yelled Jones, whose face was bleeding from scratches received in the scuffle.

Panting from exertion, August leveled his revolver and fired.

His hand was unsteady, and the bullet flew wide of the mark.

At this moment a sound behind him warned Bordine to guard his rear. He turned to see the man he supposed dead once more on his feet, with bloody face and flowing eyes, clutching at the side of the door to steady himself.

The sight startled the young engineer, and deeming it best to seek safety in flight, he turned, dealt the reeling tramp a tremendous blow in the face that swept him from his feet, and dashed swiftly into the blackness of the night.

The man in the shanty sprang swiftly after, anxious now to prevent the escape of his intended victim.

If Bordine escaped them the country would ring with the news of the attempted tragedy. Dashing with the swiftness of a deer, Jones passed over the bulky form of Perry Jounce, and caught the outlines of the fleeing engineer moving directly toward the foaming creek.

He had him now.

With the creek before, and a determined man with a cocked revolver behind, it did not seem possible for the engineer to escape.

"Halt!"

Was Harry Jones anxious to capture his man alive?

Evidently not, yet the call to halt had the effect desired. Bordine came to a momentary pause on the bank of the brawling creek—long enough for his mad pursuer to take aim and fire.

With the flash and report came a loud cry, as of a human being in pain. Instantly, on firing, Jones darted forward.

He was just in time to see the engineer plunge headlong into the boiling waters of the creek!

"Good by, young chap. I reckon you won't trouble your betters again," cried the elated homicide. "The Alstine fortune shall yet be smine—selah!"

CHAPTER XIX.

STRANGE VISITORS.

"THAT MURDER MYSTERY.

"After some weeks of uncertainty the mystery surrounding the murder of Victoria Vane, a beautiful young girl of Ridgewood, seems likely to be closed up. Mr. Ransom Vane, the brother of the murdered girl, has been in our city for some time in secret communication with officers of the law. Young Vane is something of a detective himself, and he has succeeded in fixing the crime, it is believed, upon the right person, a young man of supposed spotless reputation, living with his widowed mother in the northern part of the city. The name of the guilty man is August Bordine, a surveyor and civil engineer, who it seems was a somewhat frequent visitor at the home of the Vanes, and report says that he won the girl's heart, and promised to make her his wife. At the same time his guilty connection with another woman in this city prevented his keeping faith with the Vane girl. A quarrel resulted, and in a moment of passion the young engineer struck the girl to the ground. The instrument of murder was a narrow-bladed dagger of delicate pattern, which is now in the hands of the police. Early this morning the officers raided the house of the guilty man, but evidently having got wind of the intentions of the police the young man fled. It is not believed that he can escape, however, since the telegraph has wafted the news throughout the country. As a necessary precaution the young man's mother was taken to prison. It is possible that if she knows about the murder, she will make a confession. It is to be hoped that the culprit may be brought to speedy justice."

This is what Miss Williams read in the afternoon paper, and a cynical smile overspread her face as she hurried to find her cousin anxious to impart the news.

"News for you, Rose," exclaimed the old maid, tripping into the great parlor

where the young heiress sat alone reading.

Rose looked up with a tired expression of countenance. She was pale and sad, evidently having suffered not a little from the change in her affairs since she visited the grounds of the Bordine cottage.

"Never mind, Janet, I do not care to read it."

"Shall I read it to you?"

"Yes, if you are determined."

Seating herself near Miss Williams, read in slow, even tones, the announcement of the arrest of Mrs. Bordine and the flight of her son.

Miss Williams regarded her fair cousin furtively the moment she finished reading. Rose's face was deadly pale, and her white hands became clinched until the blood seemed ready to burst through the pink nails.

"August was no better than the rest of the men, Rose. You can't trust one of them out of your sight."

A sigh alone answered her.

"I never thought much of that man, Rose. You remembered, I told you once that there was a look about his eyes that reminded me of the criminal who murdered his wife down in New Hampshire. I never could forget that man. I shudder now when I think of it."

"Hush, Janet."

"But it wasn't your fault, of course, you are so young and inexperienced. Now, as for me, I can see through a man in an instant; it's a sort of intuition that some women possess, thus making them wiser than their companions. I always expected to hear something bad of that love of yours."

Rose came to her feet.

"Now, coz, don't get your back up"—But Rose Alstine paid no heed to the injunction of her tormenting cousin; she rushed from the room, and, speeding up

stairs, locked herself in her own cozy chamber, there to combat her grief as best she could.

She did not descend until a late hour in the evening, and even then there were ominous red lines about her eyes, indicating that she had been weeping.

A jingle at the door-bell sent one of the servants to answer it.

A dog rushed in, followed by a man, who had a string in his hand, one end fastened to the dog's collar. On his back—the dog's—was strapped a tin box.

"Excuse me, Miss, but I'd like to see the Mistress," said the man, whose red hair and beard, and eye covered with a black patch, made him rather a disgusting object to look upon.

Miss Williams and Rose were yet in the dining-room lingering over a late dinner.

"I'll see," said the maid, but dog and peddler followed her at once into the presence of the ladies.

Quite a ripple of amusement was created at the novel sight of the dog bearing the peddler's pack.

"Ladies, I beg your pardon," cried the queer looking man, lifting his hat and thrusting it under his arm.

Then he called the dog, unfastened the tin box and opened it, displaying Yankee notions in abundance.

But Miss Alstine wanted none of these.

Janet and the maid, however, seemed quite pleased with the display, and examined everything in the box, while Rose petted the dog, a shaggy, good-natured fellow.

The peddler, while expatiating on the good qualities of his goods, managed to steal to the side of Rose.

"Keep up your grit, Miss, they won't capture August. He is innocent, and the guilty one will ere long be brought to justice."

Thus whispered the peddler in the ear of the young girl.

Rose manifested her surprise with a short and half-smothered exclamation.

"Get down, Tige. Go away, you bad dog," cried out the peddler suddenly, to hide the emotion expressed by Miss Alstine. His ruse was a success, the maid and Miss Williams failing to notice the agitation of Rose.

A little later dog and peddler left the house, he having disposed of a few simple articles to the maid and Miss Williams.

"What a queer looking man," remarked the maid, as she stood at the window watching the movements of the one-eyed peddler and his dog team.

"Queer indeed," murmured Rose.

That evening Rose Alstine received a caller whom she little expected—the woman she had seen in the summer-house in the arms of August Bordine.

"Can I see you alone for a moment, Miss Alstine?"

"Certainly."

Then the heiress cast a significant look at her cousin, who with a toss of her head rose at once and left the room, taking the precaution to remain by the door and listen, however, after she had closed it.

"I am not mistaken in calling you Miss Alstine."

"No, madam."

"Doubtless you can guess why I am here?"

"I haven't the remotest idea."

Rose stared very impolitely, it must be confessed, at her visitor. "It is with regard to that unfortunate affair of a few days since—"

"No apologies are necessary," Rose interrupted haughtily. "I do not blame you."

"You have no reason to. I have been that man's wife nearly six years."

"Indeed!"

"It is true. I am here to inform you, however, that it is possible that a grave mistake has been made."

"Indeed!"

"My husband's name is not Bordine."

"He has a dozen aliases, I presume."

"I fear so," returned the woman, in an agitated voice.

"It is wholly unnecessary for you to go on, Mrs. Bordine. Rest assured that you have my sympathy, and I shall not trouble your husband again."

"No. It is not that."

"Well?"

"I read in the evening paper of the arrest of Mrs. Bordine and the flight of her son—"

"Your husband."

"Not too fast, Miss Alstine. I wish to say that my husband has no mother living, so it seems to me a mistake has been made somewhere."

"Such a man has mothers and wives to suit his convenience," retorted Rose. "I presume you will not deny that the man who calls himself your husband has fled."

"He is not at home at present."

"I thought not. I am sorry for you, Mrs. Bordine, but it is clearly a fact that we have both been sadly deceived. Of course you suffer more than I. I am free, and truly thankful that I escaped from the snare of such a villain. If I can do anything for you I will gladly respond."

"You can do nothing."

The woman sighed and came to her feet. She extended her hand with:

"I hope you will not blame me—"

"No, indeed. You have my heartfelt sympathy," assured Miss Alstine, with warmth, at the same time taking the wronged wife's hand in hers and kissing her pale cheek.

"May Heaven help you, Miss Alstine! I thought you might misconstrue my actions, and so I came to you. It is true my husband is a bad man, yet in spite of all I love him still, and would reform him if I could."

Then, dropping her veil, the wife walked sobbing from the room and the house.

CHAPTER XX.

EXIT PERRY JOUNCE.

It was a triumphant expression that fell from the lips of the disguised Barkswell as he saw his enemy plunge headlong into the gulf of boiling waters.

Making his way to the edge of the water the villain gazed long and earnestly at the seething foam, but no sign of the body of his rival was to be seen. The night was extremely dark, and this might have prevented his seeing the corpse.

"Well, there's no use standing here," muttered the man. "I am satisfied that the body of August Bordine'll be found water-logged some day, and that will end the hunt for the assassin of Victoria Vane. It is just as well, and will give me the better chance to walk into the affections of Miss Alstine. I hear that her father will soon return. I must complete the work by a marriage before that. It was a confounded mean affair, that meeting in the garden. I suppose it'll require a good deal of shrewd lying to convince Rose that that woman was not my wife."

Then the villain walked back to the little shanty.

A light still burned within.

Barkswell paused at the door.

On the floor sat Perry Jounce, wiping the blood from his face with a dirty handkerchief.

"Well, Perry, that came mighty near proving a finisher for you," said Mr. Barkswell with a provoking smile.

"Wal, I should remark. And you'd a ben glad on't. I ain't goin' ter die yet awhile, pardner. Do you know why?"

The ex-tramp seemed cool enough under the circumstances.

"Explain, Perry."

"I'm goin' to live to see you hang."

"Now, now, old boy, that's unkind."

"Jest the same it's true."

"I really hope not."

"I had my fortune told once."

"Indeed."

"The dumdest lookin' old critter in York told it."

"Well?"

"She gin me a good yarn, one that I'm thinkin's going to come true."

"Why do you think so? I supposed you were above superstition, Mr. Jounce."

"So I be, but sence a part of the prophecy has come true, why shouldn't the rest?"

"Sure enough."

"You agree with me there?"

"Certainly."

"Then I'll tell you the rest on't, though its sometimes made my blood run cold when I think on't," proceeded the tramp, looking up into the face of his companion, with blood-stained countenance, and eyes that were sodden with pain and passion. He looked like some prisoner of state doomed to the martyr's stake, as he sat there in the dim light and talked in a solemn monotone that was weird and unnatural.

"The old witch said I was to meet with many misfortunes, pass a dreadful crisis,

and then come out with flying colors.

"But I'm a gittin' ahead of my story. My sister—I had but one—was to make a mismatch with a gambler and outlaw. He was to cause her and me a heap o' trouble. Finally the husban' was ter plot ter put his wife outen the way so't he could git another gal with a big fortune."

"Nonsense."

"Don't interrupt me," growled the tramp. "I'm jest a tellin' what the fortune-teller said; 'tain't none o' my gammon."

"Go on."

A smile curled the lip of Barkswell.

"Wal, thar ain't a half more to tell. This chap, my sister's husban', was wishin' to get rid of his wife, but in makin' the attempt he ruined himself, and I was ter see the chap hung fur the murder."

"Then he *does* succeed."

The keen eyes of Barkswell regarded the man before him fixedly, penetratingly.

"No!" hissed the tramp.

"Men do not hang for attempting murder."

"Don't they? Pardner, let me tell you that you won't live arter you *attempt* to murder Iris."

"What do you mean?"

"I know ye, Andy Barkswell—know what yer scheming brain hez concocted. Not content wi' puttin' poor Vict'ry Vane out o' the world, you hev planned ter kill my sister, yer true and lawful wife. I'll watch ye thar, hossfly—"

"Scoundrel!"

With the exclamation, Barkswell leaped with the fury of a tiger at the throat of the stalwart tramp.

The hour had come for a complete triumph or none.

"Murder!"

This was the cry that escaped the lips of the wounded tramp.

Well might he give utterance to the cry.

There was murder gleaming in the lurid eyes of the villain, Barkswell.

Although Perry Jounce was weak from the effects of the shot that had plowed a furrow through his scalp, his assailant did not permit him to have a fair show.

The tramp had been very indiscreet in telling what he did to his wicked brother-in-law.

"Mercy!" finally gasped Jounce, when he found that he had not strength sufficient to combat the man who was at his throat with murderous intent.

"You shall not live to thwart me, Perry Jounce," hissed Barkswell, as he pressed his companion in crime to the floor, and crushed his knee down upon his breast.

"Mercy!" again gasped Jounce.

"No. You would grant none to me. It would not be safe for me to permit you to live."

"But, hasn't I did my duty by you, pardner? Ef't hadn't been fur me Sile Keene wouldn't a went under," uttered the helpless tramp, pleadingly.

There was no mercy in the heart of Andrew Barkswell, however. Jounce knew too much and was disposed to be dangerous, so he did not scruple to put him out of the way.

"Not a word, scoundrel," growled Barkswell, and with the words he drew a clasp knife from an inner pocket.

Again the fallen wretch gasped for mercy.

"You butted against the wrong man, Perry Jounce," muttered Barkswell, "when you attempted to frighten me from my plans. What is your life to me? No more

than *his*, than that woman's. You must die."

The point of the knife touched the heaving bosom of the tramp, above the heart.

"Mercy! Spare me, brother—!"

The words were cut short by a quick movement on the part of Barkswell. He had sent the knife to the hilt in the bosom of the tramp.

"There, that ends your career," and with the words the young villain came to his feet.

He stood back with folded arms and watched the dying convulsions of his victim.

Soon the huge form lay quiet, the strong limbs stiffened in death.

A smile played on the features of Barkswell. Nevertheless his face was pale and drawn, and his breath came in short, hot gasps. It was no ordinary thing to take the life of a human being, much less to perpetrate the deed in cold blood.

"Now then the body must be disposed of," muttered Barkswell. "I cannot permit it to lay here."

He moved about and lifted a small trap in the floor. Through this he tumbled the body, and taking the candle, towered himself into a small, damp cellar.

It was a gloomy place.

The murderer must needs labor here for a time, however.

The ground was soft, and procuring a barrel-stave, the homicide went at the labor of digging a grave for his victim.

This work consumed some time. It was accomplished at length, however, and the body of the tramp tumbled in.

Slowly the man heaped the loose sand above the breast of his victim. When it was level full he stamped it down with his feet, and then heaped on more of the dirt.

His light sputtered and grew dim, threatening to go out.

It was not a pleasant thought, the one of being left alone in the dark there, with the blood of his victim trickling through the floor upon him.

"Mercy! what a dismal place. I must get out of this instanter, and—what was that?"

The sound of a step creaking on the floor above!

An awful horror took complete possession of Barkswell at that moment. He dared not look up at the opening through which he had passed, fearing, he knew not what.

His first thought was to extinguish the light.

He snatched it from the wall, and then, in spite of his terror, he cast his eyes upward. A face, white and ghostly, peered down upon him, a pair of flaming eyes burning into his very soul. With a wild cry Barkswell flung down the light, and fell fainting across the grave of his murdered victim.

CHAPTER XXI.

BORDINE AND SHANKS.

The bullet that Andrew Barkswell sent hustling after the fleeing Bordine went wide of its mark.

The young engineer was moving at such a rate of speed, however, that it was wholly impossible for him to halt.

He knew not of the near proximity of the creek, and in consequence went headlong into the foaming current. His head came in contact with a jagged rock that partially stunned him so that for the moment he sank beneath its surface.

The swift current buoyed him up, and bore him swiftly from the vicinity.

Dazed and nearly strangled the engineer struggled to save himself from drowning. In the endeavor his hands came in contact with a floating plank, which the high water had floated from the bank.

He grasped the plank with a cry of joy. He felt that there was little danger of his drowning with such a buoy to cling to.

On down the current swept plank and man. At times the float touched the shore, but in such places the bank was steep and Bordine dared not make the attempt to land.

Presently, after floating perhaps a mile, the glimmer of a light filled his eyes.

On swept the plank with its human burden, and soon the light broadened into a large flame.

It proved to be a fire built on a level bit of ground near the water's edge. A man

sat in the glow of the fire evidently engaged in cooking his evening meal.

The sharp bark of a dog seemed to startle him.

"What is it, Tige?"

The dog darted down to the edge of the water, looked wistfully at the stream, then with a final bark plunged into the stream.

He seized one end of the plank and dragged it ashore.

A man, with the water running from him in streams, stood up in the fire-light regarding the dog-owner. "Hello!" exclaimed the man.

"Hello yourself."

"Who are you?"

"A gentleman of the naval service," answered August Bordine with a gruesome laugh.

He could not feel prepossessed in favor of the man before him, who was small of stature, with a deformed body, bushy red hair and beard, one eye alone visible, the other hidden completely under a black patch.

"Wal," remarked the queer looking man, "you have the appearance of being a water-fowl anyhow. Come up by the fire and wring yourself, and get the chills out of your system. I havn't got much of a home to offer you, but it's good enough for me, and what's good enough for me is good enough for anybody."

Then the queer stranger led the way to the fire, where the light revealed the features of the saturated man completely.

"Eh!"

The peddler started and uttered the exclamation as though astonished.

"Now what?" demanded the young engineer as he began to wring himself.

"I reckon I've seen you before."

"It wouldn't be strange."

"Your from Grandon?"

"Yes."

"I git my stock in that town," proceeded Mr. Shanks. "I've seen a heap of folks, and know a—many who don't know me."

"Undoubtedly."

"You remember seeing me at your house 'tother day don't you?"

"I do not."

"Ain't your name Barkswell?"

"No."

The one-eyed man fixed his single optic on the face of the wet youth in a glance that was penetrating.

"I swear, but there's a mighty close resemblance."

"There must be. Many people have taken me to be somebody other than I am. I do not understand it."

"What *is* your name?"

"Bordine."

"Um!"

The peddler sat down on a log near, and crossing his legs, with both hands on the back of his dog—he seemed to have only one now—he gazed thoughtfully into vacancy.

"A strange resemblance," he muttered.

"Permit me to thank you for your kindness, Mr.——"

"Shanks—Hiram Shanks at your service," the peddler filled in.

"I might have drowned but for you. This fire is quite comfortable I assure you, most comfortable indeed."

The steam rose in a cloud about the engineer as he turned about, exposing his clothing to the genial heat.

"I was eating a mighty late supper," said the peddler. "Fact is I'm nowadays regular at my meals; coz the tarverns won't board me for what it's worth. I bunk out of doors these warm nights, and don't feel afraid with Tige for a companion."

"I should imagine not. That dog is a noble fellow."

"Noble! Well, he's the next thing to human, Mr. Bordine. Somebody poisoned his mate, so't I have to foot it where once I rode in my carriage. If your anyways hungry, mister, I can give you grub enough such as 'tis."

The engineer assured the queer fellow that he had no desire to eat since it was late when he left home.

"How'd you come in the creek?"

Should he tell the true story to this deformed fellow, who had befriended him? Could there be any harm in it?

"Speak right out, young man. You've been into a muss of some sort, and I sympathise with you."

"I am glad to hear you say that."

After a moment given to reflection, the engineer told the story of his being decoyed from home, and of the attempt upon his life by the tramp, and the man from Grandon.

Not a word did the one-eyed man utter during the recital, but the fire in that single eye grew to a deeper flame, and he pushed up the black patch in a way that betokened extreme nervousness.

The eye beneath the patch did not seem defective to Bordine, yet the slight view

he obtained of it was not sufficient to make sure as to that.

When he had finished, the peddler opened his lips to give utterance to one word:

"Fool!"

"I admit it," returned the engineer.

"Beg pardon, sir," uttered Hiram Shanks, quickly, "but after the warning you'd had, and the death of the detective, it seems to me that you ought to have been on your guard."

"So I ought; but it was on account of the detective."

"Don't put yourself out on his account," retorted the one-eyed man quickly. "The little experience I've had with a litter of that kind it don't pay to waste sympathy on 'em. Do you know who the fellow was that got you into this trap?"

"I am not positive. I know I saw the fellow once, and at the Golden Lion he registered as Mr. Brown."

"Exactly."

After a little more questioning, the peddler assured August that it was time to turn in.

"You needn't be scared. Tige'll watch out for tramps or other enemies to honest men."

"I would like to reach home."

"You can't to-night. Twon't be long till morning. Wait, and I will go with you."

After a little reflection the young engineer consented to this plan, but he found it impossible to sleep for some time in his damp clothing.

The peddler walked into the shadows, and August saw no more of him until the dawn of day, when Tige uttered a glad bark and darted into the bushes to greet his returning master.

August sat up, yet damp and uncomfortable, with an intense, burning fever in his

veins.

"How far is it to the city?" he questioned.

"Four miles."

The young man staggered to his feet, but sank as quickly.

"You are ill, young feller?"

"I—I fear so," groaned August. "I don't believe it will be possible for me to walk home."

"Of course it won't."

"What shall I do? Can you procure a horse—"

"I can. You must rest here, or at a little shanty up the stream I have in my mind, until I bring a conveyance. Do you mind?"

"I suppose I must wait. I feel terribly sick and weak."

Then, leaning on the arm of the deformed peddler, August permitted him to lead him into the bushes, where, against the creek bank, was a small fisherman's shanty, one side of which was open to the weather.

Here, on an old blanket, the peddler left August to await his return.

Tige was left to guard the sick man, and then Hiram Shanks hastened from the spot.

It seemed a long time ere the peddler returned, and when he did come, he brought the most startling news.

CHAPTER XXII.

HANK JONES AGAIN.

Hot with fever, August Bordine lifted his aching head for the dozenth time to listen for the returning tread of the queer old peddler.

A glad bark from Tige was the first announcement the sick young man had of the return of his queer friend.

"Tired waiting?" queried Shanks, as he burst through the bushes and confronted the engineer.

"Very tired," moaned the feverish lips.

Then August put his head upon his hand and regarded the peddler with a look of anxious inquiry.

"Did you bring a horse?"

"No, I didn't," answered the peddler abruptly.

"Then you have deceived me," and the sick youth sank back with a groan.

"Nothing of the kind," answered Shanks. "I've learned some tremendous news since I went from here this morning."

"News?"

"Yes. Twon't be safe for you to go back to the city."

"Not safe? What do you mean?"

"This is what I mean," said the peddler, sinking to his knees and adjusting the black patch carefully over his eye. "The whole burgh is in a state of excitement over the discovery of the murderer of Victoria Vane."

"He has been discovered then?"

"Wait. A squad of police went to your house this morning and hunted high and low for you. The papers say that August Bordine murdered the Ridgewood girl, and that he fled last night from the city to escape arrest. What do you think of that?"

"It's all false."

"I suppose so, but if you should fall into the hands of the officers just now, you wouldn't be given half chance for your life."

"But who started this yarn?"

Bordine was deeply interested, and he sat up now and forgot for the time his aching head and weakened body.

"It seems to be the murdered girl's brother who is engineering the search. He is determined that his sister's murderer shall be brought to justice."

"That is right of course."

"Yes, but the evidence points strongly to you. I think, with a speedy trial, you could be convicted, I vow I do, Mr. Bordine. Dare you go back and risk it?"

"I am innocent—"

"True, but you *seem* guilty. The girl, they say, was stabbed—"

"Yes, with a small dirk."

"Exactly," with a start.

Perhaps he was wondering how the young engineer knew so much if he was guiltless.

"Can you tell me what kind of a knife it was?"

The single eye of the questioner was fixed in a keen gaze upon the face of August Bordine.

He seemed growing suspicious again.

"It was apparently a two-edged blade."

"Apparently?"

"Yes. Of course I could not tell exactly, since the wound was not easily examined."

"I see. Then you have not seen the knife—the dagger that found the life of Victoria Vane?"

"Certainly not."

"And yet it was found in your room."

"Impossible!"

"It is true. That evidence alone might hang you."

"My soul! what does, what *can* this mean?" groaned the young engineer, sinking back to the rough blanket, weak as a rag under the revelation of this strange man.

"It means that a plot exists for your destruction, and the elevation of another," answered Hiram Shanks, slowly and with deliberation. "Doubtless your journey last night was a part of the plot. I confess that some things puzzle me, yet I am assured that your death is necessary to the successful issue of a plot."

"I cannot understand it."

"Nor I, fully."

Then a short silence fell between the two men, during which the eyes of Bordine examined the face of the queer little peddler keenly. At length he said:

"Mr. Shanks, will you answer me a question?"

"A dozen, if you like."

"Only one?"

"Well?"

"Who are you?"

"Hiram Shanks."

"Yes, but you are no ordinary man."

"Why do you think that?"

"To look at you, one would think—"

Then the engineer came to a sudden pause, and seemed embarrassed.

"I understand what you would say," remarked the peddler, with the faintest smile imaginable. "You imagine I will feel offended if you speak the truth, and say that I look like a battered, old tramp, but I should not. I will tell you the truth, young man. I have seen better days, but misfortunes came upon me, not singly, but in platoons, until I found my life a wreck. A wicked woman, poor whisky, and a reckless heart have brought me mighty low. I do not expect to rise again, but I have resolved to reform and pass the remainder of my days in honest endeavor.

"I turned to peddling from a natural liking to handle goods. I lead a wandering life now, and expect to till I die. I mean, however, to help you all possible, since I am assured that you are a good man and innocent of crime. My advice was once listened to; may I not hope that it will be again? Heed what I say, trust me, and all will yet come out right. What do you say?"

"That I am unable to disobey at the present time, at any rate," answered the engineer. "Which may prove to be a blessing in disguise, after all."

Then queer Hiram Shanks came to his feet, and gazed sharply about him.

"I am not sure that this is the safest place that could be found," he said, "yet it isn't a place that people hunting for criminals would be apt to look. On the whole, I think you had better remain here until night, at least."

Then the peddler whistled to his dog, and walked away, leaving the sick man

alone in the fisherman's shanty.

"Who is guilty? that's the question," muttered Hiram Shanks when once out of hearing of the sick man. "Bordine certainly doesn't act like a guilty wretch, and I, for one, believe him innocent. I must run down the guilty dogs, however, if I would save an innocent man and win the five thousand dollars reward."

Then the peddler hurried from the vicinity, accompanied by his dog.

Bordine fell into a troubled slumber, from which he was awakened by a sound from the murmuring creek.

Instantly his senses were on the alert.

He felt anxious to be at home, to alleviate the fears that he knew his mother must undergo on account of his continued absence.

"Somebody is coming," he thought.

Then he listened as he could with the beating fever in his head.

The dip of a paddle!

It was this that had wakened him.

He roused to a sitting posture and gazed through the open side of the shanty down toward the water.

A man had just landed from an Indian canoe, and stood on the bank, regarding him in evident astoundment. August could scarcely repress a cry.

And no wonder.

In front of him, not ten yards distant, stood the man who attempted to murder him the night before in the lone cabin near the creek falls.

The astoundment was mutual.

Evidently the man was none the worse for the fright he had received over the grave of his victim in the shanty cellar. He stared at the reclining form in the fisherman's shanty as though doubting his senses.

After a moment he advanced, and gazed fixedly into the face of fever-stricken August.

"So!" he exclaimed, and in that one word there was an immense amount of meaning.

Then he walked up to the bunk and stood within a few feet of the sick man.

"Hank Jones, what are you doing here?"

"Well, that's a nice question," sneered the villain as he thrust his hand to his hip pocket. "How in nature did you escape from the creek? Didn't I hit you when I fired?"

With the words the villain drew a revolver.

"It seems not."

"Then I'll make sure of it this time."

"This is unfair," remonstrated August, feeling that he was at the mercy of his enemy, and anxious to gain time, for night was fast falling, and with it the peddler and his dog would doubtless come.

"All is fair in war my friend."

"Why did you attempt to murder me last night?"

"For purposes of my own."

"You concocted a falsehood about Silas Keene and led me into a trap."

"Not entirely false," returned the villain. "The detective was hurt, and has since died."

"Since last night?"

"No, before that, but I will not palaver with you. I set out to rid the earth of my rival in business, and this is the way I do it."

The speaker thrust forward his revolver and fired.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A QUEER MISTAKE.

The aim of the would-be assassin was not good. His bullet flew wide of the mark.

Why?

The deep growl of a dog was the disturbing cause.

As Hank Jones pulled the trigger, a shaggy object bounded through the bushes full at the throat of the villainous murderer.

August recognized the peddler's dog. Man and dog rolled down the bank to the water's edge. In the struggle the disguised outlaw's beard was torn off, and Andrew Barkswell stood revealed.

"Curse you, I'll knife you for this!" grated the baffled villain.

The next instant a keen blade gleamed in the air, just as a voice called:

"Tige, come off."

The dog was used to obeying his master's voice, and so he released his hold just in time to avoid the knife of the maddened Barkswell.

"Here, Tige."

The dog came bounding up the bank.

The single eye of the peddler glanced down at the man who struggled to his feet at the water's edge, and sprang into a canoe.

"So, you, Tige. Why was you going for our friend in that way?"

The peddler patted his dog and talked scoldingly until the escaping villain was well out in the stream, paddling away.

Quickly Hiram Shanks strode down to the water.

"Hey, you, man—August, what you leaving for? You'll surely get caught."

It will thus be seen that the peddler, who was hidden from the fisherman's shanty by a line of bushes, had mistaken the fleeing man for his patient.

The man in the boat made no response to the call of Shanks, and soon was lost to view behind an abrupt bend.

"Well, that beats me," muttered the one-eyed man, as he gazed over the water at the point where the canoe and its occupant had just disappeared.

Then, as he turned to ascend the bank, he noticed that Tige held something in his teeth—a heavy black beard!

Seizing it, the peddler examined it closely, then exclaimed:

"A disguise! Well, I'm puzzled now more than ever. I thought August Bordine a much abused man, and now it turns out that he's a villain after all, and able to pull the wool even over *my* eyes."

Slowly Hiram Shanks ascended the bank. His dog uttered a joyful bark, and dashed through the bushes toward the little shanty.

"Here you, Tige," called the peddler.

"Bow-wow-wow!" was the answer from the faithful dog.

Hiram Shanks moved through the bushes, and then uttered a surprised exclamation. Reclining on the old blanket where he had left him was August Bordine, the young engineer.

"Bless my heart! young man, I thought I saw you just now riding away in a canoe."

"You see your mistake now, I suppose," returned August, trying repeatedly to smile.

"And it wasn't you, after all?"

"Certainly not."

Then August explained the situation in a few words. When he had finished the peddler tapped him gently on the shoulder and said:

"I am greatly relieved. I know that man now. He has caused all the mischief. You and he look as near alike as two peas. The clouds are rolling by and I see my way clear. It won't be long before the authorities as well as the people will be astounded with the arrest of Victoria Vane's murderer. It will astound them because they will find in the real murderer not the man they expect."

The peddler spoke so enthusiastically as to attract the notice of his listener.

"Are you on the track of the assassin?" questioned Bordine.

"I am."

"Then you are a detective?"

"If I succeed, yes. You see, I am but an amateur now. Whisky and an unfaithful woman poisoned me almost to the death. I saw that offer of five thousand dollars reward, and it stimulated me to new life. That is a good deal of money, my boy, especially to one in my circumstances; and so I thought to myself, if I could only win that reward, I could tog up in good shape and enter the business world once more. I've been aiming for that, and I mean to gather it in."

"I sincerely hope you may Mr. Shanks."

* * * * *

The days passed; a fortnight was gone, and yet no news of the young engineer who had so mysteriously disappeared from his home on the night before the arrest of Mrs. Bordine.

That lady was well treated by the sheriff's family, but was not permitted to have

communication with the outside world, so that she realized that she was a close prisoner all this time. The reader can easily imagine how the old lady suffered, with a dark cloud hanging over the name of her son. She, of course, firmly believed in his innocence, and would not credit the story that he had fled to escape arrest. There was a mystery about his continued absence for which she could not account, and which gave the good woman no end of trouble.

"I would trust August with my life," she more than once asserted. "He does not come because he fears arrest, but some accident has befallen him, and it may be that we shall none of us see him again, for I fear he is dead."

It was thus the old mother talked to the officers, and to Miss Alstine, who, in the kindness of her heart, visited her lover's mother.

Of course that lover was as nought to the young heiress now. She believed him to be a villain of the deepest dye, yet she could not tell her thoughts to that trusting old mother who seemed so wrapped up in her son.

"The idea that he could harm anybody," declared Mrs. Bordine to Rose, with both plump hands on the girl's shoulders. "Why, he never even so much as killed a chicken without shuddering."

"We will hope that a mistake has been made, dear Mrs. Bordine."

"And you are so kind," returned the old woman with tears in her eyes. "Do you know, Miss Alstine, I want to ask your forgiveness."

"For what, dear?"

"For unkind judgment of you."

"I am sure you never have misjudged me, dear."

"Oh, yes I have."

"How?"

"It was one day when August had been up to your house. He was dreadfully down in the mouth when he came back from that visit. He'd been jilted he said, by you, and I told him right for ever trying to win the heart of a rich girl. I said

some very harsh things of you, Miss, things that I know now weren't true. Of course I can see now that you had some good reason for not wishing to marry a poor engineer, a reason that was above regarding his poverty. I won't ask you what it was, for if the poor boy is dead it won't make any difference, and—and —"

Poor mother.

She broke down then completely, and fell to sobbing on the breast of the sympathetic Rose.

Ah, yes, she knew why she had refused to see the widow's son that eventful day, and it was not poverty that drove him out of her life. Rose, however, would not explain now, nor ever to Mrs. Bordine. She realized that the kindly soul had never realized the truth regarding the dual character of August.

If he never returned it was well that she should think of him always, as now, true and dutiful, a model man and son in every respect.

Officers were now more than ever on the alert. Everybody was anxious to win the magnificent reward, and it now seemed very easy of attainment, since the real murderer was known.

Would he fall finally into the hands of the law?

This was the question that Rose asked many times of herself. It would be justice, and yet it would grind her heart to know of his dying on the scaffold.

Was he guilty?

Another question.

Could she doubt it, remembering the scene in the garden at the house of her lover?

One evening while Rose, unattended, was hastening along the street toward the city prison, she suddenly became aware that a man was following her. There was something in his walk and general appearance that seemed familiar, but she could not see his face, since his hat was down low, shading it completely.

She had reached the entrance to the sheriff's office, and placed her hand on the knob, when the man sprang quickly to her side and seized her arm. She uttered a startled cry and pushed open the door.

"One moment, Rose!" cried the man, hoarsely. He snatched the hat from his head and bent his face close hers.

The girl uttered a great cry.

"Great Heaven, *you here, August Bordine!*"

And then Rose closed the door and leaned heavily against the wall.

[Illustration: HE SNATCHED THE HAT FROM HIS HEAD, AND BENT HIS FACE CLOSE TO HERS.]

CHAPTER XXIV.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

Not a word passed between the two for some moments. The man glanced up and down the street uneasily, then resumed his hat and said:

"I am glad you recognize me, Rose. I have been wanting to see you for a long time."

"You have risked your life in coming," she said. "Surely you know that a large reward rests against you."

"I do, but I am willing to risk life to see the one I love—"

"Hush! Mr. Bordine," cried the girl, huskily. "I wish to hear no more of that."

"No? Then you believe the stories that are handed about that I am a murderer?"

There was a bitter tone to his voice that did not fail to have its effect.

"Don't ask me, August," she returned sadly. "I have no right to think on that subject, it is a question that rests between you and your God."

"But do you believe me guilty?"

"Are you guilty? Tell me truly," she cried, suddenly, looking up into his haggard face in a way that thrilled him to the quick.

"Will you believe me if I swear—"

"No, no, do not mar your word with an oath, August," she interrupted, quickly. "I will believe you without that."

"May Heaven bless you, Rose," he cried, in a relieved tone. "I am as innocent as you are of that murder."

"Then go. Do not be found here another minute. The evidence will convict you, and I do not wish to see you die."

She pushed him from her with a trembling hand.

"One kiss, darling."

She would have been less than human and a woman, had she refused, with her heart all seething with conflicting emotion on account of the love she bore this man, that would not down even when she knew him guilty of deception and fraud—perhaps of murder.

He bent and imprinted a kiss upon her cold cheek, held her hand a moment in a hot clasp, then turned to go.

A step sounded near.

Someone was approaching.

"Go! while it is yet time," urged the maiden in a thrilling whisper.

But he seemed unable to move just then.

"My mother; how does she bear up?"

"Bravely."

"She is used well?"

"Very well, indeed."

"I am glad for her sake. Tell her nothing of this visit, it will do no good, and I wish her to remain in ignorance of my whereabouts."

The sound of a step died away, and the spot occupied by man and maid seemed safe from observation for the present.

"It shall be as you wish."

"Bless you, Rose. Tell me again that you believe me guiltless."

"I have once said so, August, but go now, and never set foot in this dangerous neighborhood again."

"Will you permit me to speak of that scene in the garden where you so misjudged me?"

"No," with an impatient gesture. "I wish to destroy that picture. Don't force me to think of it."

"But I can explain."

Again came the sound of approaching steps. This time two men were seen approaching from either direction.

"Go before you are discovered!" cried out the girl huskily.

He dropped her hand and started to move away, evidently realizing his danger.

Rose crept swiftly into the building and watched the moving form of her lover through the window.

"Halt!"

She heard the cry, and saw a police baton uplifted over the head of the man who had just left her side.

White as death the girl gazed.

Would there be trouble?

She saw a hand laid on the one of her lover, then two men were engaged in a desperate struggle.

Presently there came a bright flash and sharp report. Rose was petrified with horror as she gazed.

The policeman sank in a heap to the walk, while a voice outside shouted:

"Murder!"

Then the man who had encountered the police officer darted swiftly from the vicinity.

A timid man bent over the fallen officer.

The Sheriff heard the startling cry from without and rushed into the front room, passing Rose, who crowded in the shadows, without noticing her. He gained the walk and soon stood over the fallen officer.

"I heard a shot," cried the sheriff, in an excited tone. "Who did it? Is the man dead?"

"I don't know answered the other," who seemed to be an ordinary pedestrian. "I saw a man talking with a woman there, at your door. He walked away and met the officer, then came a scuffle and a shot."

"Exactly," muttered the sheriff, laying his hand on the man's arm. "You will consider yourself my prisoner."

"But I haven't done a thing."

"We'll see about that."

At this moment the policeman moved and assumed a sitting posture.

"No, the man's right," he said in a labored tone.

"The fellow ran when he fired. I—I reckon he's done for me."

"Who was it?"

"The man we wanted—Bordine!"

"Is it possible?"

"It seems to me it would be wise to alarm the police and have them on the lookout for the villain," said the citizen.

Just then a hack was passing which was hailed, and the wounded officer placed inside with the citizen, who promised to set the city force on the lookout.

"You might question the girl, Mr. Sheriff," said the citizen.

"Yes, but I may not be able to find her now."

"She entered your house I am sure."

Then the hack whirled away.

The sheriff hastened into the house just as Rose, pale and agitated, rose from a crouching posture at the window.

"Was the policeman killed?"

This was her question, given in an agitated voice.

"Not killed, but he may die."

"Just Heaven, why did he do it?"

The country officer regarded the beautiful speaker keenly.

"So it was you who met this man, this outlaw, outside, Miss Alstine?"

She made no reply, but stood with clasped hands gazing into vacancy, the very picture of woe and despair.

"Miss Alstine, I demand an explanation," uttered the sheriff, sternly, at the same time taking her arm and shaking her sharply.

"Sir, I—I cannot explain."

"We'll see about that. Who was the man you were talking with ten minutes ago, in front of this building?"

"A gentleman."

"His name."

"I cannot give it."

"You will not, you mean."

She was silent.

He shook her slender frame furiously.

"Girl, you cannot deceive me; the man you countenanced so unblushingly was August Bordine, the murderer!"

He hissed his words out hotly, and seemed ready to crush her with his wrath.

"Please take your hand from my shoulder, sir," said Rose, in a tone so calm and chilling as to surprise the over-zealous official.

He did not obey.

She transfixed him with her eyes and said:

"Mr. Sheriff, you have no right to insult a lady as you are doing, and I shall see that you are reported."

He dropped his hand and stepped backward quickly. The look in her beautiful eyes startled him. He owed his official station to the people, and he seemed of a sudden to realize that this girl was a representative of one of the wealthiest families in Grandon. She was not on the same footing as the poor widow, who had been held in confinement for weeks without the privilege of bail.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Alstine," he said, quickly. "I see that I was going a little too far, but my excuse is that I am anxious to leave no stone unturned to effect the capture of that low villain, Bordine. It may be that he will have another murder to answer for after to-night."

Rose shuddered at the thought.

The gulf between her and August Bordine was widening to the shores of eternity, and even beyond.

"I have no wish to deny that the man who met me to-night was Bordine. The meeting was wholly unexpected on my part, and I was compelled to listen to him."

"Exactly. Well, it is more than likely that the scoundrel will be in the hands of

the law before midnight."

Then the sheriff turned away.

Quite unstrung, Rose left the building without attempting to see Mrs. Bordine that night.

CHAPTER XXV.

A STARTLING WARNING.

The remainder of that night and for several days thereafter the city was wild with excitement over the story of the sudden disappearance of the man for whom five thousand dollars reward was offered.

The policeman was not mortally hurt, but the wound he had received was destined to lay him up for a long time.

A thorough search of the city failed to discover the assassin. His bold return had evidently been to see his betrothed, and it was surmised by many that Rose Alstine could tell, if she would, the exact whereabouts of the murderer.

Ransom Vane went to see her on the subject, but gained no satisfaction. Rose solemnly assured him that she had no more knowledge of her lover's whereabouts than he.

"I do not care to talk on a subject so painful," concluded the girl.

"However painful, you may be compelled to talk," retorted the young man in a tone of exceeding vexation. "I cannot consider it just for a woman to screen her lover, when he has several murdered victims to answer for."

"Your insinuations are wholly unjust, Mr. Vane."

"I hope they are. That a girl should defend a lover, even when he has stained his hands with blood, seems incredible."

"It would seem incredible if such a thing occurred. I have no lover and consequently cannot come under your condemnation."

"Do you deny that August Bordine is your lover?"

"Certainly I do."

"Then I have been misinformed."

"Doubtless you have. Busybodies are ready to make any assertions, however false," said Rose calmly.

There certainly was nothing to be gained here, so the eager young man took his departure.

In the meantime where was August Bordine?

Safe under the care of the eccentric Hiram Shanks, and not once had he ventured into Grandon. He followed implicitly the instructions of the peddler, who evinced intelligence beyond his appearance.

When the young man learned that his mother was under arrest, he insisted on visiting her at once, although he was yet ill in bed, for the fever clung to him for many days, and weakened his strong frame so that he had scarcely more strength than a child.

It was at a farm-house that the sick engineer had found shelter, and in order to effectually disguise him the indefatigable Shanks had shaved his beard, and cut his hair close, over which he fitted a wig of wool, and stained his face and arms.

Thus young Bordine represented a sick mulatto to perfection. The farmer and his wife were in the secret, but being feed heavily by Shanks, they refused to betray the young man.

Officers had been at the house on several occasions, but the sick farm hand excited no suspicions, since he in no way resembled the photographs of the fugitive from justice.

Of course the reader will understand that the man who personated Bordine in his interview with Rose Alstine was the young man's double, who yet hovered in the city, and moved about among the people in many disguises. On the night in question he had boldly thrown off his disguise for the purpose of appealing to Rose as the fugitive, hoping to excite her sympathy.

It proved a dear game, and come near landing him in prison. He did not scruple at shooting the officer who assailed him. Once he could get his fingers on the Alstine bank account, he would be able to defy the world.

It was a bold and heartless scheme he was working, and hardly promised success. While the real Bordine was a fugitive from justice, the schemer felt that he had nothing to fear from him; but how long was this to be?

The young engineer might be captured at any time, when it would be impossible for him to deceive Rose longer. It was this fear that troubled Barkswell more than aught else.

He thought sometimes of the grave in the cellar of the lone shanty in the woods, and remembered the pair of gleaming eyes that peered down upon him from above. He was in disguise then, however, and even were that murder discovered, it could not be laid at his door.

On the night in question, Barkswell, after shooting the policeman from his path, darted swiftly down the street a few rods, then turned into a dark alley.

Here he resumed the disguise he had discarded, in order to meet Rose.

Passing out at the other end of the alley, he met several members of the police force who were looking for him.

"I seed a feller makin' tracks toward the river," said the seeming countryman in answer to a query from a blue-coat.

"He's going to one of the low dives down near the dock," declared the sergeant of police, and then he quickly hastened on his way.

The man for whom all this excitement was occasioned pursued his way leisurely to the suburbs of the city, and entered a small house that stood some rods back from the street.

It was not the cottage that he had occupied at the time Rose Alstine mistook it for the Bordine residence. Soon after that untoward event, the scheming Barkswell had changed his residence to a less respectable neighborhood, against the protest of his wife, who was constantly urging him to lead a better life.

All this time Barkswell was exceedingly anxious that Iris should leave him for a better world, where she would be less troublesome.

He entered her presence to-night not in the best of humor.

Iris was reclining in a rocker, looking very pale and ill. She had been suffering of late even more than usual, and to-night a deathly sickness seemed stealing through her veins, rendering her weak and helpless.

"You are looking very pale, Iris. What is the trouble?"

"I am feeling very miserable, Andrew."

"You are always talking that way, my dear."

"But I feel that this is something different. I—I am fearful that I shan't live long."

"Nonsense," with a cheery laugh he knew so well how to assume when the occasion demanded.

His cheerfulness was contagious, and she smiled faintly.

"If you would only reform—"

"Not a word on that threadbare question, Iris," he interrupted quickly. "I am tired of it, and you know it. I've something here that'll be good for your nerves."

He drew a bottle from his pocket and poured a few drops into a glass that stood near. Then, mixing with water, he offered it to his wife.

She drank it without a word.

"You will soon feel better, dear," he assured her in the kindest tone imaginable.

"Oh, dear, I hope so."

She closed her eyes, and was soon in a profound sleep. Barkswell sat watching her, the thin face and hollow eyes, and muttered to himself:

"She suffers, poor girl, but I will be merciful. She shall not suffer long."

Then he came to his feet and began pacing the room with measured tread in front of his calmly sleeping wife.

There were many contending emotions in the breast of Andrew Barkswell as he paced the floor in front of his sleeping wife.

If he ever possessed a spark of human sympathy, the past few weeks of his life in Grandon had obliterated the feeling.

One more life stood between him and his goal; that life was even now on the verge of the unknown.

"I might throttle her," he muttered in a half audible tone, as his glittering eyes peered into the quiet face of the slumberer. "No one would be the wiser, and then I would be free to pursue my wooing of the heiress."

He moved a step nearer the sleeping woman. His fingers twitched and turned about, as though itching diabolical work. His breath came hot and hard above the false gray beard that adorned his chin.

He lifted his hands, made a forward movement, as if to carry into execution the dastard work his heart had conjured up. One step, and he came to a sudden pause.

A strange sound greeted his ears and held his steps. The sound seemed to proceed from the window.

Glancing toward it, the would-be homicide saw on the pane, written in letters of blood:

"Murderer, beware! The hounds of justice are on your trail, and will strike when you least expect it!"

Slowly the words faded out, yet Andrew Barkswell stood there, riveted to the floor, staring as though petrified into a marble image.

"Heavens!"

With this one exclamation Barkswell sprang forward and gazed out into the night. He thought he saw a form moving away in the gloom. He threw up the

sash and called after the form, but no answer came back, and then he dropped the sash, waking his wife.

"Delusion!" he muttered under his breath; and yet he trembled and was very pale.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PLOTTER'S VICTORY.

Rose Alstine did not visit the widow in her prison home for some days after her encounter with the counterfeit August Bordine. In fact, she was quite ill for a time, and kept her room, refusing to see any one, not excepting her cousin Janet.

"What a tormented little fool," declared the old maid. "If a man had used me as this one has Cousin Rose, do you think I'd take on, and make myself miserable over his villainy? No, I wouldn't—"

"But you'd go for another man at once," put in Sallie, the maid, who had overheard the remark of Miss Williams.

"Faugh! I'd keep clear of the vampires, I tell you," snorted the old maid, with a toss of her diminutive head.

"It seems you've been doing that pretty thoroughly in the past, Miss Williams," retorted Sallie, with a malicious little laugh.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Miss Williams, tartly.

"Oh, don't fly mad, Miss, I was only speaking from a historical point of view. Judging from the past, it seems to me you wouldn't be apt to have more than a dozen beaux dangling after you after they'd used you mean as you say—"

"Girl, I'll have you discharged."

"You can't do that," retorted Sallie, defiantly.

"I'll show you, huzzy!" and the old maid flounced from the room.

"I'd like to see the likes of her turning me off," muttered the maid. "I don't think Miss Rose'll pay any attention to that vinegar-cruet."

And in this opinion the maid was not far wrong. Rose did not permit her cousin to interfere in the least with the internal relations of the household.

In the evening, while Rose was in the parlor for the first time in several days, a visitor was announced, a gentleman.

"Who is it, Sallie?"

"Stranger, ma'am."

"What does he want?"

But at this moment the visitor took the liberty to make himself known in person, a tall, slender man, with gray beard, neatly dressed, and evidently of the upper class.

Rose greeted the stranger politely and offered a chair.

Of course the maid, seeing that she was no longer needed, passed out and closed the door.

"To what do I owe the honor of this visit, sir?" questioned Rose.

"I could not stay away longer. I have been burning to see you and have it out," said the man in a trembling voice; then, with a quick movement he removed a wig and revealed a young and pleasant face.

Rose recoiled.

"August Bordine!"

He stood before her with outstretched hands and pleading eyes. It was hard for her to resist that look, yet she viewed him coldly, and refused to look in his face.

"Don't scorn me until you hear my plea, Rose," he said in a passionate outcry, that thrilled a chord in her heart.

"Oh, sir, why did you come? Are you not aware that you risk your life?"

"I would risk Heaven for you, my darling. I know how much I risk in coming here, but I must have this horrible unrest settled for all time. See, on my bended knees I swear to you, Rose, I am innocent of the murder of that poor girl. It is a great mistake all round, and I mean to give myself up and stand trial.

"I have been a coward without your love, Rose. You cannot imagine how your scorn has weakened me, and the whole affair has been one round of ghastly mistakes. I am here to-night to tell you the truth. You have constantly denied me audience, and so to-night I resolved to see you or die in the attempt. As an excuse I plead only my deep love, and my innocence, which I believe I shall be able to prove. I hear that you have been kind to my mother in prison, and to-day I learn that she was permitted to return to her lonely home through your interference in her behalf.

"For this I thank you, and if a life-time of devotion can repay you it shall be yours—"

"Cease, sir," Rose interrupted at the first opportunity. "I am willing to believe you innocent of that awful crime at Ridgewood, but there are other crimes as wicked as murder—"

"I know," he cried, rising and clasping his hands, while he bent a pleading, wistful look into her face. "You refer to that scene in the garden."

"I do," coldly.

"You have never permitted me to explain that."

"It is not susceptible of explanation."

"It is—"

"I must take counsel of my senses, Mr. Bordine," persisted Rose, trampling fiercely on her own heart. "I know that that woman was your wife. I heard enough to convince me of this. Your perfidy ought to make me hate you."

"And you do hate me, Rose?"

"No—"

"Thank Heaven for that."

"Leave me now, Mr. Bordine."

"Mr. Bordine!" he cried bitterly. "It is August no longer. You would drive me from you without permitting me to explain. You are unjust, Rose."

"Never. Would to Heaven I could be!"

What did she mean?

A sudden, wild hope entered the heart of the schemer. He was making even better progress than he had anticipated.

"You will, you must hear my explanation of that scene in the garden," persisted he. "If you can scorn and cast me aside after you know the truth then I am willing to go."

Rose sank to a seat.

She had been standing, up to this moment, but now she felt strangely weak and unsteady. He, however, refused to be seated until, as he said, he made his peace with her.

Their interview had a witness suspected by neither.

Miss Williams, piqued at the attentions her cousin received, resolved to play the eavesdropper, and so she crouched in the hall at the parlor door and listened to every word that fell from the lips of the gentleman visitor.

Although Miss Williams was not the brightest female in the world, she was far removed from a fool, and soon she learned enough to convince her that the outlaw, August Bordine, was in the parlor.

This discovery was one which agitated the old maid not a little.

She remembered the immensity of the reward offered for this man, and realized that if she could win a portion of it, it would be of wonderful help to her as a matter of pin-money, and it might influence some man to take pity on her single state and propose.

When the old maid had revolved these thoughts in her brain sufficiently, she rose to her feet and donning hat and shawl hastened from the house.

"You imagined that that poor woman you heard addressing me as husband that day was my wife," proceeded Barkswell, after a moment of silence, "but that was where the trouble came in and the mistake rose."

"Do you deny—"

"It is not necessary. That woman was my sister, but she has been out of her mind for years. Four years ago I placed her in an asylum near Rochester for treatment, and this spring she left the place, declared cured by the doctors. Of course I was overjoyed at this, and hastened to remove her to my home in this city, where I have resided for more than two years, as you know. Mother wished to keep the fact of her having a daughter secret until we were sure that the terrible malady would not return. It did return, and so we have kept my poor sister very close for some time. She has strange hallucinations, and imagines that I am her husband, and that she is ill-treated. It was a love affair that turned her brain, and I suppose this has much to do with her present hallucination."

In measured tones he uttered this information, and it did not seem possible that the man was uttering a deliberate lie.

Rose moved uneasily in her seat.

His dark eyes, full of an intense love-light, were fixed on her face.

He saw that his falsehood was having its effect.

"You no doubt wonder why you haven't heard of this sooner. You must remember that I have failed to gain an audience with you since that hour."

"August, are you speaking the truth?"

Her face was ghastly white, and her full bosom rose and fell with the violence of her inward emotions.

"If you doubt, I am ready to swear it," he cried, sinking to her feet once more, bowing his head as a subject might to his sovereign.

"No, no," she cried suddenly. "Rise up, August. Heaven help me and *you* if this is a deception. I can do no other way than to believe."

He uttered a glad cry and pressed her hands to his lips, covering it with kisses.

She sat like one in a dream, unresisting, feeling a portion of bliss, yet filled with a vague alarm that was far from pleasant.

"And now I shall not fear to brave the world, and proclaim and prove my innocence," he cried boldly, coming to his feet.

She regarded him with a faint, fluttering heart, the faintest impress of a smile on her beautiful face.

Was it possible that happiness was in store for her in the near future? Even while these thoughts filtered through her brain he spoke again.

"Poor Iris, she will no longer suffer."

"Your sister?"

"Yes; she died to-night."

"That is terrible."

"And yet it is best so. Insanity is far worse than death; at any rate it seems so to me," he said solemnly and slow. "And now, dear Rose, I have but one request to make. If we could only be married before this trial I should feel doubly strong to face the world."

She opened her lips to reply, but the words were drowned in their inception by the crash of feet in the hall.

Swiftly the man sprang across the carpet and turned the key in the lock, just as a hand shook the door, and a loud voice demanded admittance.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DEMON'S DEED.

"My presence here has been discovered," he whispered hoarsely. "What shall we do?"

He had seemingly forgotten his determination to face the world and fight for his life as a man should.

Under the excitement of the occasion Rose thought only of saving her lover from the hands of rude men, who looked upon him as a wild beast justly their prey.

"Open the door, or I will break it down!" thundered a voice without.

"This way, quick!" cried Rose.

She led the way from another room that led from the parlor. Raising a window at the side of the house she bade her lover pass through.

He obeyed, and dropped safely to the ground. He had been far-seeing enough to readjust his wig, and a moment later an elderly gentleman walked from the rear of the house and gained the street without molestation.

Then Miss Alstine walked back to the door, turned the key and admitted two men wearing the police uniform.

"Quick! Don't let the villain escape!"

"What does this mean?" demanded Rose, quickly.

"Where is the man you had in here?"

"What man?"

"Do you deny that a man was in this room?"

"There seems to be two at present," retorted Rose, with provoking coolness.

"Will you answer my question, girl?"

"Please ask it, and I will see."

"Where is the man who was with you a short time since?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Cannot?"

"That's what I said."

"Will not, you mean."

"No, I cannot," asserted Rose.

"Be careful, girl, or it may become my duty to place you under arrest."

"I would not have you neglect your duty," retorted Rose.

"Do you still refuse to reveal the whereabouts of August Bordine?"

"I certainly refuse to tell what I do not know. He is not here—"

"But he has been here?"

"Yes."

"When did he go?"

"Not long since."

"Don't waste words with her," said the speaker's companion. "Let's search the house."

"I fear it's too late now."

Nevertheless the two men went through the dwelling, even invading the sanctity of Rose Alstine's bedchamber. Nothing was found, however. The fugitive from justice had made good his escape.

And thus pretty Rose Alstine had assisted in a criminal act without realizing it.

The police debated about arresting the girl, but in the end concluded not to do so. They were a chagrined lot, however, who returned to the station.

In the meantime Andrew Barkswell, safely disguised, hurried to the house in the suburbs where he had left his wife alone, and, as he believed, dying.

He was therefore surprised to find her still breathing, as he entered the room where she lay on a low couch, with the room in shadow.

"How are you feeling, Iris?"

He paused an instant at her bedside and gazed down into the sunken face.

"I—I feel bad, very bad."

"Curse it, I wish you were dead!" He did not utter the words aloud, however. Instead he drew a chair to the side of the bed and smoothed the dark hair from her white brow, and pretended to feel the deepest sympathy for her sufferings.

"You remained away a long time, Andrew," murmured the thin lips of the sick wife.

"Did you miss me, dear?"

"Very much. Promise you will remain with me until the—the last, Andrew."

"I won't leave again until you are better," he said, with a peculiar gleam of the eye.

"Then you will stay always."

"Why so?"

"I shall never be better, Andrew."

"Nonsense."

"You always say that, but I know that I am in my last sickness, and—and I want to have a solemn talk with you, Andrew, the last I will have to say to you on earth."

He fidgeted uneasily in his chair, but could not well refuse to listen.

"Nonsense."

But there was no heart in the word. He wished she would hasten her demise. In fact had he thought she was yet alive he would not have so soon returned to the house. It was her dead body he came to see, not a breathing woman, whose claim on him was still paramount to all others.

"Andrew, where is Perry, my brother?"

Her mind seemed to be wandering somewhat.

"How should I know, dear?"

"True, he is such an unsteady body. I have worried about him of late. It has been many days since I have seen him."

The man who sat there in the shadows was silent. So long as she did not talk to him he was content. Her constant upbraiding in the past, although richly merited, was certainly unpleasant to the last degree. He hoped she might die without thinking of him or his misdeeds again.

He was not to escape thus easily, however.

"Poor Victoria! Will it ever be forgiven?"

He started at mention of that name.

Sleuth-hounds were on the track of the murderer, and it was poor satisfaction to know that his only chance of escape lay in the punishment of an innocent man, who so strongly resembled him as to complicate matters to a wonderful degree.

"Why do you mention that name?" he ventured hoarsely.

"Because, poor innocent, it was your fault, all yours. Did they find the dagger, the cold steel that did the bloody, cruel deed?"

"Don't dwell on that," he said in an agitated way. "What was it you were about to tell me for my good, dear?"

"Yes, it was to you I was to talk. You will listen, now that—that I am dying, Andrew?"

"Yes, I will listen."

"Promise me that after I am dead you will reform and lead a better life, that we may meet over there, when—when you cross the river of death."

"I promise."

He was anxious to have the interview over, for it was not pleasant to sit and listen to her sorrowful words.

"You promise. Alas! how many times have I heard that word from your lips, and as many times it was broken."

She sighed deeply and remained silent for some minutes.

Then he was startled by a low sob.

"Nonsense, Iris, don't cry. You're not so far gone as you imagine."

"I—I am so wicked," she murmured.

"You wicked! You're an angel, Iris, and I am ready to swear to it."

"But you do not know, you do not know," she wailed. "I have no right to lecture you on your bad deeds, no right, no right."

She threw up her arms and clung sobbing to his neck.

"There, there, never mind," he said soothingly. "Take a sip of this and you will feel better."

Disengaging her arms from his neck he drew a goblet, half full of water, toward him, and emptied the contents of a small vial into it.

"Enough to kill a giant," he muttered low, as he placed the goblet to the lips of his wife.

One swallow and then she uttered a great cry and sank back quivering.

He sprang to his feet replacing with trembling hand the goblet on the stand at the head of the bed.

"That will fix her," he muttered.

"Andrew, Andrew, what have you done?" she questioned, gaspingly.

"How do you feel?"

His eyes fairly glared at her.

"Worse—*that was poison!*"

He uttered a guttural laugh. Then in a fit of madness bent low and hissed:

"You are right, old woman, it was poison! It isn't the first dose you have taken, either. I meant to have you out of my way before now."

What demon possessed him to tell her this?

His manner had changed suddenly, indeed.

There was the look of a demon on his countenance. He seemed to gloat over the sufferings of his dying wife.

"Andrew, oh, Andrew!"

It was a rebuking cry, but it failed to touch the calloused heart of the being before her.

"You have tormented me continually, Iris," he said, with cool deliberation, "and now my hour of triumph has come."

He laughed hoarsely.

He seemed to enjoy the ghostly horror exhibited on the face of his devoted wife.

"Let me tell you what I have done," he proceeded, with the malice born of a devil's nature. "I get rid of you to make room for another."

"Spare me, Andrew," moaned the pallid lips of the dying woman, already foam-flecked from the effects of the inward workings of the poison last administered.

"I will not. You tormented me until life become a burden, harping on my shortcomings. You are too good for this world, Iris—just proper for an angel, and so 'tis best for you to go. I have found one who will fill your place to perfection, and make me a happy man, since she brings wealth to back her claims. I speak of Rose Alstine. She has promised to wed me as soon as you are dead—we have it all arranged!"

Heartless, wicked, woeful words.

As he came to a pause the sick woman uttered a great, gasping cry, and went into convulsions, foam and blood flecking her lips.

It was the dying agony, he believed.

She seemed beyond help; a few minutes would see her silent in death. It was well. Turning his back upon the scene he strode from the room, and from the house.

Scarcely had he departed when two persons ran up the steps, tried the door and found it yield to their touch.

"It may be too late, doctor, but I hope not."

When the two men entered the room we recognize one of them as Hiram Shanks, the peddler, although he is now neatly clad, and not so repulsive to look upon as formerly.

"Too late!" exclaimed Shanks' companion, as he bent over Mrs. Barkswell.

"The woman is dead!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FACE TO FACE.

"Dead! No, no, it must not be," cried the peddler, in an excited tone.

The doctor felt the woman's pulse.

"There is life certainly," he said, after a moment. "It is possible that she may be revived."

"A hundred dollars shall be your fee, doctor, if you revive her so she can speak again," declared Shanks in a tone of the most intense eagerness.

"I will try."

Placing a medicine case on the stand at the head of the bed, the doctor, whose gray hairs seemed to indicate long experience at least in the profession, proceeded to open and pour out a dark liquid in a spoon.

Then he forced open the jaws of the poor woman, and was gratified to see her swallow it.

A second later she breathed spasmodically and soon showed signs of life.

Shanks sat watching every movement with the most intense interest.

The physician succeeded beyond his most sanguine expectations. It was a most powerful antidote to the poison he knew had been administered by the treacherous husband.

In the course of twenty minutes the woman was able to speak again, although only in an extremely low tone.

"Can you communicate with me, Mrs. Barkswell?"

"Yes," faintly.

"Your husband has attempted to murder you; do you realize it?"

"Yes."

"I am afraid you may never be any better, and unless you tell us what you know, an innocent man may suffer for murder that I believe *he* committed. Do you comprehend?"

"Yes, I believe so," answered Mrs. Barkswell in a stronger voice.

The doctor administered a second dose in brandy, of the antidote, and then the sick woman seemed quite revived for the time.

"There is a plot to ruin one of the most exemplary young men in Grandon," proceeded Shanks in a low tone. "The man who has plotted his destruction is the man who left you but a few minutes since after believing that you were removed from his path forever. Surely you can have no love for that evil man."

"No, no, that is all dead now."

"Then it is needless to tell you that he is an outlaw of the deepest dye. I want you to tell me what you know of the murder at Ridgewood. He confessed to you that he robbed the house, and it may be that you know if it was his hand that used *this!*"

And then Shanks held up a gleaming dagger, the design of the hilt being a serpent's head.

At sight of the weapon the woman shrank back among the pillows and seemed terrified and about to go into another fit.

"Calm yourself," uttered the peddler, lowering the weapon. "You have seen that dagger before."

"Yes! oh, yes!"

"Do you mind telling all about it? It may be the means of saving a human life, it certainly will save a young girl from the trap set for her by this man, who administered poison to rid himself of his wife."

"I will tell."

This was sufficient. The doctor administered another dose of cordial, and then, in tremulous tones, the dying wife, even then in the shadow of death, told a strange and startling story.

When she had finished, her face blanched and she sank suddenly away.

"Quick! the cordial!" cried Shanks, but it was too late. When the man lifted her head to administer the medicine the woman hung a dead weight.

"She is dead," said the doctor.

* * * * *

Mrs. Bordine was once more back at her cottage home, thanks to the kindly influence of Miss Rose Alstine.

Soon after the widow's return, Rose called at the cottage to condole with her over the death of her demented daughter, and the still absent son.

"We all have our cross to bear, Mrs. Bordine. I believe, however, that the worst is past. I believe that August will return and vindicate his innocence in the courts."

"Ah, bless you for that, Miss Rose," uttered the old lady, with tears in her old eyes. "You are an angel if there ever was one."

The two walked into the garden at the side of the house, where the air was cool and balmy.

"I saw your son last night, Mrs. Bordine."

"What! Saw August?"

"Yes."

The widow was all interest at once.

Rose then related the interview she had with Andrew Barkswell, laboring under the delusion that he was her lover.

"And he said he would surely come again and stand trial?"

"Yes."

"Dear boy, Heaven and I know that he is innocent, but it may be impossible to prove it."

"Truth will prevail."

"I hope it will."

"And that poor girl, I know how you must feel at her death, with your son absent. I've do doubt he will try and be at the funeral."

"Yes, I suppose so."

And yet Mrs. Bordine stared at Rose in a sort of dazed way that proved that she did not fully understand.

"I would not weep over poor Iris, Mrs. Bordine."

"Iris?"

"Yes. I feel, and so does August, that the girl is better off—"

"What are you talking about? Who is Iris?"

It was Rose Alstine's turn to stare.

"I am aware that you have tried faithfully to keep the secret, Mrs. Bordine, but August told me all about it last night. He thought it was better that I should know."

The widow rubbed her eyes and still stared at the girl in complete bewilderment.

"I'm sure I never heard of Iris, and I don't know what you mean."

"I speak of your poor daughter—"

"Daughter! My daughter?"

"Yes."

"Goodness alive! child, I never had but one daughter, and she died in infancy. That was nigh about thirty years ago. Her name was Mary."

Rose regarded the mother with a puzzled expression.

"Then you have no crazed daughter—"

"Never. What put such an idea into your head, child?"

It was August, but Rose had no time to explain, for at that moment a shadow fell athwart the grass, and both looked up to see a man standing before them with a hat down low over his eyes.

Rose uttered a cry.

Mrs. Bordine stood staring, but when the man lifted his hat she uttered a glad cry and rushed to his arms.

It was, or seemed to be, August Bordine.

Rose waited for her turn with a wildly beating heart.

"Stand aside mother, I would speak with Rose."

The mother stepped aside then.

There was something in the man's voice that sounded unnatural. She felt chilled and rebelled. Could this be her boy, whom she loved so dearly, casting her coldly aside for another. A mother's instincts are strong, and she stared at the man with tear dimmed eyes as he took the hand of Rose and led her aside.

"I could remain away no longer," he said, in low tones. "As I told you last night, I need you to strengthen me for the ordeal that is to come. Will you do it?"

But in spite of herself just then, Rose was unable to speak. She trembled and felt

cold chills passing over her body.

What did it mean?

The same influence was at work that had troubled the mother. She glanced timidly into the man's face, and then trembled visibly. How strangely old he looked, much different from the gay August of former times. Had his troubles wrought him this change?

"You do not answer, Rose," he urged complainingly, "Must I then lose your sympathy, and meet the ordeal alone?"

"No, no. I will be with you," she cried, quickly.

"As my wife?"

Again she was silent, trembling like a leaf.

"Speak."

"Yes," falteringly, "as your wife, August."

The words seemed to have been forced from her lips.

She regretted them as soon as uttered. Weak and faint, she leaned heavily on his arm for support.

He led her tottering to Mrs. Bordine and said:

"Mother, we ask your blessing. Rose has consented, and we are to be married at once."

"Rose consented to marry you?"

"Yes, mother."

"Don't call me mother," uttered the widow, pushing him from her suddenly, "You are *not* my son, you are an imposter!"

An imposter!

How the words cut into the heart of poor Rose. She recoiled, but he grasped her hand and started to lead her away.

"Come, this is no place for us," he hissed hotly, forgetting his part in his rage and alarm.

"Aye! he is an imposter as I am here to prove!"

A clear, ringing voice uttered the words, as a young man strode from a tree near, tossed his hat to the green-sward, and confronted the startled trio.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CORNERED AT LAST.

"My son, my son!"

The next instant the old lady was clasped to the breast of August Bordine.

It was a dramatic scene.

But the drama was not yet complete.

Several men were striding through the garden, the two in advance wearing the uniform of the city police.

"August Bordine, I arrest you for the murder of Victoria Vane."

[Illustration: "I ARREST YOU FOR THE MURDER OF VICTORIA VANE."]

A hand fell on the impostor's shoulder and a bearded face looked into his.

There came a wild gleam to the eyes of Barkswell as he realized his situation.

He seemed equal to the occasion, however.

"A mistake, officer. Yonder stands August Bordine," and the criminal pointed toward the widow's son.

And then, with a wailing cry, poor Rose reeled and sank fainting to the arms of Mrs. Bordine.

At this moment the officer snapped a pair of handcuffs over the wrists of

Barkswell, thus securing him. However, the officers seemed puzzled, and stared at August as if undecided what course to pursue.

At this moment two others appeared on the ground—Hiram Shanks, the queer peddler, and Ransom Vane.

"You have the right man, gentlemen," said Shanks. "These two resemble each other strangely, and it is this resemblance that has baffled detectives, and made trouble for an honest man."

All eyes were fixed on the speaker, who adjusted the black patch on his blind eye, and spoke with the vigor of a man who knew that he was right.

"Yes," put in Ransom Vane, "there has been a great mistake. This man," pointing to Barkswell, "is the outlaw, and by confounding him with Mr. Bordine an innocent man has been deeply wronged."

"It is false—"

"Never mind putting in your lip," sneered the irrepressible peddler.

"There's crimes enough against you, young man, to sink you to perdition. You are now arrested for the murder of a beautiful, innocent girl—"

"But I never harmed her, I swear it," cried the prisoner, trembling with deep excitement.

"Who did, then?"

"I don't know; but—"

"Is this yours?"

Shanks held up a gleaming dagger.

"No," with a start.

"You have seen the weapon before?"

"Yes."

"You placed it into Bordine's house one night, where it was found by the

officers, for the purpose of fixing that awful murder upon an innocent man. Do you deny that?"

The outlaw was pallid and silent.

"It is true, and you dare not deny it. So far so good; but, gentlemen, it is a mistake to suppose that this man, guilty as he is of crimes without number, was the one who murdered Victoria Vane."

At this announcement the interest deepened on all faces, and the countenance of the prisoner brightened.

"The person who murdered Miss Vane, with this dagger, was in turn murdered by Andrew Barkswell, the prisoner here."

"Who was it?"

"Iris, your wife. *She was the assassin of Victoria Vane!*"

This announcement created a great sensation. Rose had revived, and clinging to the strong arm of August, was listening in amazement to the revelations of Hiram Shanks.

"I suspected it all the time," muttered the prisoner.

"You did? She found Victoria reading a letter from you, and in a fit of insane jealousy she stole upon and drove this dagger into her throat. Last night the poor woman died penitent, and made a full confession before two witnesses."

"If this is true, then we cannot detain the prisoner," said one of the officers.

"Release me at once," demanded Barkswell.

"Not so," cried Shanks. He must be held, for he is guilty of other crimes. The woman who died last night was murdered by poison administered by the hand of her husband, the man you now hold a prisoner. Dr. Wise has the proof that he will produce in good time. Furthermore, this man has another crime to answer for.

"He attempted to murder August Bordine, but failed. He *did*, however,

assassinate his wife's brother, and buried the body in the cellar of an old shanty in the woods upon Bear Creek."

"That is false," uttered Barkswell, yet trembling and paling with fear.

"I have the proof," declared Shanks.

"What proof?"

"My eyesight. I saw you bury your victim!"

The prisoner weakened then. His handcuffs rattled and his whole frame swayed as though he were about to fall to the ground.

"You do not deny your crime, nor the fact that besides poisoning your wife and murdering Perry Jounce, her brother, you assisted the latter, who had long been your tool, to decoy Silas Keene into a room in the rear of Billy Bowleg's saloon, where, some weeks ago, you committed another crime by hurling the detective into a well."

"My soul! This is too much!" gasped the quaking villain.

"Do you deny it?"

No answer from Barkswell, but his head was bowed upon his breast, and a helpless look filled his eyes.

"It would do you no good to deny that you and Perry Jounce murdered Detective Keene—"

"How did you learn so much?" cried out the doomed man.

"There were witnesses present—"

"Witnesses?"

"There was one."

"One?"

Barkswell raised his head and glared at the speaker in evident amazement.

"Yes, one—myself."

"I deny it."

"I think I can convince you."

With the words, the peddler's hand went to his head, a few passes were made, and the man stood transformed. It was a complete metamorphosis.

On the ground lay red wig and black patch.

An exclamation fell from many lips. Andrew Barkswell uttered a great cry.

"Great heavens! *it is Silas Keene, the detective!*"

It was true.

August Bordine had suspected this for some time, and was consequently the least astonished of any present.

"Although you cast me into that well, I did not perish," proceeded the detective, after a moment. "The well was not deep, and there was no water in it, so that the fall only stunned me a little. I soon recovered, and managed to climb to the surface on the jagged stones. It is not necessary to detail how I made my way from the building. No one saw me, and once free, I resolved to disguise myself completely, and thus work to better advantage.

"You of course supposed me dead, and so proceeded with more boldness than you would otherwise have done. This suited me. Your resemblance to August Bordine puzzled me for a time. I did not discover the truth until I saw you both together the time that my faithful Tige prevented you from murdering Bordine in the fisherman's shanty. I dogged your steps and found where your wife lived. I mistrusted you meant to destroy her, and at one time tried to frighten you from your wicked purpose. I failed, but succeeded in capturing you at last."

The detective paused.

The criminal said nothing.

He could not; he was completely broken up, and would have sunk to the ground

had not one of the stout policemen supported him with his arms.

A low sob fell on the ears of all.

The eyes of the group turned to Rose. She rested on the breast of August and was weeping bitterly.

She, too, was broken up.

When the wicked cause of all the trouble was led away to prison, and none remained in the little garden but the old mother, August, and Rose, the latter disengaged himself from his hands and said, with a quiver in her voice and a moisture in her eye:

"I feel like going away by myself and never looking you in the face again, August."

"Why so, darling?"

"Because I have been such a fool."

He drew her to him, however, and kissed her tears away, while he whispered:

"The clouds have drifted away, darling, and we are destined to be happy yet."

She clung to him closely, and the widow understood and helped them. It was indeed sunshine after the storm.

* * * * *

Andrew Barkswell confessed his guilt in open court, and was sentenced to prison for life. Two years later he died. Thus ended an eventful and wicked career. Of course the reward was paid over in due time, and Silas Keene was the lion of the hour, since he had cornered a double murderer, and cleared up the mystery of Victoria Vane's sad death, who had fallen by the hand of a jealous woman.

And now adieu.

THE END.

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