

Lynch Lawrence L.

Out of a Labyrinth



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Out of a Labyrinth / L. Lynch — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I.	5
CHAPTER II.	8
CHAPTER III.	12
CHAPTER IV.	15
CHAPTER V.	18
CHAPTER VI.	21
CHAPTER VII.	26
CHAPTER VIII.	29
CHAPTER IX.	31
CHAPTER X.	34
CHAPTER XI.	41
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	44

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CHAPTER I. A BAD BEGINNING

It was a June day; breezy, yet somewhat too warm. The slow going old passenger train on the slow going mail route, that shall be nameless in these chronicles, seemed in less of a hurry than usual, and I, stretched lazily across two seats, with my left arm in a sling, was beginning to yield to the prevailing atmosphere of stupidity, when we rumbled up to a village station, and took on board a single passenger.

I was returning from a fruitless mission; and had stepped on board the eastward-bound train in anything but an enviable frame of mind; and no wonder! I, who prided myself upon my skill in my profession; *I*, who was counted by my chief the "best detective on the force, sir," – had started, less than a week before, for a little farming settlement in one of the interior States, confident of my ability to unravel soon, and easily, a knotty problem.

I had taken every precaution to conceal my identity, and believed myself in a fair way to unveil the mystery that had brought grief and consternation into the midst of those comfortable, easy-going farmers; and I had been *spotted* at the very outset! I had been first warned, in a gentlemanly but anonymous fashion, to leave the neighborhood, and then, because I did not avail myself of the very first opportunity to decamp, had been shot from behind a hedge!

And this is how it happened:

Groveland, so called, doubtless, because of the total absence of anything bearing closer resemblance to a grove than the thrifty orchards scattered here and there, is a thriving township, not a town.

Its inhabitants reside in the midst of their own farms, and, save the farm buildings, the low, rambling, sometimes picturesque farm houses, or newer, more imposing, "improved" and often exquisitely ugly, white painted dwellings; the blacksmith shop, operated by a thrifty farmer and his hard-fisted sons; the post-office, kept in one corner of the "front room" by a sour-visaged old farmer's wife; and the "deestrick" school-house, then in a state of quiescence, – town institutions there were none in Groveland.

The nearest village, and that an exceedingly small one, was five miles west of Groveland's western boundary line; and the nearest railroad town lay ten miles east of the eastern boundary.

So the Grovelanders were a community unto themselves, and were seldom disturbed by a ripple from the outside world.

It was a well-to-do community. Most of its inhabitants had "squatted" there when the land was cheap and uncultivated, and they were poor and young.

Time, railroads, and the grand march of civilization had increased the value of their acres; and their own industry had reared for them pleasant homes, overflowing granaries, barns "good enough to live in," orchards, vineyards, all manner of comforts and blessings. Strong sons and fair daughters had grown up around them; every man knew his neighbor, and had known him for years. They shared in their neighborhood joys and griefs, and made common cause at weddings, funerals, threshings, huskings, cider makings, everything.

One would suppose it difficult to have a secret in Groveland, and yet a mystery had come among them.

'Squire Ewing, 'squire by courtesy, lived in a fine new white house on a fine farm in the very center of the township. His family consisted of his wife, two daughters, the eldest, eighteen, the younger, fifteen, and two sons, boys of twelve and ten.

The daughters of 'Squire Ewing were counted among the brightest and prettiest in Groveland, and they were not lacking in accomplishments, as accomplishments go in such communities. Much learning was not considered a necessity among the Groveland young ladies, but they had been smitten with the piano-playing mania, and every Winter the district school-house was given over, for one night in the week, to the singing school.

The Misses Ewing were ranked among the best "musicians" of Groveland, and they had also profited for a time by the instructions of the nearest seminary, or young ladies' school.

One evening, just as the sun was setting, Ellen, or Nell Ewing, as she was familiarly called, mounted her pony and cantered blithely away, to pass the night with a girl friend.

It was nothing unusual for the daughters of one farmer to ride or drive miles and pass the night or a longer time with the daughters of another, and Nellie's destination was only four miles away.

The night passed and half of the ensuing day, but the eldest daughter of Farmer Ewing did not return.

However, there was no cause for alarm in this, and 'Squire Ewing ate his evening meal in peace, confident that his daughter would return before the night had closed in. But a second night came and went, and still she did not come.

Then the good farmer became impatient, and early on the morning of the second day he dispatched his eldest son to hasten the return of the tardy one.

But the boy came back alone, and in breathless agitation. Nellie had not been seen by the Ballous since the night she left home. She had complained of a headache, and had decided to return home again. She had remained at Mrs. Ballou's only an hour; it was not yet dark when she rode away.

Well, Nellie Ewing was never seen after that, and not a clue to her hiding-place, or her fate, could be discovered.

Detectives were employed; every possible and impossible theory was "evolved" and worked upon, but with no other result than failure.

Groveland was in a state of feverish excitement; conjectures the most horrible and most absurd were afloat; nothing was talked of save the mysterious disappearance of Nellie Ewing.

And so nearly three months passed. At the end of that time another thunderbolt fell.

Mamie Rutger, the only daughter of a prosperous German farmer; wild little Mamie, who rode the wickedest colts, climbed the tallest trees, sang loudest in the singing-school, and laughed oftenest at the merry-makings, also vanished. At first they thought it one of her jokes, for she was given to practical joking; but she did not come back. No trace of her could be found.

At twilight one June evening she was flitting about the door-yard, sometimes singing gayly, sometimes bending over a rosebush, sometimes snatching down handfuls of early cherries. After that she was seen no more.

Then ensued another search, and a panic possessed that once quiet community. The country was scoured. Every foot of road, every acre of ground, every hedge or clump of trees, every stream, every deserted or shut-up building for miles around was faithfully searched.

And then Farmer Rutger and 'Squire Ewing closeted themselves together, took counsel of each other, and decided to call in the aid of a city detective. They came together to our office and laid their case before our chief.

"If any man can clear up this matter, it's Bathurst," said that bluff old fellow.

And so I was called into the consultation.

It was a very long and very earnest one. Questions were asked that would have done credit to the brightest lawyer. Every phase of the affair, or the two affairs, was closely examined from different standpoints. Every possibility weighed; copious notes taken.

Before the two men left us, I had in my mind's eye a tolerably fair map of Groveland, and in my memory, safely stowed away, the names of many Grovelanders, together with various minute, and seemingly irrelevant, items concerning the families, and nearest friends and neighbors, of the two bereaved fathers.

They fully perceived the necessity for perfect secrecy, and great caution. And I felt assured that no word or sign from them would betray my identity and actual business when, a few days later, I should appear in Groveland.

It was a strange case; one of the sort that had a wonderful fascination for me; one of the sort that once entered upon, absorbed me soul and body, sleeping or waking, day and night, for I was an enthusiast in my profession.

After waiting a few days I set out for the scene of the mystery. I did not take the most direct route to reach my destination, but went by a circuitous way to a small town west of the place, and so tramped into it, coming, not from the city, but from the opposite direction.

My arrival was as unobtrusive as I could make it, and I carried my wardrobe in a somewhat dusty bundle, swung across my shoulder by a strap.

I had assumed the character of a Swede in search of employment, and my accent and general *ensemble* were perfect in their way.

Perseveringly I trudged from farm to farm, meeting sometimes with kindness, and being as often very briefly dismissed, or ordered off for a tramp. But no one was in need of a man until I arrived at the widow Ballou's.

This good woman, who was a better farmer than some of her male neighbors, and who evidently had an eye to the saving of dollars and cents, listened quite indifferently to my little story while I told how long I had looked for work, and how I had been willing to labor for very small wages. But when I arrived at the point where I represented myself as now willing to work for my board until I could do better, her eyes brightened, she suddenly found my monotone more interesting, decided that I "looked honest," and, herself, escorted me to the kitchen and dealt me out a bountiful supper, for I had reached the Ballou farmhouse at sundown.

CHAPTER II.

THE ENEMY MAKES A MOVE

Three days passed, and of course during that time I heard much about the two girls and their singular disappearance.

At night, after work was done, and supper disposed of, Mrs. Ballou would send some one to the post-office. This duty had usually fallen to Miss Grace Ballou, or been chosen by her, but since the night when Nellie Ewing rode away from the door, never again to be seen, Mrs. Ballou had vetoed the evening canters that Grace so much loved, and so the post-office was attended to by Master Fred, the spoiled son and heir, aged thirteen, or by the "hired man."

On the evening of the third day of my service, I saddled one of the farm horses, and rode to the post-office to fetch the widow's mail, and great was my surprise when the grim postmistress presented me with a letter bearing my assumed name, Chris Ollern, and directed to the care of Mrs. Ballou.

Stowing away the widow's papers and letters in a capacious coat pocket, and my own letter in a smaller inner one, I rode thoughtfully homeward.

Who had written me? Not the men at the office; they were otherwise instructed; besides, the letter was a local one, bearing only the Groveland mark. Could it be that Farmer Rutger or 'Squire Ewing had forgotten all my instructions, and been insane enough to write me?

I hurriedly put my horse in his stable, unburdened my pocket of the widow's mail, and mounted to my room.

Locking my door and lighting a tallow candle – the widow objected to kerosene in sleeping rooms, – I opened my letter.

It was brief, very, containing only these words:

Chris Ollern – As you call yourself, unless you wish to disappear as effectually as did Nellie Ewing and Mamie Rutger, you will abandon your present pursuit. A word to the wise is sufficient.

Here was an astonisher, and here was also a clue. I was betrayed, or discovered. But the enemy had showed his hand. I had also made a discovery.

There was an enemy then; there had been foul play; and that enemy was still in the vicinity, as this letter proved.

It was a wily enemy too; the letter would betray nothing as regarded identity. It was *printed*; the letters were smooth and even, but perfectly characterless. It was a wily enemy, but not quite a wise one, as the sending of such a letter proved.

I did not leave my room again that night, but sat for hours thinking.

The next morning as I came from the barn-yard with a pail of milk, I encountered Miss Grace Ballou. She was feeding a brood of chickens, and seemed inclined to talk with me.

"Did you ever see such fine chicks, Chris?" she asked; "and they are only two weeks old."

I stopped, of course, to admire the chickens and express my admiration in broken English.

Suddenly she moved nearer me, and said, in a lower tone:

"Chris, did you bring any letters for any one except mother, last night?"

Promptly and unblushingly, yet somewhat surprised, I answered, "No."

Her eyes searched my face for a second, and then she said, falling back a step:

"Well, don't say anything about my asking you, Chris. I – I expected a letter."

That night I went to the post-office as usual, and the next morning Miss Grace repeated her question:

"Did you bring no letters for *any one, positively*?"

"No, there were only papers that night."

The third night after the receipt of my mysterious warning, however, there came a letter for Grace, which, a little to my surprise, was promptly handed over by her mother. Whether this was the expected missive or not it threw the young lady into unmistakable raptures.

Amy was coming! Amy Holmes; she would be at the station to-morrow, and Grace must go in the carriage to meet her.

Everybody was pleased except Fred Ballou. Mrs. Ballou heartily expressed her satisfaction, and announced that I should drive with Grace to "the station;" and Ann, the "help," became quite animated.

But Fred scornfully declined his mother's proposition, that he should ride to town with his sister and myself.

"Catch me," he sniffed, "for that stuck-up town girl; she was always putting ideas into Grace's head; and – he hated girls anyway. And hoped some one would just carry Amy Holmes off as they did Nellie Ewing."

Whereupon Grace turned, first pale, then scarlet, and lastly, flew at her brother and boxed his ears soundly.

The next day we went as per programme to the town, ten miles distant, where Miss Holmes would be. She had arrived before us, and was waiting.

She was a handsome, showy-looking girl, stylishly dressed, and very self-possessed in manner; evidently a girl who knew something of town life.

We found her beguiling the time of waiting by conversation with a well-dressed, handsome young fellow, who was evidently a prime favorite with both young ladies. He accompanied them while they went about making certain purchases that Mrs. Ballou had charged her daughter not to forget, and then he assisted them into the carriage, while I stowed away their bundles, shook their hands at parting, and stood gazing after them as the carriage rolled away, the very model of a young Don Juan, I thought.

I had hoped to gain something from my ten-mile drive with the two young ladies sitting behind me. I had learned that Miss Holmes was a friend of the Ewings, and also of Mamie Rutger, and as she had not been in the vicinity since these young ladies had vanished, what more natural than that she should talk very freely of their mysterious fate, and might not these girl friends know something, say something, that in my hands would prove a clue?

But I was disappointed; during the long drive the names of Nellie Ewing and Mamie Rutger never once passed their lips. Indeed, save for a few commonplaces, these two young ladies, who might be supposed to have so much to say to each other, never talked at all.

I had driven the steady old work horses in going for Miss Holmes, and so when night came, a feeling of humanity prompted me to buckle the saddle upon a young horse scarcely more than half broken, and set off upon his back for the post-office.

It was a little later than usual, and by the time I had accomplished the first half of my journey, stowed away the usual newspapers, and remounted my horse, it was fully dark; and I rode slowly through the gloom, thinking that Groveland was ambitious indeed to bring the mail every day from a railway ten miles distant, and wondering what it would be like to be the mail boy, and jog over that same monotonous twenty miles of fetching and carrying every day.

I had now reached a high hedge that assured me that my homeward journey was half accomplished, when, from an imaginary inland mail boy, I was suddenly transformed into an actual, crippled John Gilpin. From out the blackness of the hedge came a flash and a sharp report; my horse bounded under me, my left arm dropped helpless, and then I was being borne over the ground as if mounted upon a whirlwind!

It was useless to command, useless to strive with my single hand to curb the frightened beast. It was a miracle that I did not lose my seat, for at first I reeled, and feeling the flow of blood, feared

a loss of consciousness. But that swift rush through the dewy evening air revived me, and rallied my scattered senses.

As we dashed on, I realized that my life had been attempted, and that the would-be assassin, the abductor or destroyer of the two missing girls, had been very near me; that but for the unruly beast I rode I might perhaps have returned his little compliment; at least have found some trace of him.

My horse kept his mad pace until he had reached his own barn-yard gate, and then he stopped so suddenly as to very nearly unseat me.

I quickly decided upon my course of action, and now, dismounting and merely leading my horse into the inclosure, I went straight to the house. I knew where to find Mrs. Ballou at that hour, and was pretty sure of finding her alone.

As I had anticipated, she was seated in her own room, where she invariably read her evening papers in solitude. I entered without ceremony, and much to her surprise.

But I was not mistaken in her; she uttered no loud exclamation, either of anger at my intrusion, or of fright at sight of my bleeding arm. She rose swiftly and came straight up to me.

Before she could ask a question, I motioned her to be silent, and closed the door carefully. After which, without any of my foreign accent, I said:

"Mrs. Ballou, a woman who can manage a great farm and coin money in the cattle trade, can surely keep a secret. Will you bind up my arm while I tell you mine?"

"What!" she exclaimed, starting slightly; "you are not a –"

"Not a Swede? No, madame," I replied; "I am a detective, and I have been shot to-night by the hand that has struck at the happiness of 'Squire Ewing and his neighbor.'"

The splendid woman comprehended the situation instantly.

"Sit there," she said, pointing to her own easy chair. "And don't talk any more now. I shall cut away your sleeve."

"Can you?" I asked, deprecatingly.

"Can I?" contemptuously; "I bleed my cattle."

I smiled a little in spite of myself; then —

"Consider me a colt, a heifer, anything," I said, resignedly. "But I feel as if I had been bled enough."

"I should think so," she replied, shortly. "Now be still; it's lucky that you came to me."

I thought so too, but obedient to her command, I "kept still."

She cut away coat and shirt sleeves; she brought from the kitchen tepid water and towels, and from her own especial closet, soft linen rags. She bathed, she stanchd, she bandaged; it proved to be only a flesh wound, but a deep one.

"Now then," she commanded in her crisp way, when all was done, and I had been refreshed with a very large glass of wine, "tell me about this."

"First," I said, "your colt stands shivering yet, no doubt, and all dressed in saddle and bridle, loose in the stable-yard."

"Wait," she said, and hurried from the room.

In a few moments she came back.

"The colt is in his stable, and no harm done," she announced, sitting down opposite me. "How do you feel?"

"A little weak, that is all. Now, I will tell you all about it."

In the fewest words possible, I told my story, and ended by saying:

"Mrs. Ballou, you, as a woman, will not be watched or suspected; may I leave with you the task of telling 'Squire Ewing and Mr. Rutger what has happened to me?'"

"You may," with decision.

"And I must get away from here before others know how much or little I am injured. Can your woman's wit help me? I want it given out that my arm is broken. Do you comprehend me?"

"Perfectly. Then no one here must see you, and – you should have that wound dressed by a good surgeon, I think. There is a train to the city to-morrow at seven. I will get up in the morning at three o'clock, make us a cup of coffee, harness the horses, and drive you to Sharon."

"*You?*" I exclaimed.

"Yes, I! Why not? It's the only way. And now, would you mind showing me that letter?"

I took it from my pocket-book and put it in her hand. She read it slowly, and then looked up.

"Why did you not heed this warning?" she asked.

"Because I wanted to find out what it meant."

"Well, you found out," sententiously. "Now, go to bed, but first let me help you remove that coat."

"Mrs. Ballou, you are a woman in a thousand," I exclaimed, as I rose to receive her assistance.

"And I don't see how I can ever repay you. You are your own reliance."

As I spoke, the coat fell from my shoulder and my hand touched the weapon in my pistol pocket.

She saw it, too, and pointing to it, said:

"I have never owned a pistol, because I could not buy one without letting Fred know it; he is always with me in town. If you think I have earned it give me that."

"Gladly," I said, drawing out the small silver-mounted six-shooter; "it is loaded, every barrel. Can you use it?"

"Yes; I know how to use firearms."

"Then when you do use it, if ever, think of me." I laughed.

"I will," she said, quite soberly.

And little either of us dreamed how effectively she would use it one day.

The next morning, at half-past three, we drove out of the farm yard, *en route* for the railway station.

During our drive, we talked like two men, and when we parted at Sharon we were very good friends. I dropped her work-hardened hand reluctantly, and watched her drive away, thinking that she was the only really sensible woman I had ever known, and feeling half inclined to fall in love with her in spite of the fact that she was twenty-five years my senior.

CHAPTER III. SCENTING A MYSTERY

That is how I chanced to be rolling city-ward on that phlegmatic, oft-stopping, slow going, accomodation train, and that is why I was out of temper, and out of tune.

My operation had been retarded. Instead of working swiftly on to a successful issue, this must be a case of waiting, of wit against wit, and I must report to my chief a balk in the very beginning.

Nevertheless, as I said in the outset, fifty miles of monotonous rumble, together with the soothing influence of a good cigar, had blunted the edge of my self-disgust; my arm was quite easy, only warning me now and then that it was a crippled arm; I was beginning to feel phlegmatic and comfortable.

I had formed a habit of not thinking about my work when the thinking would be useless, and there was little room for effective thought in this case. My future movements were a foregone conclusion. So I rested, and fell almost asleep, and then it was that the single passenger of whom I made mention, came on board.

I had not noticed the name of the station, but as I roused myself and looked out, I saw that we were moving along the outskirts of a pretty little town, and then I turned my eyes toward the new passenger.

He was coming down the aisle towards me, and was a plain, somewhat heavy-featured man, with a small, bright, twinkling eye. Certainly it was not a prepossessing countenance, but, just as certainly, it was an honest one. He was dressed in some gray stuff, the usual "second best" of a thriving farmer or mechanic, and might have been either.

By the time I had arrived at this stage in my observations, there was rustle and stir behind me, and a man who had been lounging, silent, moveless, and, as I had supposed, asleep, stretched forward a brown fist, exclaiming:

"Hallo, old boy! Stop right here. Harding, how are ye?"

Of course the "old boy" stopped. There was the usual hand shaking, and mutual exclamations of surprise and pleasure, not unmixed with profanity. Evidently they had been sometime friends and neighbors, and had not met before for years.

They talked very fast and, it seemed to me, unnecessarily loud; the one asking, the other answering, questions concerning a certain village, which, because it would not be wise to give its real name we will call Trafton.

Evidently Trafton was the station we had just left, and where we took on this voluble passenger. They talked of its inhabitants, its improvements, its business; of births, and deaths, and marriages. It was very uninteresting; I was beginning to feel bored, and was meditating a change of seat, when the tone of the conversation changed somewhat, and, before I could sufficiently overcome my laziness to move, I found myself getting interested.

"No, Trafton ain't a prosperous town. For the few rich ones it's well enough, but the poor – well, the only ones that prosper are those who live without work."

"Oh! the rich?"

"No! the poor. 'Nuff said."

"Oh! I see; some of the old lot there yet; wood piles suffer?"

"*Wood piles!*"

"And hen roosts."

"*Hen roosts!*" in a still deeper tone of disgust.

"Clothes lines, too, of course."

"*Clothes lines!*" Evidently this was the last straw. "Thunder and lightning, man, that's baby talk; there's more deviltry going on about Trafton than you could scoop up in forty ordinary towns."

"No! you don't tell me. What's the mischief?"

"Well, it's easy enough to tell *what* the mischief is, but *where* it is, is the poser; but there's a good many in Trafton that wouldn't believe you if you told them there was no such thing as an organized gang of marauders near the place."

"An organized gang!"

"Yes, sir."

"But, good Lord, that's pretty strong for Trafton. Do you believe it?"

"Rather," with Yankee dryness.

"Well, I'm blessed! Come, old man, tell us some of the particulars. What makes you suspect blacklegs about that little town?"

"I've figured the thing down pretty close, and I've had reason to. The thing has been going on for a number of years, and I've been a loser, and ever since the beginning it has moved like clock-work. Five years ago a horse thief had not been heard of in Trafton for Lord knows how long, until one night Judge Barnes lost a valuable span, taken from his stable, slick and clean, and never heard of afterwards. Since then, from the town and country, say for twenty-five miles around, they have averaged over twenty horses every year, and they are always the very best; picked every time, no guess work."

The companion listener gave a long, shrill whistle, and I, supposed by them to be asleep, became very wide awake and attentive.

"But," said the astonished man, "you found some of them?"

"No, sir; horses that leave Trafton between two days never come back again."

"Good Lord!"

There was a moment's silence and then the Traftonite said:

"But that ain't all; we can beat the city itself for burglars."

"Burglars, too!"

"Yes, *burglars!*" This the gentleman emphasized very freely. "And cute ones; they never get caught, and they seldom miss a figure."

"How's that?"

"They always know where to strike. If a man goes away to be absent for a night or two, they know it. If a man draws money from the bank, or sells cattle, they know that. And if some of our farmers, who like to go home drunk once in a while, travel the road alone, they are liable to be relieved of a part of their load."

"And who do the folks suspect of doing the mischief?"

"They talk among themselves, and very carefully, about *having* suspicions and *being* on the watch; but very few dare breathe a name. And after all, there is no clear reason for suspecting anyone."

"But *you* suspect some one, or I miss my guess."

"Well, and so I do, but I ain't the man to lay myself liable to an action for damages, so I say nothing, but *I'm watching*."

Little more was said on the subject that interested me, and presently the Traftonite took leave of his friend, and quitted the train at a station, not more than twenty miles east of Trafton; the other was going to the city, like myself.

When quiet was restored in my vicinity, I settled myself for a fresh cogitation, and now I gave no thought to the fate of Mamie Rutger and 'Squire Ewing's daughter. My mind was absorbed entirely with what I had just heard.

The pretty, stupid-looking little town of Trafton had suddenly become to me what the great Hippodrome is to small boys. I wanted to see it; I wanted to explore it, and to find the mainspring that moved its mystery.

The words that had fallen from the lips of the Trafton man, had revealed to my practiced ear a more comprehensive story than he had supposed himself relating.

Systematic thieving and burglary for five years! Systematic, and always successful. What a masterful rogue must be the founder of this system! How secure he must be in his place, and his scheming, and what a foeman to encounter. It would be something to thwart, to baffle, and bring to justice a villain of such caliber.

After a while my thoughts turned back to Groveland. Certainly the mystery there was quite as deep, and the solution of it of more vital importance. But – Groveland was the mystery that I had touched and handled; Trafton was the mystery unseen.

So my mind returned to the latter subject, and when, hours later, we ran into the city, Groveland was still absent, and Trafton present, in my thoughts.

CHAPTER IV. CHARTERING A DUMMY

By the time I reached the city my arm, which needed fresh bandages, began to pain me, and I went straight to the office of a surgeon, well-known to fame, and to the detective service. He had bound up many a broken bone for our office, and we of the fraternity called him "Our Samaritan." Some of the boys, and, let me confess it, myself among the number, called him "Our old woman," as well, for, while he bandaged and healed and prescribed, he waged continued warfare upon our profession, or rather the dangers of it.

Of course, the country needed secret service men, and must have them, but there was an especial reason why each one of us should not be a detective. We were too young, or too old; we were too reckless, or we were cut out for some other career. In short, every patient that came under the hand of good Dr. Denham, became straightway an object of interest to his kindly old heart; and – strange weakness in a man of his cloth – he desired to keep us out of danger.

"So ho!" cried "our old woman," when I appeared before him with my bandaged arm, "here *you* are! I knew you'd be along soon. You've kept out of my clutches a good while. Arm, eh? Glad of it! I'll cut it off; I'll cut it off! That'll spoil *one* detective."

I laughed. We always laughed at the talkative soul, and he expected it.

"Cut it off, then," I retorted, flinging myself down in a chair and beginning to remove my sling. "I don't need a left arm to shoot the fellow that gave me this, and I'm bound to do that, you know."

"So! Got shot again? Go on, go on, sir! I'll have the pleasure of dissecting you yet. You'll come home dead some day, you scoundrel. Ah! here we are. Um! flesh wound, rear of arm, under side; close, pretty close, pret-ty close, sir!"

All this was jerked out in short breaths, while he was undoing and taking a first look at my arm. When the actual business of dressing commenced, "our old woman" was always silent and very intent upon the delicate task.

"Pity it wasn't a little worse," he sniffled, moving across the room and opening a case of instruments. "You chaps get off too easy; you don't come quite near enough to Death's door. There's Carnes, now; got a knife through his shoulder, and fretting and fuming because he can't put himself in a position to get another dig."

"Is Carnes in?"

"Yes. And was badly cut."

"Poor fellow! I'm sorry for that, but glad of the chance to see him; he's been on a long cruise."

"Well, I'm not so sure about his going on another. Now then."

And the doctor applied himself to business, and I sat, wincing sometimes, under his hand, but thinking through it all of Carnes.

He was the *comique* of the force; a man who was either loved or hated by all who knew him. No one could be simply indifferent to Carnes. He was a well-educated man, although he habitually spoke with a brogue. But I knew Carnes was not an Irishman; although he professed to have "hailed from Erin," he could drop the accent at pleasure and assume any other with perfect ease, – a feat rather difficult of accomplishment by a genuine Irishman.

Nobody knew much about Carnes; he had no confidants, although he had his favorites, one of whom I chanced to be.

He was older than myself by ten years, but when the mood seized him, could be younger by twenty. He had been absent from the office for nearly a year, and I mentally resolved that, after making my report and attending to business, I would lose no time in seeing him.

Under the skilled hand of Dr. Denham my arm was soon dressed and made comfortable. It would be well in a fortnight, the good doctor assured me, and then as soon as I could, I withdrew from his presence and his customary fire of raillery and questions, and stopping only to refresh myself at a restaurant by the way, hastened on toward our office, where I was soon closeted with my Chief.

As usual, he made no comments, asked no questions, when I dawned upon him thus unexpectedly. He never made use of unnecessary words. He only turned out one or two of the force who were lounging there, waiting his pleasure to attend to less important business, saw that the doors were closed and the outer office properly attended, and then seating himself opposite me at the desk, said quietly:

"Now, Bathurst?"

I was well accustomed to this condensed way of doing things, and it suited me. In a concise manner matching his own, I put him in possession of the facts relating to the Groveland case, and then I made a discovery. After relating how I had received the anonymous letter I produced my pocket-book, where I supposed it to be, and found it missing! It was useless to search; the letter was not in my pocket-book, neither was it on my person.

"Well!" I said, when fully convinced that the letter was certainly not in my possession, "here's another complication. I've been robbed and – I know who did it!"

My companion made no comment, and I continued:

"The letter was of no vital importance; I will finish my story and then you will know what has become of it."

I told the rest; of my ride upon Mrs. Ballou's colt, of the pistol shot, my runaway steed, and my subsequent interview with Mrs. Ballou. How she had dressed my wound, how the circumstances had compelled me to confide in her, and how she had risen to the occasion, and driven me to the station at half-past three in the morning, and I finished by saying:

"Now it looks to me as if Mrs. Ballou had stolen my letter, and if so, one might take that fact and the one that Nellie Ewing was never seen after leaving her house, and count it as strong circumstantial evidence; but, that kind of evidence won't convince me that Mrs. Ballou is implicated in the crime or the mystery. When I told her of the printed letter, I saw her eyes gleam; and when she asked to see the document I read anxiety in her face. I am sure she took the letter, and I think she has a suspicion of some sort; but if she has the letter she will return it."

My chief made no comment on all that I had told him; he picked up a paper weight and laid it down again with great precision, then he put all my story "on the shelf," as we were wont to express it, by asking abruptly:

"What are you going to do next?"

The question did not surprise me. He was not in the habit of offering much advice to such operatives as he trusted with delicate cases, for he never trusted a man until he felt full confidence in his skill and integrity. But when we desired to consult with him, he entered into the study of the case with animation and zeal; and then, and then only, did he do a full share of the talking.

"Going to send them a 'dummy,' if we can find one with the grit to face the chances. They must suppose me entirely out of the business."

"Yes."

"I want an extraordinary dummy, too; a blusterer."

"Wait," interrupted my companion, beginning to smile, "I have got just the animal. When do you want to see him?"

"As soon as possible; I want him in the field at once."

"Very good. This fellow came here yesterday, and he's the greatest combination of fool and egotist I ever saw. Knows he was born for a detective and is ready to face a colony of desperadoes; there is no limit to his cheek and no end to his tongue. If you want a talkative fool he'll do."

"Well," I replied, "that's what I want, but the man must not be quite destitute of courage. I don't think that the party or parties will make another attack upon a fresh man, and yet they may; and this dummy must remain there quite alone until the rascals are convinced that he has no confederates. There is a keen brain at the bottom of this Groveland mischief. I mean to overreach it and all its confederates, for I believe there must be confederates; and, sir, I don't believe those girls have been murdered."

"No?"

"No. But I want our dummy to act on the supposition that they *have* been. This will ease the vigilance of the guilty parties, and when they are off their guard, our time will come. Where is Carnes?"

My companion was in full sympathy with my abrupt change of the subject, and he answered, readily:

"At his old rooms. Carnes had a bad cut, but he is getting along finely."

"Is he? The doctor gave me the idea that he was still in a doubtful condition."

"Stuff," giving a short laugh, "some of his scarey talk; he told me that Carnes would be about within two weeks. Carnes did some good work in the West."

"He is a splendid fellow; I must see him to-night. But about our dummy: when can you produce him?"

"Will to-morrow do? say ten o'clock."

"It must be later by an hour; the doctor takes me in hand at ten."

"Eleven, then. I will have him here, and you'll find him a jewel."

"Very good," I said, rising, and taking up my hat, "any message to send to Carnes? I shall see him to-night."

"Look here," turning upon me suddenly, "you are not to go to Carnes for any purpose but to *see* him. You must not talk to him much, nor let him talk; the doctor should have told you that. He is weak, and easily excited. It's bad enough to have two of my best men crippled and off at once; you must not retard his recovery. Carnes is as unruly as a ten-year old, now."

I laughed; I could see just how this whimsical comrade of mine would chafe under his temporary imprisonment.

"I won't upset the old fellow," I said, and took my leave.

CHAPTER V. EN ROUTE FOR TRAFTON

Over the minor events of my story I will not linger, for although they cannot be omitted altogether, they are still so overshadowed by startling and thrilling after events that they may, with propriety, be narrated in brief.

I saw Carnes, and found that the Chief had not exaggerated, and that the doctor had.

Carnes was getting well very fast, but was chafing like a caged bear, if I may use so ancient an illustration.

We compared notes and sympathized with each other, and then we made some plans. Of course we were off duty for the present, and could be our own masters. Carnes had been operating in a western city, and I proposed to him a change. I told him of the conversation I had overheard that morning, and soon had him as much interested in Trafton as was myself. Then I said:

"Now, old man, why not run down to that little paradise of freebooters and see what we think of it?"

"Begorra and that'll jist suit me case," cried Carnes, who was just then in his Hibernian mood. "And it's go we will widen the wake."

But go "widen the wake" we did not.

We were forced to curb our impatience somewhat, for Carnes needed a little more strength, and my arm must be free from Dr. Denham's sling.

We were to go as Summer strollers, and, in order to come more naturally into contact with different classes of the Traftonites, I assumed the *rôle* of a well-to-do Gothamite with a taste for rural Summer sports, and Carnes made a happy hit in choosing the character of half companion, half servant; resolving himself into a *whole* Irishman for the occasion.

It was a fancy of his always to operate in disguise, so for this reason, and because of his pallor, and the unusual length of his hair and beard, he chose to take his holiday *en naturelle*, and most unnatural he looked to me, who had never seen him in ill-health.

As for me, I preferred on this occasion to adopt a light disguise.

In spite of the warning of our Chief, but not in defiance of it, I talked Carnes into a fidget, and even worked myself into a state of enthusiasm. Of course I made no mention of the Groveland case; we never discussed our private operations with each other; at least, not until they were finished and the *finale* a foregone conclusion.

After bidding Carnes good-night, I sauntered leisurely homeward, if a hotel may be called home, and the ring of a horse's hoofs on the pavement brought to my mind my wild ride, Groveland, and Mrs. Ballou.

Why had she stolen that letter of warning? That she had I felt assured. Did she give her true reason for wishing my revolver? Would she return my letter? And would she, after all, keep the secret of my identity?

I did not flatter myself that I was the wonderful judge of human nature some people think themselves, but I did believe myself able to judge between honest and dishonest faces, and I had judged Mrs. Ballou as honest.

So after a little I was able to answer my own questions. She *would* return my letter. She *could* keep a secret, and – she would make good use, if any, of my weapon.

It was not long before my judgment of Mrs. Ballou, in one particular at least, was verified.

On the morning after my interview with Carnes, I saw the man who was destined to cover himself with glory in the capacity of "Dummy," and here a word of explanation may be necessary.

Sometimes, not often, it becomes expedient, if not absolutely necessary, for a detective to work under a double guard. It is not always enough that others should not know him as a detective; it is required that they should be doubly deluded by fancying themselves aware of *who is*, hence the dummy.

But in this narrative I shall speak in brief of the dummy's operations. Suffice it to say that he was just the man for the place; egotistical, ignorant, talkative to a fault, and thoroughly imbued, as all dummies should be, with the idea that he was "born for a detective."

Of course he was not aware of the part he was actually to play. He was instructed as to the nature of the case, given such points as we thought he would make best use of, and told in full just what risk he might run.

But our dummy was no coward. He inspected my wounded arm, expressed himself more than ready to take any risk, promised to keep within the bounds of safety after nightfall, and panted to be in the field.

Just one day before our departure for Trafton I received a letter from Mrs. Ballou. Enclosed with it was my lost note of warning. Its contents puzzled me not a little. It ran thus:

Dear Sir – I return you the letter I took from your pocket the morning you left us. You did not suspect me of burglary, did you? Of course you guessed the truth when you came to miss it. I thought it might help me to a clue, but was wrong. *I can not use it.*

If anything *new or strange* occurs, it may be to your interest to inform *me* first of all.

The time may come when you can doubly repay the service I rendered you not long since. If so, remember me. I think I shall come to the city soon.

Respectfully, etc., M. A. Ballou

P. S. —*Please destroy.*

From some women such a letter might have meant simply nothing. From Mrs. Ballou it was fraught with meaning.

How coolly she waived the ceremony of apology! She wanted the letter – she took it; a mere matter of course.

And as a matter of course, she returned it.

Thus much of the letter was straight-forward, and suited me well enough; but —

"I thought it might help me to a clue, but was wrong. I can not use it."

Over these words I pondered, and then I connected them with the remainder of the letter. Mrs. Ballou was clever, but she was no diplomatist. She had put a thread in my hands.

I made some marks in a little memorandum book, that would have been called anything but intelligible to the average mortal, but that were very plain language to my eye, and to none other. Next I put a certain bit of information in the hands of my Chief; then I turned my face toward Trafton.

To my readers the connection between the fate of the two missing girls, and the mysterious doings at Trafton, may seem slight.

To my mind, as we set out that day for the scene of a new operation, there seemed nothing to connect the two; I was simply, as I thought, for the time being, laying down one thread to take up another.

A detective has not the gift of second sight, and without this gift how was I to know that at Trafton I was to find my clue to the Groveland mystery, and that that mystery was in its turn to shed a light upon the dark doings of Trafton, and aid justice in her work of requital?

So it is. Out of threads, divers and far-fetched, Fate loves to weave her wonderful webs.

And now, for a time, we leave Groveland with the shadow upon it. We leave the shadow now; later it comes to us.

For the present we are *en route* for Trafton.

CHAPTER VI.

JIM LONG

"Trafton?" said Jim Long, more familiarly known as Long Jim, scratching his head reflectively, "can't remember just how long I *did* live in Trafton; good sight longer'n I'll live in it any more, I calklate; green, oh, dretful green, when I come here; in fact mem'ry hadn't de-welluped; wasn't peart then like I am now. But I ain't got nothin' to say agin' Trafton, I ain't, tho' there *be* some folks as has. Thar's Kurnel Brookhouse, now, *he's* bin scalped severial times; then thar's – hello!"

Jim brought his rhetoric up standing, and lowered one leg hastily off the fence, where he had been balancing like a Chinese juggler.

At the same moment a fine chestnut horse dashed around a curve of the road, bearing a woman, who rode with a free rein, and sat as if born to the saddle. She favored Jim with a friendly nod as she flew past, and that worthy responded with a delighted grin and no other sign of recognition.

When she had disappeared among the trees, and the horse's hoofs could scarcely be heard on the hard dry road, Jim drew up his leg, resumed his former balance, and went on as if nothing had happened.

"There was Kurnel Brookhouse and – "

"The mischief fly away wid old Brookhouse," broke in Carnes, giving the fence a shake that nearly unseated our juggler. "Who's the purty girl as bowed till yee's? That's the question on board now."

"Look here, Mr. Ireland," expostulated Jim, getting slowly off the fence backward, and affecting great timidity in so doing, "ye shouldn't shake a chap that way when he's practisin' jimnasti – what's its name? It's awful unsafe."

And he assured himself that his two feet were actually on *terra firma* before he relinquished his hold upon the top rail of the fence. Then turning toward Carnes he asked, with a most insinuating smile:

"Wasn't you askin' something?"

"That's jist what I was, by the powers," cried Carnes, as if his fate hung upon the answer. "Who is the leddy? be dacent, now."

We had been some two weeks in Trafton when this dialogue occurred, and Jim Long was one of our first acquaintances. Carnes had picked him up somewhere about town; and the two had grown quite friendly and intimate.

Long was a character in the eyes of Carnes, and was gradually developing into a genius in mine. Jim was, to all outward appearances, the personification of laziness, candor, good nature, and a species of blundering waggishness; but as I grew to know him better, I learned to respect the irony under his innocent looks and boorish speeches, and I soon found that he possessed a faculty, and a fondness, for baffling and annoying Carnes, that delighted me; for Carnes was, like most indefatigable jokers, rather nonplussed at having the tables turned.

Jim never did anything for a livelihood that could be discovered, but he called himself a "Hoss Fysician," and indeed it was said that he could always be trusted with a horse, if he could be induced to look at one. But he had his likes and dislikes, so he said, and he would obstinately refuse to treat a horse toward which he had what he called "onfriendly feelin's."

Jim could tell us all there was to tell concerning the town of Trafton. It was only necessary to set him going; and no story lost anything of spirit through being told by him.

He was an oracle on the subjects of fishing and hunting; indeed, he was usually to be found in the companionship of gun or fishing rod.

Fortunately for us, Trafton had rare facilities for sports of the aforementioned sort, and we gathered up many small items while, in the society of Long Jim, we scrambled through copses, gun in hand, or whipped the streams, and listened to the heterogenous mass of information that flowed from his ready tongue.

But the spirit of gossip was not always present with Jim. Sometimes he was in an argumentative mood, and then would ensue the most astounding discussions between himself and Carnes. Sometimes he was full of theology, and then his discourse would have enraptured Swing, and out-Heroded Ingersoll, for his theology varied with his moods. Sometimes he was given to moralizing, and then Carnes was in despair.

Jim lived alone in a little house, or more properly, "cabin," something more than a mile from town. He had a small piece of ground which he called his "farm," and all his slight amount of industry was expended on this.

"Who is the leddy, I tell yee's?" roared Carnes, who, I may as well state here, had introduced himself to the Traftonites as Barney Cooley. "Bedad, a body would think she was your first shwateheart by the dumbness av yee's!"

"And so she air," retorted Jim with much solemnity. "Don't *you* go ter presoomin', Mr. Ireland. That are Miss Manvers, as lives in the house that's just a notch bigger'n Kurnel Brookhouse's; and her father was Captain Manvers, as went down in the good ship *Amy Audrey*, and left his darter that big house, and a bigger fortune dug out 'en a treasure-ship on the coast uv –"

"Stop a bit, long legs," interposed Carnes, or Barney, as we had better call him, "was it a treasure-ship yee's wur hatchin' when it tuck yee's so long to shun out yer little sthory?"

"Well, then, Erin, tell your own stories, that's all. If yer wan't ter kick over one uv the institooshuns uv Trafton, why, wade in."

But Carnes only shook his head, and lying at full length upon the ground feigning great pain, groaned at intervals:

"Oh! h! h! treasure-ship!"

"But, Long," I interposed, "does this young lady, this Miss Manvers, sanction the story of a treasure from the deep, or is it only a flying rumor?"

"It's flyin' enough," retorted Jim, soberly. "It's in everybody's mouth; that is, everybody as has an appetite for flyin' rumors. And I never knew of the lady contradictin' it, nuther. The facks is jest these, boss. There's Miss Manvers, and there's the big house, and the blooded horses, an' all the other fine things that I couldn't begin to interduce by their right names. They're facks, as anybody can see. There seems to be plenty o' money backin' the big house an' other big fixins, an' *I* ain't agoin' to be oudacious enough ter say there ain't a big treasure-ship backin' up the whole business. Now, I ain't never seen 'em, an' I ain't never seen anyone as has, not bein' much of a society man; but folks say as Miss Manvers has got the most wonderfulest things dug out o' that ship; old coins, heaps of 'em; jewels an' *aunteeks*, as they call 'em, that don't hardly ever see daylight. One thing's certain: old Manvers come here most six years ago; he dressed, looked, and talked like a sailor; he bought the big house, fitted it up, an' left his daughter in it. Then he went away and got drowned. They say he made his fortune at sea, and it's pretty sartin that he brought some wonderful things home from the briny. Mebbe you had better go up to the Hill, that's Miss Manvers' place, and interduce yourself, and ask for the family history, Mr. 'Exile of Erin,'" concluded Jim, with a grin intended to be sarcastic, as he seated himself on a half decayed stump, and prepared to fill his pipe.

"Bedad, an' so I will, Long Jim," cried Barney, springing up with alacrity. "An' thank ye kindly for mintionin' it. When will I find the leddy at home, then?"

Partly to avert the tournament which I saw was about to break out afresh between the two, and partly through interest in the fair owner of the treasure-ship spoils, I interposed once more.

"Miss Manvers must be a fair target for fortune-hunters, Long; are there any such in Trafton?"

"Wall, now, that's what *some* folks says, tho' I ain't goin' ter lay myself liable ter an action fer slander. There's *lovers* enough; it ain't easy tellin' jest what they *air* after. There's young Mr. Brookhouse; now, *his* pa's rich enough; *he* ain't no call to go fortin huntin'. There's a lawyer from G – , too, and a young 'Piscopal parson; then there's our new young doctor. I ain't hearn anyone say anythin' about him; but *I've* seen 'em together, and I makebold ter say that he's anuther on 'em. Seen the young doctor, ain't ye?" turning to me suddenly with the last question.

"Yes," I replied, carelessly; "he dines at the hotel."

"Just so, and keeps his own lodgin' house in that little smit on a cottage across the creek on the Brookhouse farm road."

"Oh, does he?"

"Yes. Queer place for a doctor, some think, but bless you, it's as central as any, when you come ter look. Trafton ain't got any *heart*, like most towns; you can't tell where the middle of it is. It's as crookid as – its reputation."

Not desiring to appear over anxious concerning the reputation of Trafton, I continued my queries about the doctor.

"He's new to Trafton, I think you said?"

"Yes, bran new; *too* new. We don't like new things, we don't; have to learn 'em afore we like 'em. We don't like the new doctor like we orter."

"*We*, Long? Don't you like Dr. Bethel?"

"Well, speakin' as an individual, I like him fust rate. *I* wuz speakin' as a good citizen, ye see; kind o' identifyin' myself with the common pulse," with an oratorical flourish.

"Oh, I do see," I responded, laughingly.

"Yis, we see!" broke in Barney, who had bridled his tongue all too long for his own comfort. "He's runnin' fur office, is Jim; he's afther wantin' to be alderman."

"Ireland," retorted Long, in a tone of lofty admonition, "we're talkin' sense, wot nobody expects ye to understand. Hold yer gab, won't yer?"

Thus admonished, Barney relapsed into silence, and Jim, who was now fairly launched, resumed:

"Firstly," said he, "the doctor's a leetle too good lookin', don't you think so?"

"Why, he is handsome, certainly, but it's in a massive way; he is not effeminate enough to be *too* handsome."

"That's it," replied Long, disparagingly; "he ain't our style. *Our* style is curled locks, cunnin' little moustachys, little hands and feet, and slim waists. Our style is more ruffles to the square fut of shirt front, and more chains and rings than this interlopin' doctor wears."

"Our sthyle! Och, murther, hear him!" groaned Carnes, in a stage aside.

"His manners ain't our style, nuther," went on Long, lugubriously. "*We* always has a bow and a smile fur all, rich an poor alike, exceptin' now and then a no count person what there's no need uv wastin' politeness on. *He* goes along head up, independenter nor Fouth o' July. He don't make no distincshun between folks an' folks, like a man orter. I've seen him bow jist the same bow to old Granny Sanders, as lives down at the poor farm, and to Parson Radcliffe, our biggest preachin' gun. Now, *that's* no way fer a man ter do as wants ter live happy in Trafton; it ain't *our* way."

A mighty groan from Barney.

"He's got a practice, though," went on Jim, utterly ignoring the apparent misery of his would-be tormentor. "Somehow he manages to cure folks as some of our old doctors can't. I reckon a change o' physic's good fer folks, same's a change o' diet – "

"Or a clane shirt," broke in Carnes, with an insinuating glance in the direction of Jim's rather dingy linen.

"Eggsackly," retorted Long, turning back his cuffs with great care and glancing menacingly at his enemy – "er a thrashin'."

"Gentlemen," I interposed, "let us have peace. And tell me, Jim, where may we find your model Traftonite, your hero of the curls, moustaches, dainty hands, and discriminating politeness? I have not seen him."

"Whar?" retorted Long, in an aggrieved tone, "look here, boss, you don't think *I* ever mean anythin' personal by my remarks? I'd sworn it were all that way when you come ter notice. The average Traftonite's the sleekest, pertiest chap on earth. We wuz born so."

Some more demonstrations in pantomime from Carnes, and silence fell upon us. I knew from the way Long smoked at his pipe and glowered at Carnes that nothing more in the way of information need be expected from him. He had said enough, or too much, or something he had not intended to say; he looked dissatisfied, and soon we separated, Long repairing to his farm, and Carnes and I to our hotel, all in search of dinner.

"We won't have much trouble in finding the 'Average Traftonite,' old man," I said, as we sauntered back to town.

No answer; Carnes was smoking a huge black pipe and gazing thoughtfully on the ground.

"I wonder if any attempt has been made to rob Miss Manvers of those treasure-ship jewels," I ventured next.

"Umph!"

"Or of her blooded horses. Carnes, what's your opinion of Long?"

Carnes took his pipe from his mouth and turned upon me two serious eyes. When I saw the expression in them I knew he was ready to talk business.

"Honor bright?" he queried, without a trace of his Irish accent.

"Honor bright."

"Well," restoring his pipe and puffing out a black cloud, "he's an odd fish!"

"Bad?"

"He's a fraud!"

"As how?"

"Cute, keen, has played the fool so long he sometimes believes himself one. Did you notice any little discrepancies in his speech?"

"Well, rather."

"Nobody else ever would, I'll be bound; not the 'Average Traftonite,' at least. That man has not always been at odds with the English grammar, mark me. What do you think, Bathurst?"

"I think," responded I, soberly, "that we shall find in him an ally or an enemy."

We had been sauntering "across lots," over some of the Brookhouse acres, and we now struck into a path leading down to the highway, that brought us out just opposite the cottage occupied by Dr. Bethel.

As we approached, the doctor was leaning over the gate in conversation with a gentleman seated in a light road wagon, whose face was turned away from us.

As we came near he turned his head, favoring us with a careless glance, and, as I saw his face, I recognized him as the handsome young gallant who had attended the friend of Miss Grace Ballou, on the occasion of that friend's visit to the Ballou farm, and who had bidden the ladies such an impressive good-bye as I drove them away from the village station.

Contrary to my first intention I approached the gate, and as I drew near, the young man gathered up his reins and nodding to the doctor drove away.

Dr. Bethel and myself had exchanged civilities at our hotel, and I addressed him in a careless way as I paused at the gate.

"That's a fine stepping horse, doctor," nodding after the receding turnout; "is it owned in the town?"

"Yes," replied the doctor; "that is young Brookhouse, or rather one of them. There are two or three sons; they all drive fine stock."

I was passing in the town for a well-to-do city young man with sporting propensities, and as the doctor swung open the gate and strode beside me toward the hotel, Carnes trudging on in advance, the talk turned quite naturally upon horses, and horse owners.

That night I wrote to Mrs. Ballou, stating that I had nothing of much moment to impart, but desired that she would notify me several days in advance of her proposed visit to the city, as I wished to meet her. This letter I sent to our office to be forwarded to Groveland from thence.

CHAPTER VII. WE ORGANIZE

We had not been long in Trafton before our reputation as thoroughly good fellows was well established, "each man after his kind."

Carnes entered with zest into the part he had undertaken. He was hail fellow well met with every old bummer and corner loafer; he made himself acquainted with all the gossipers and possessed of all the gossip of the town.

After a little he began to grow somewhat unsteady in his habits, and under the influence of too much liquor, would occasionally make remarks, disparaging or otherwise as the occasion warranted, concerning me, and so it came about that I was believed to be a young man of wealth, the possessor of an irascible temper, but very generous; the victim of a woman's falseness; – but here Carnes always assured people that he did not know "the particulars," and that, if it came to my ears that he had "mentioned" it, it would cost him his place, etc.

These scraps of private history were always brought forward by, or drawn out of, him when he was supposed to be "the worse for liquor." In his "sober" moments he was discreteness itself.

So adroitly did he play his part that, without knowing how it came about, Trafton had accepted me at Carnes' standard, and I found my way made smooth, and myself considered a desirable acquisition to Trafton society.

I became acquainted with the lawyers, the ministers, the county officials, for Trafton was the county seat. I was soon on a social footing with the Brookhouses, father and son. I made my bow before the fair owner of the treasure-ship jewels; and began to feel a genuine interest in, and liking for, Dr. Bethel, who, according to Jim Long, was *not* Trafton style.

Thus fairly launched upon the Trafton tide, and having assured ourselves that no one entertained a suspicion of our masquerade, we began to look more diligently about us for fresh information concerning the depredations that had made the town attractive to us.

Sitting together one night, after Carnes had spent the evening at an especially objectionable saloon, and I had returned from a small social gathering whither I had been piloted by one of my new acquaintances, we began "taking account of stock," as Carnes quaintly put it.

"The question now arises," said Carnes, dropping his Hibernianisms, and taking them up again as his enthusiasm waxed or waned. "The question is this: What's in our hand? What do wee's know? What do wee's surmise, and what have wee's got till find out?"

"Very comprehensively put, old fellow," I laughed, while I referred to a previously mentioned note book. "First, then, what do we know?"

"Well," replied Carnes, tilting back his chair, "we know more than mony a poor fellow has known when he set out to work up a knotty case. We know we are in the field, bedad. We know that horses have been stolen, houses broken open, robberies great and small committed *here*. We know they have been well planned and systematic, engineered by a cute head."

Carnes stopped abruptly, and looked over as if he expected me to finish the summing up.

"Yes," I replied, "we knew all that in the beginning; now for what we have picked up. First, then, just run your eye over this memorandum; I made it out to-day, and, like a love letter, it should be destroyed as soon as read. Here you have, as near as I could get them, the names of the farmers who have lost horses, harness, buggies, etc. Here is the average distance of their respective residences from the town, and their directions. Do you see the drift?"

Carnes rubbed the bridge of his nose; a favorite habit.

"No, be the powers," he ejaculated; "St. Patrick himself couldn't see the sinse o' that."

"Very good. Now, here is a map of this county. On this map, one by one, you must locate those farms."

"Bother the location," broke in Carnes, impatiently. "Serve it up in a nutshell. What's the point?"

"The point, then, is this," drawing the map toward me. "The places where these robberies have been committed, are all in certain directions. Look; east, northeast, west, north; scarce one south, southeast, or southwest. Hence, I conclude that these stolen horses are run into some rendezvous that is not more than a five hours' ride from the scene of the theft."

"The dickens ye do!" muttered Carnes, under his breath.

"Again," I resumed, perceiving that Carnes was becoming deeply interested, and very alert, "the horses, etc., have been stolen from points ten, twelve, twenty miles, from Trafton; the most distant, so far as I have found out, is twenty-two miles."

"Ar-m-m-m?" from Carnes.

"Now, then, let us suppose the robbers to be living in this town. They leave here at nine, ten, or later when the distance is short. They ride fleet horses. At midnight, let us say, the robbery is committed. The horses must be off the road, and safe from prying eyes, before morning, and must remain *perdu* until the search is over. What, then? The question is, do the robbers turn them over to confederates, in order to get safely back to the town under cover of the night; or, is the hiding-place so near that no change is necessary?"

I paused for a comment, but Carnes sat mute.

"Now, then," I resumed, "I am supposing this lair of horse-thieves to be *somewhere* south, or nearly south, of the town, and not more than thirty miles distant."

"Umph!"

"I suppose it to be south, or nearly south, for obvious reasons. Don't you see what they are?"

"Niver mind; prache on."

"No horses have been taken from the south road, or from any of the roads that intersect it from this. I infer that it is used as an avenue of escape for the marauding bands. Consequently –"

"We must make the acquaintance of that north and south highway," broke in Carnes.

"Just so; and we must begin a systematic search from this out."

"System's the word," said Carnes, jerking his chair close to the table, upon which he planted his elbows. "Now, then, let's organize."

It was nearly daybreak before we knocked the ashes from our pipes, preparatory to closing the consultation, and when we separated to refresh ourselves with a few hours' sleep, we were so thoroughly "organized" that had we not found another opportunity for private consultation during our operations in Trafton, we could still have gone on with the programme, as we had that night arranged it, without fear of blunder or misunderstanding.

"You came down upon me so sudden and solemn with your statistics and all that, last night," said Carnes, the following morning, "that I entirely forgot to treat you to a beautiful little Trafton vagary I was saving for your benefit. They *do* say that the new doctor is suspected of being a *detective*!"

"What!" I said, in sincere amazement; "Carnes, that's one of Jim Long's notions."

"Yis, but it isn't," retorted Carnes. "I haven't seen Jim Long this day. D'ye mind the chap ye seen me in company with last evening early?"

"The loutish chap with red hair and a scarred cheek?"

"That's him; well, his name is Tom Briggs, and he's a very close-mouthed fellow when he's sober; to-day he was drunk, and he told me in confidence that *some* folks looked upon Dr. Bethel as nothing more nor less than a detective, on the lookout for a big haul and a big reward."

"What is this Briggs?"

"He's a sort of a roust-about for 'Squire Brookhouse, but the 'squire don't appear to work him very hard."

"Carnes," I said, after a moment of silence between us, "hadn't you better cultivate Briggs?"

"Like enough I had," he replied, nonchalantly. Then turning slowly until he faced me squarely
"If I were you, I would give a little attention to *Dr. Bethel*."

CHAPTER VIII. A RESURRECTION

Two weeks passed, during which time Carnes and I worked slowly and cautiously, but to some purpose.

Having arrived at the conclusion that here was the place to begin our search for the robbers, we had still failed in finding in or about Trafton a single man upon whom to fix suspicion.

After thoroughly analyzing Trafton society, high and low, I was obliged to admit to Carnes, 'spite of the statement made by the worthy farmer on board the railway train that "the folks as prospered best were those who did the least work," that I found among the poor, the indolent and the idle, no man capable of conducting or aiding in a prolonged series of high-handed robberies.

The only people in Trafton about whom there seemed the shadow of strangeness or mystery, were Dr. Bethel and Jim Long.

Dr. Bethel had lived in Trafton less than a year; he was building up a fine practice; was dignified, independent, uncommunicative. He had no intimates, and no one knew, or could learn, aught of his past history. He was a regularly authorized physician, a graduate from a well-known and reliable school. He was unmarried and seemed quite independent of his practice as a means of support.

According to Jim Long, he was "not Trafton style," and if Tom Briggs was to be believed, he was "suspected" of making one profession a cloak for the practice of another.

Jim Long had been nearly five years in Trafton. He had bought his bit of land, built thereon his shanty, announced himself as "Hoss Fysician," and had loafed or laughed, smoked or fished, hunted, worked and played, as best pleased him; and no one in Trafton had looked upon him as worthy of suspicion, until Carnes and I did him that honor.

Up to this time we had never once ventured to walk or drive over that suspected south road. This was not an accident or an oversight, but a part of our "programme."

We had lived and operated so quietly that Carnes began to complain of the monotony of our daily lives, and to long, Micawber-like, for something to turn up.

We had both fully recovered in health and vigor; and I was beginning to fear that we might be compelled to report at the agency, and turn our backs upon Trafton without having touched its mystery, when there broke upon us the first ripple that was the harbinger of a swift, onrushing tide of events, which, sweeping across the monotony of our days, caught us and tossed us to and fro, leaving us no moment of rest until the storm had passed, and the waves that rolled over Trafton had swept away its scourge.

One August day I received a tiny perfumed note bidding me attend a garden party, to be given by Miss Manvers one week from date. As I was writing my note of acceptance, Carnes suggested that I, as a gentleman of means, should honor this occasion by appearing in the latest and most stunning of Summer suits; and I, knowing the effect of fine apparel upon the ordinary society-loving villager, decided to profit by his suggestions. So, having sealed and despatched my missive, I bent my steps toward the telegraph office, intent upon sending an order to my tailor by the quickest route.

The operator was a sociable young fellow, the son of one of the village clergymen, and I sometimes dropped in upon him for a few moments' chat.

I numbered among my varied accomplishments, all of which had been acquired for *use* in my profession, the ability to read, by sound, the telegraph instrument.

This knowledge, however, I kept to myself, on principle, and young Harris was not aware that my ear was drinking in his messages, as we sat smoking socially in his little operating compartment.

After sending my message, I produced my cigar case and, Harris accepting a weed, I sat down beside him for a brief chat.

Presently the instrument called Trafton, and Harris turned to receive the following message:

New Orleans, Aug. —

Arch Brookhouse – Hurry up the others or we are likely to have a balk.

F. B.

Hastily scratching off these words Harris enclosed, sealed, and addressed the message, and tossed it on the table.

The address was directly under my eye; and I said, glancing carelessly at it:

"Arch, – is not that a rather juvenile name for such a long, lean, solemn-visaged man as 'Squire Brookhouse?'"

Harris laughed.

"That is for the son," he replied; "he is named for his father, and to distinguish between them, the elder always signs himself *Archibald*, the younger *Arch*."

"I see. Is Archibald Junior the eldest son?"

"No; he is the second. Fred is older by four years."

"Fred is the absent one?"

"Fred and Louis are both away now. Fred is in business in New Orleans, I think."

"Ah! an enterprising rich man's son."

"Well, yes, enterprising and adventurous. Fred used to be a trifle wild. He's engaged in some sort of theatrical enterprise, I take it."

Just then there came the sound of hurrying feet and voices mingling in excited converse.

In another moment Mr. Harris, the elder, put his head in at the open window.

"Charlie, telegraph to Mr. Beale at Swan Station; tell him to come home instantly; his little daughter's grave has been robbed!"

Uttering a startled ejaculation, young Harris turned to his instrument, and his father withdrew his head and came around to the office door.

"Good-morning," he said to me, seating himself upon a corner of the office desk. "This is a shameful affair, sir; the worst that has happened in Trafton, to my mind. Only yesterday I officiated at the funeral of the little one; she was only seven years old, and looked like a sleeping angel, and now –"

He paused and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Mrs. Beale will be distracted," said Charlie Harris, turning toward us. "It was her only girl."

"Beale is a mechanic, you see," said the elder, addressing me. "He is working upon some new buildings at Swan Station."

"How was it discovered?" said his son.

"I hardly know; they sent for me to break the news to Mrs. Beale, and I thought it best to send for Beale first. The town is working into a terrible commotion over it."

Just here a number of excited Traftonites entered the outer room and called out Mr. Harris.

A moment later I saw Carnes pass the window; he moved slowly, and did not turn his head, but I knew at once that he wished to see me. I arose quietly and went out. Passing through the group of men gathered about Mr. Harris, I caught these words: "Cursed resurrectionist," and, "I knew he was not the man for us."

Hurrying out I met Carnes at the corner of the building.

"Have you heard –" he began; but I interrupted him.

"Of the grave robbery? Yes."

"Well," said Carnes, laying a hand upon my arm, "they are organizing a gang down at Porter's store. They are going to raid Dr. Bethel's cottage and search for the body."

"They're a set of confounded fools!" I muttered. "Follow me, Carnes."

And I turned my steps in the direction of "Porter's store."

CHAPTER IX.

MOB LAW

Lounging just outside the door at Porter's was Jim Long, hands in pockets, eyes fixed on vacancy. He was smoking his favorite pipe, and seemed quite oblivious to the stir and excitement going on within. When he saw me approach, he lounged a few steps toward me, then getting beyond the range of Porter's door and window.

"Give a dough-headed bumpkin a chance to make a fool of himself an' he'll never go back on it," began Jim, as I approached. "Have ye come ter assist in the body huntin'?"

"I will assist, most assuredly, if assistance is needed," I replied.

"Well, then, walk right along in. I guess *I'll* go home."

"Don't be too hasty, Jim," I said, in a lower tone. "I want to see you in about two minutes."

Jim gave a grunt of dissatisfaction, but seated himself, nevertheless, on one of Porter's empty butter tubs, that stood just beside a window.

I passed in and added myself to the large group of men huddled close together near the middle of the long store, and talking earnestly and angrily, with excitement, fiercely, or foolishly, as the case might be.

The fire-brand had been dropped in among them, by whom they never could have told, had they stopped once to consider; but they did not consider. Someone had hinted at the possibility of finding the body of little Effie Beale in the possession of the new doctor, and that was enough. Guilty or innocent, Dr. Bethel must pay the penalty of his reticence, his newness, and his independence. Not being numbered among the acceptable institutions of Trafton, he need expect no quarter.

It seemed that the child had been under his care, and looking at the matter from a cold-blooded, scientific standpoint, it appeared to me not impossible that the doctor *had* disinterred the body, and I soon realized that should he be found guilty, or even be unable to prove his innocence, it would go hard with Dr. Bethel.

Among those who cautioned the overheated ones, and urged prudence, and calm judgment, was Arch Brookhouse; but, somehow, his words only served to add fuel to the flame; while, chief among the turbulent ones, who urged extreme measures, was Tom Briggs, and I noted that he was also supported by three or four fellows of the same caliber, two of whom I had never seen before.

Having satisfied myself that there was not much time to lose if I wished to see fair play for Dr. Bethel, I turned away from the crowd, unnoticed, and went out to where Jim waited.

"Jim," I said, touching him on the shoulder, "they mean to make it hot for Bethel, and he will be one man against fifty – we must not allow anything like that."

"Now ye're talkin'," said Jim, knocking the ashes from his pipe, and rising slowly, "an' I'm with ye. What's yer idee?"

"We must not turn the mob against us, by seeming to co-operate," I replied. "Do you move with the crowd, Jim; I'll be on the ground as soon as you are."

"All right, boss," said Jim.

I turned back toward the telegraph office, that being midway between "Porter's" and my hotel.

The men were still there talking excitedly. I looked in at the window and beckoned to young Harris. He came to me, and I whispered:

"The men at Porter's mean mischief to Dr. Bethel; your father may be able to calm them; he had better go down there."

"He will," replied Harris, in a whisper, "and so will I."

Carnes was lounging outside the office. I approached him, and said:

"Go along with the crowd, Carnes, and stand in with Briggs."

Carnes winked and nodded, and I went on toward the hotel.

On reaching my room, I took from their case a brace of five-shooters, and put the weapons in my pockets. Then I went below and seated myself on the hotel piazza.

In order to reach Dr. Bethel's house, the crowd must pass the hotel; so I had only to wait.

I did not wait long, however. Soon they came down the street, quieter than they had been at Porter's, but resolute to defy law and order, and take justice into their own hands. As they hurried past the hotel in groups of twos, threes, and sometimes half a dozen, I noted them man by man. Jim Long was loping silently on by the side of an honest-faced farmer; Carnes and Briggs were in the midst of a swaggering, loud talking knot of loafers; the Harrises, father and son, followed in the rear of the crowd and on the opposite side of the street.

As the last group passed, I went across the road and joined the younger Harris, who was some paces in advance of his father, looking, as I did so, up and down the street. Arch Brookhouse came cantering up on a fine bay; he held in his hand the yellow envelope, which, doubtless, he had just received from Harris.

"Charlie," he called, reining in his horse. "Stop a moment; you must send a message for me."

We halted, Harris looking somewhat annoyed.

Brookhouse tore off half of the yellow envelope, and sitting on his horse, wrote a few words, resting his scrap of paper on the horn of his saddle.

"Sorry to trouble you, Charlie," he said, "but I want this to go at once. Were you following the mob?"

"Yes," replied Charlie, "weren't you?"

"No," said Brookhouse, shortly, "I'm going home; I don't believe in mob law."

So saying, he handed the paper to Harris, who, taking it with some difficulty, having to lean far out because of a ditch between himself and Brookhouse, lost his hold upon it, and a light puff of wind sent it directly into my face.

I caught it quickly, and before Harris could recover his balance, I had scanned its contents. It ran thus:

No. – New Orleans.

Fred Brookhouse: – Next week L – will be on hand.

A. B.

Harris took the scrap of paper and turned back toward the office. And I, joining the elder Harris, walked on silently, watching young Brookhouse as he galloped swiftly past the crowd; past the house of Dr. Bethel, and on up the hill, toward the Brookhouse homestead. I wondered inwardly why Frederick Brookhouse, if he were prominently connected with a Southern theater, should receive his telegrams at a private address.

Dr. Bethel occupied two pleasant rooms of a small house owned by 'Squire Brookhouse. He had chosen these, so he afterwards informed me, because he wished a quiet place for study, and this he could scarcely hope to find either in the village hotel or the average private boarding houses. He took his meals at the hotel, and shared the office of Dr. Barnard, the eldest of the Trafton physicians, who was quite willing to retire from the practice of his profession, and was liberal enough to welcome a young and enterprising stranger.

Dr. Bethel was absent; this the mob soon ascertained, and some of them, after paying a visit to the stable, reported that his horse was gone.

"Gone to visit some country patient, I dare say," said Mr. Harris, as we heard this announcement.

"Gone ter be out of the way till he sees is he found out," yelled Tom Briggs. "Let's go through the house, boys."

There was a brief consultation among the leaders of the raid, and then, to my surprise and to Mr. Harris's disgust, they burst in the front door and poured into the house, Carnes among the rest. Jim Long drew back as they crowded in, and took up his position near the gate, and not far from the place where we had halted.

Their search was rapid and fruitless; they were beginning to come out and scatter about the grounds, when a horse came thundering up to the gate, and Dr. Bethel flung himself from the saddle.

He had seen the raiding party while yet some rods away, and he turned a perplexed and angry face upon us.

"I should like to know the meaning of this," he said, in quick, ringing tones, at the same moment throwing open the little gate so forcibly as to make those nearest it start and draw back. "Who has presumed to open my door?"

Mr. Harris approached him and said, in a low tone:

"Bethel, restrain yourself. Little Effie Beale has been stolen from her grave, and these men have turned out to search for the body."

"Stolen from her grave!" the doctor's hand fell to his side and the anger died out of his eyes, and he seemed to comprehend the situation in a moment. "And they accuse me – of course."

The last words were touched with a shade of irony. Then he strode in among the searchers.

"My friends," he said, in a tone of lofty contempt, "so you have accused me of grave robbing. Very well; go on with your search, and when it is over, and you find that you have brought a false charge against me, go home, with the assurance that every man of you shall be made to answer for this uncalled-for outlawry."

The raiders who had gathered together to listen to this speech, fell back just a little, in momentary consternation. He had put the matter before them in a new light, and each man felt himself for the moment responsible for his own acts. But the voice of Tom Briggs rallied them.

"He's bluffin' us!" cried this worthy. "He's tryin' to make us drop the hunt. Boys, we're gittin' hot. Let's go for the barn and garden."

And he turned away, followed by the more reckless ones.

Without paying the slightest heed to them or their movements, Dr. Bethel turned again to Mr. Harris and asked when the body was disinterred.

While a part of the men, who had not followed Briggs, drew closer to our group, and the rest whispered together, a little apart, Mr. Harris told him all that was known concerning the affair.

As he listened a cynical half smile covered the doctor's face; he lifted his head and seemed about to speak, then, closing his lips firmly, he again bent his head and listened as at first.

"There's something strange about this resurrection," said he, when Mr. Harris had finished. "Mr. Beale's little daughter was my patient. It was a simple case of diphtheria. There were no unusual symptoms, nothing in the case to rouse the curiosity of any physician. The Trafton doctors *know* this. Drs. Hess and Barnard counselled with me. Either the body has been stolen by some one outside of Trafton, or – there is another motive."

He spoke these last words slowly, as if still deliberating, and, turning, took his horse by the bridle and led him stableward.

In another moment there came a shout from Briggs' party, their loud voices mingling in angry denunciations.

With one impulse the irresolute ones, forgetting self, swarmed in the direction whence the voices came.

We saw Dr. Bethel, who was just at the rear corner of the house, start, stop, then suddenly let fall the bridle and stride after the hurrying men, and at once, Mr. Harris, Jim Long and myself followed.

Just outside the stable stood Briggs, surrounded by his crew, talking loudly, and holding up to the view of all, a bright new spade, and an earth-stained pick ax. As we came nearer we could see that the spade too had clots of moist black earth clinging to its surface.

CHAPTER X.

TWO FAIR CHAMPIONS

"Look, all of ye," shouted Briggs. "So much fer his big words; them's the things he did the job with."

The doctor stopped short at sight of these implements; stopped and stood motionless so long that his attitude might well have been mistaken for that of unmasked guilt. But his face told another story; blank amazement was all it expressed for a moment, then a gleam of comprehension; next a sneer of intensest scorn, and last, strong but suppressed anger. He strode in among the men gathered about Tom Briggs.

"Where did you get those tools, fellow?" he demanded, sternly.

"From the place where ye hid 'em, I reckon," retorted Briggs.

"Answer me, sir," thundered the doctor. "*Where* were they?"

"Oh, ye needn't try any airs on me; ye know well enough where we got 'em."

Dr. Bethel's hand shot out swiftly, and straight from the shoulder, and Briggs went down like a log.

"Now, sir," turning to the man nearest Briggs, "where were these things hidden?"

It chanced that this next man was Carnes, who answered quickly, and with well feigned self-concern.

"In the stable, yer honor, foreinst the windy, behind the shay."

I heard a suppressed laugh behind me, and looking over my shoulder saw Charlie Harris.

"Things are getting interesting," he said, coming up beside me. "Will there be a scrimmage, think you?"

I made him no answer, my attention being fixed upon Bethel, who was entering the stable and dragging Carnes with him. When he had ascertained the exact spot where the tools were found, he came out and turned upon the raiders.

"Go on with your farce," he said, with a sarcastic curl of the lip. "I am curious to see what you will find next."

Then turning upon Briggs, who had scrambled to his feet, and who caressed a very red and swollen eye, while he began a tirade of abuse —

"Fellow, hold your tongue, if you don't want a worse hit. If you'll walk into my house I'll give you a plaster for that eye — after I have cared for your better."

And he turned toward his horse, whistling a musical call. The well-trained animal came straight to its master and was led by him into its accustomed place.

And now the search became more active. Those who at first had been held in check by the doctor's manner were once more spurred to action by the sight of those earth-stained tools, and the general verdict was that "Bethel was bluffing, sure." When he emerged again from the stable, they were scattering about the garden, looking in impossible places of concealment, under everything, over everything, into everything.

Briggs, who seemed not at all inclined to accept the doctor's proffered surgical aid, still grasping in his hand the pick, and followed by Carnes, to whom he had resigned the spade, went prowling about the garden.

Bethel, who appeared to have sufficient mental employment of some sort, passed our group with a smile and the remark:

"I can't ask you in, gentlemen, until I have set my house in order. Those vandals have made it a place of confusion."

He entered the house through a rear door, which had been thrown open by the invaders, and a moment later, as I passed by a side window, I glanced in and saw him, not engaged in "setting his house in order," but sitting in a low, broad-backed chair, his elbows resting on his knees, his hands loosely clasped, his head bent forward, his eyes "fixed on vacancy," the whole attitude that of profound meditation.

The finding of the tools, the manner of Bethel, both puzzled me. I went over to Jim Long, who had seated himself on the well platform, and asked:

"How is this going to terminate, Jim?"

"Umph!" responded Jim, somewhat gruffly. "'Twon't be long a comin' to a focus."

And he spoke truly. In a few moments we heard a shout from the rear of the garden. Tom Briggs and his party had found a spot where the soil had been newly turned. In another moment a dozen hands were digging fiercely.

Just then, and unnoticed by the exploring ones, a new element of excitement came upon the scene.

Mr. Beale, the father of the missing child, accompanied by two or three friends, came in from the street. They paused a moment, in seeming irresolution, then the father, seeing the work going on in the garden, uttered a sharp exclamation, and started hastily toward the spot, where, at that moment, half a dozen men were bending over the small excavation they had made, and twice as many more were crowding close about them.

"They have found something," said Harris, the elder, and he hastily followed Mr. Beale, leaving his son and myself standing together near the rear door of the house, and Jim still sitting aloof, the only ones now, save Dr. Bethel, who were not grouping closer and closer about the diggers, in eager anxiety to see what had been unearthed.

In another moment, there came a tumult of exclamations, imprecations, oaths; and above all the rest, a cry of mingled anguish and rage from the lips of the bereaved and tortured father.

The crowd about the spot fell back, and the diggers arose, one of them holding something up to the view of the rest. Instinctively, young Harris and myself started toward them.

But Jim Long still sat stolidly smoking beside the well.

As we moved forward, I heard a sound from the house, and looked back. Dr. Bethel had flung wide open the shutters of a rear window, and was looking out upon the scene.

Approaching the group, we saw what had caused the father's cry, and the growing excitement of the searchers. They had found a tiny pair of shoes, and a little white dress; the shoes and dress in which little Effie Beale had been buried.

And now the wildest excitement prevailed. Maddened with grief, rage, and sickening horror, the father called upon them to find the body, and to aid him in wreaking vengeance upon the man who had desecrated his darling's grave.

It was as fire to flax. Those who have witnessed the workings of a mob, know how swiftly, mysteriously, unreasonably, it kindles under certain influences.

How many men, with different, often opposing interests, make the cause of one their common cause, and forgetting personality, become a unit for vengeance, a single, dreadful, unreasoning force!

The air resounded with threats, imprecations, exclamations, oaths.

Some of the better class of Traftonites had followed after the first party, joining them by threes and fours. These made some effort to obtain a hearing for themselves and Mr. Harris, but it was futile.

"Hang the rascally doctor!"

"String him up!"

"Run him out of town!"

"Hanging's too good!"

"Let's tar and feather him!"

"Bring him out; bring him out!"

"Give us a hold of him!"

"We ain't found the body yet," cried one of the most earnest searchers. "Let's keep looking."

As some of the party turned toward the house I looked back to the open window.

Dr. Bethel still stood in full view, but Jim Long had disappeared from the pump platform.

The search now became fierce and eager, and while some started to go once again through the house and cellar, a number of Briggs' cronies began a furious onslaught upon a stack of hay, piled against the stable.

But those who approached the house met with an unlooked-for obstacle to their search, – the rear door was closed and barred against them. Failing in this quarter they hastened around to the front.

Here the door was open, just as they had left it, swinging on one broken hinge; but the doctor's tall form and stalwart shoulders barred the way.

"Gentlemen," he said, in low, resolute tones, "you can not enter my house, at least at present. You have done sufficient damage to my property already."

The men halted for a moment, and then the foremost of them began to mount the steps.

"Stand back," said Bethel. "I shall protect my property. I will allow my house to be inspected again by a committee, if you like, but I will *not* admit a mob."

"You'd better not try to stop us," said the leader of the party, "we are too many for ye." And he mounted the upper step.

"Stand down, sir," again said Bethel. "Did I not say I should protect my property?" and he suddenly presented in the face of the astonished searcher a brace of silver-mounted pistols.

The foremost men drew hastily back, but they rallied again, and one of them yelled out:

"Ye'd better not tackle *us* single-handed; an' ye won't get anyone to back ye *now*!"

"Jest allow me ter argy that pint with ye," said Jim Long, as he suddenly appeared in the doorway beside Bethel. "I reckon *I'm* somebody."

Jim held in his hand a handsome rifle, the doctor's property, and he ran his eye critically along the barrel as he spoke.

"Here's five of us, an' we all say *ye can't come in*. Three of us can *repeat* the remark if it 'pears necessary."

Then turning his eye upon the last speaker of the party, he said, affably:

"I ain't much with the little shooters, Simmons; but I can jest make a rifle howl. Never saw me shoot, did ye? Now, jest stand still till I shoot that grasshopper off ye'r hat brim."

Simmons, who stood in the midst of the group, and was taller than those about him by half a head, began a rapid retrograde movement, and, as Jim slowly raised his rifle to his shoulder, the group about the door-steps melted away, leaving him in possession of the out-posts.

"That," said Jim, with a grin, as he lowered his rifle, "illyusterates the sooperiority of mind over matter. Doctor, did ye know the darned thing wasn't loaded?"

While Bethel still smiled at this bit of broad comedy, a sharp cry, and then a sudden unnatural stillness, told of some new occurrence, and followed by Jim we went back to the rear window and looked out.

They were crowding close about something, as yet half hidden in the scattered hay; all silent, and, seemingly, awe-stricken. Thus for a moment only, then a low murmur ran through the crowd, growing and swelling into a yell of rage and fury.

Hidden in the doctor's hay they had found the body of Effie Beale!

It was still encoffined, but the little casket had been forced open, and it was evident, from the position of the body, that the buried clothing had been hurriedly torn from it.

It would be difficult to describe the scene which followed this last discovery. While the father, and his more thoughtful friends, took instant possession of the little coffin, the wrath of the raiders grew hotter and higher; every voice and every hand was raised against Dr. Bethel.

Tom Briggs, with his blackened eye, was fiercely active, and his two or three allies clamored loudly for vengeance upon "the cursed resurrectionist."

"Let's give him a lesson," yelled a burly fellow, who, having neither wife, child, nor relative in Trafton was, according to a peculiar law governing the average human nature, the loudest to clamor for summary vengeance. "Let's set an example, an' teach grave robbers what to look for when they come to Trafton!"

"If we don't settle with him nobody will," chimed in another fellow, who doubtless had good reason for doubting the ability of Trafton justice to deal with law-breakers.

Those who said little were none the less eager to demonstrate their ability to deal with offenders when the opportunity afforded itself. Over and again, in various ways, Trafton had been helplessly victimized, and now, that at last they had traced an outrage to its source, Trafton seized the opportunity to vindicate herself.

A few of the fiercest favored extreme measures, but the majority of the mob seemed united in their choice of feathers and tar, as a means of vengeance.

Seeing how the matter would terminate, I turned to Harris, the younger, who had kept his position near me.

"Ask your father to follow us," I said, "and come with me. They are about to attack the doctor."

We went quietly around and entered the house from the front. The doctor and Jim were still at the open window, and in full view of the mob.

Bethel turned toward us a countenance locked in impenetrable self-possession.

"They mean business," he said, nodding his head toward the garden. "Poor fools."

Then he took his pistols from a chair by the window, putting one in each pocket of his loose sack coat.

"Gentlemen," he said, addressing us, "pray don't bring upon yourselves the enmity of these people by attempting to defend me. I assure you I am in no danger, and can deal with them single-handed. Out of regard for what they have left of my furniture, I will meet them, outside."

And he put one hand upon the window sill and leaped lightly out, followed instantly by young Harris.

"Here's the inconvenience of being in charge of the artillery," growled Jim Long, discontentedly. "I'll stay in the fort till the enemy opens fire," and he drew the aforementioned rifle closer to him, as he squatted upon the window ledge.

The clergyman and myself, without consultation or comment, made our exit as we came, by the open front door, and arrived upon the scene just as Bethel, with his two hands in his coat pockets, halted midway between the house and rear garden to meet the mob that swarmed toward him, yelling, hooting, hissing.

If the doctor had hoped to say anything in his own defense, or even to make himself heard, he was speedily convinced of the futility of such an undertaking. His voice was drowned by their clamor, and as many eager hands were outstretched to seize him in their hard, unfriendly grasp, the doctor lost faith in moral suasion and drew back a step, while he suddenly presented, for their consideration, a brace of five-shooters.

The foremost men recoiled for a moment, and Mr. Harris seized the opportunity. Advancing until he stood almost before Dr. Bethel, he began a conciliatory speech, after the most approved manner.

But it came to an abrupt ending, the men rallied almost instantly, and, drowning the clergyman's voice under a chorus of denunciations and oaths, they once more pressed forward.

"Stand down, parson," cried Jim Long, now leaping from the window, rifle in hand, and coming to the rescue. "Your medicine ain't the kind they're hankerin' after."

"You fall back, Tom Briggs," called Charlie Harris, peremptorily, "we want fair play here," and he drew a pistol from his pocket and took his stand beside Bethel.

At the same moment I drew my own weapons and fell into line.

"Gentlemen," I said, "let's give Dr. Bethel a hearing."

And now occurred what we had hardly anticipated. While some of the foremost of the raiders drew back, others advanced, and we saw that these comers to the front were armed like ourselves.

While we stood thus, for a moment, there was a breathless silence and then Jim Long's deep voice made itself heard.

"Some of you fellers are giving yourselves away," he said, with a sneer. "Now, jest look a here; ye mean bluff, we mean business. An' you chaps as has been supplied with shooters by Tom Briggs and Simmons and Saunders hed better drop the things an' quit."

A moment's silence, then a babel of voices, a clamor and rush.

There was the loud crack of a pistol, accompanied by a fierce oath, – a cry of "stop," uttered in a clear female voice, – then another moment of breathless silence.

Two women were standing in our midst, directly between the doctor and his assailants, and Carnes still grasped the pistol hand of Tom Briggs, while the smoke of the averted charge yet hovered above their heads.

One of the two ladies, who had so suddenly come to the rescue, was Miss Adele Manvers. The other a tall, lithe, beautiful blonde, I had never before seen.

"Friends, neighbors," said this fair stranger, in clear, sweet, but imperious tones, "you have made a terrible mistake. Dr. Bethel was with *my father* from sunset last night until one hour ago. They were together every moment, at the bedside of Mr. James Kelsey, on the Willoughby road."

Evidently this fair young lady was an authority not to be questioned. The crowd fell back in manifest consternation, even Tom Briggs' tongue was silent.

Miss Manvers stood for a moment casting glances of open contempt upon the crowd. Then, as the doctor's fair champion ceased speaking and, seeing that her words had been effective, drew nearer to Mr. Harris, flushing and paling as if suddenly abashed by her own daring, the brilliant owner of the treasure-ship riches turned to Dr. Bethel.

"Doctor, you are *our* prisoner," she said, smiling up at him. "Dr. Barnard is half frantic since hearing of this affair, and he commissioned us to bring you to him at once."

Miss Manvers had not as yet noted my presence among the doctor's handful of allies. Wishing to give my eyes and ears full play, I drew back, and, using Jim Long as a screen, kept near the group about the doctor; but out of view. I had noted the sudden flash of his eyes, and the lighting up of his face, when the fair unknown came among us. And now I saw him clasp her hand between his two firm palms and look down into her face, for just a moment, as I could have sworn he had never looked at any other woman.

I saw her eyes meet his for an instant, then she seemed to have withdrawn into herself, and the fearless champion was merged in the modest but self-possessed woman.

I saw the haughty Adele Manvers moving about among the raiders, bestowing a word here and there, and I saw Mr. Harris now making good use of the opportunity these two fair women had made. I noted that Tom Briggs and his loud-voiced associates were among the first to slink away.

Dr. Bethel was reluctant to quit the field, but the advice of Mr. Harris, the earnest entreaty of Miss Manvers, and, more than all the rest, the one pleading look from the eyes of the lovely unknown, prevailed.

"Long," he said, turning to Jim, "here are my keys; will you act as my steward until – my place is restored to quiet?"

Jim nodded comprehensively.

"I'll clear the premises," he said, grimly. "Don't ye have any uneasiness; I'll camp right down here."

"Bethel," said Charlie Harris, "for the sake of the ladies, you had better go at once; those fellows in the rear there are trying to rally their forces."

"Since my going will be a relief to my friends, I consent to retreat," said the besieged doctor, smiling down at the two ladies.

They had driven thither in a dashing little pony phaeton, owned by Miss Manvers; and as they moved toward it the heiress said:

"Doctor, you must drive Miss Barnard home; I intend to walk, and enjoy the society of Mr. Harris."

Dr. Bethel and the blonde lady entered the little carriage, and, after a few words addressed to Harris and Miss Manvers, drove away.

The heiress looked about the grounds for a moment, addressed a few gracious words to Harris, the elder, smiled at Jim Long, and then moved away, escorted by the delighted younger Harris.

"Wimmen air – wimmen," said Jim Long, sententiously, leaning upon the rifle, which he still retained, and looking up the road after the receding plumes of Miss Manvers' Gainsborough hat. "You can't never tell where they're goin' ter appear next. It makes a feller feel sort a ornary, though, ter have a couple o' gals sail in an' do more business with a few slick words an' searchin' looks, then *he* could do with a first-class rifle ter back him. Makes him feel as tho' his influence was weakening."

"Jim," I said, ignoring his whimsical complaint, "who was the fair haired lady?"

"Doctor Barnard's only darter, Miss Louise."

"I never saw her before."

"'Spose not; she's been away nigh onto two months, visitin' her father's folks. Old Barnard must a had one of his bad turns this morning, so's he couldn't git out, or he'd never a sent his gal into such a crowd on such an errand. Hullo, what's that Mick o' your'n doin'?"

Glancing in the direction indicated by Jim, I saw that Carnes was engaged in a fisticuff bout with Tom Briggs, and hastened to interpose; not through solicitude for Carnes so much as because I wished to prevent a serious rupture between the two.

"Barney," I said, severely, "you have been drinking too much, I am sure. Stop this ruffianism at once."

"Is it ruffianism yer callin' it, ter defend yerself against the murtherin' shnake; and ain't it all bekase I hild up his fist fer fear the blundherin' divil ud shoot yees by mishtake! Och, then, didn't I make the illigant rhyme though?"

"You have made yourself very offensive to me, sir, by the part you have taken in this affair," I retorted, with additional sternness; "and so long as you remain in my service you will please to remember that I desire you to avoid the society of loafers and brawlers."

"Meanin' me, I suppose?" snarled Tom Briggs.

"Meaning you in *this* instance," I retorted, turning away from the two, with all the dignity I could muster for the occasion.

"Bedad, he's got his blood up," muttered Carnes, ruefully, as I walked away. "Old Red Top, shake! Seein' as I'm to be afther howldin' myself above yees in future, I won't mind yer airs jist now, an' if iver I git twenty dollars ahead I'll discharge yon blood an' be me own bye."

Satisfied that this bit of by-play had had the desired effect, and being sure that Carnes would not leave the premises so long as there remained anything or any one likely to prove interesting, I turned my steps townward, musing as I went.

I had made, or so I believed, three discoveries.

Dr. Carl Bethel was the victim of a deep laid plot, of which this affair of the morning was but the beginning.

Dr. Carl Bethel was in love with the fair Miss Barnard.

And the brilliant owner of the treasure-ship jewels was in love with Dr. Carl Bethel.

Whether Bethel was aware of the plot, or suspected his enemies; whether he was really what he seemed, or only playing a part like myself; whether to warn him and so risk bringing myself under

suspicion, or to let matters take their natural course and keep a sharp lookout meantime; – were questions which I asked myself again and again, failing to find a satisfactory answer.

On one thing I decided, however. Bethel was a self-reliant man. He was keen and courageous, quite capable of being more than he seemed. He was not a man to be satisfied with half truth. I must give him my fullest confidence or not seek his.

CHAPTER XI. A CUP OF TEA

It was growing dusk before I saw Carnes again that day. I had remained in my room since dinner, wishing to avoid as much as possible the gossip and natural inquiry that would follow the denouement of the raid against Dr. Bethel, lest some suspicious mind should think me too much interested, considering the part I had taken in the affair.

Carnes came in softly, and wearing upon his face the peculiar knowing grin that we at the office had named his "Fox smile." He held in his hand a folded slip of paper, which he dropped upon my knee, and then drew back, without uttering a comment, to watch my perusal of the same.

It was very brief, simply a penciled line from Dr. Barnard, asking me to tea at seven o'clock. It was almost seven as I read.

"Where did you get this?" I asked, rising with sudden alacrity, and beginning a hurried toilet. "Read it Carnes, if you haven't already; I should have had it earlier."

Carnes took up the note, perused it, and tossed it on the bed, then, seating himself astride a chair, he told his story, watching my progressing toilet with seeming interest the while.

"After my tender parting with Briggs, I sherried over and made myself agreeable to Jim Long, and as I was uncommon respectful and willin' to be harangued, he sort o' took me as handy boy, an' let me stay an help him tidy up Bethel's place. He cleared out the multitude, put the yard into decent order, and then, while he undertook to rehang the doctor's front door, I'm blest if he didn't set *me* to pilin' up the hay stack. Don't wear that beast of a choker, man, it makes you look like a laughing hyena."

I discarded the condemned choker, swallowed the doubtful compliment, and Carnes continued, lapsing suddenly into broad Irish:

"Prisintly he comes out to the shtack, as I was finishin' the pile, tellin' me as he must have some new hinges to the doctor's door, an' axin would I shtay an' kape house till he wint up fer the iron works. I consinted."

"Yes!" eagerly.

"And I made good use of the opportunity. I wint over that place in a way to break the heart of a jenteel crook, an' I'm satisfied."

"Of what, Carnes?"

"That there's no irregularity about the doctor. If there was a track as big as a fly's foot wouldn't I have hit it? Yes, sir! There ain't no trace of the detective-in-ambush about those premises, Tom Briggs to the contrary notwithstanding. He's a regular articed medical college graduate; there's plenty of correspondence to prove him Dr. Carl Bethel, and nothing to prove him anything else."

"Quite likely," I replied, not yet wholly convinced; "Bethel is not the man to commit himself; he'd be very sure not to leave a trace of his 'true inwardness' about the premises, if he *were* on a still hunt. How about the note, Carnes?"

"Oh, the note! Well, when Jim came back, about fifteen minutes ago, or so, he gave me that, saying that he called at Dr. Barnard's to ask for instructions from Bethel, and was handed that note to leave for you. Jim says that he forgot to stop with the note; but I'm inclined to think that he wanted to dispose of me and took this way to avoid hurting my feelings."

"Well, I shall be late at Dr. Barnard's, owing to Jim's notions of delicacy," I said, turning away from the mirror and hurriedly brushing my hat. "However, I can explain the tardiness. By-by, Carnes; we will talk this day's business over when I have returned."

Dr. Barnard's pleasant dwelling was scarce five minutes' walk from our hotel; and I was soon making my bow in the presence of the doctor, his wife and daughter, Miss Manvers, and Dr. Bethel.

As I look back upon that evening I remember Louise Barnard as at once the loveliest, the simplest and most charmingly cultivated woman I have ever met. Graceful without art, self-possessed without ostentation, beautiful as a picture, without seeming to have sought by artifices of the toilet to heighten the effect of her statuesque loveliness.

Adele Manvers was also beautiful; no, handsome is the more appropriate word for her; but in face, form, coloring, dress, and manner, a more decided contrast could not have been deliberately planned.

Miss Barnard was the lovely lady; Miss Manvers, the daintily clad, fair woman of fashion.

Miss Barnard was tall, slender, dazzlingly beautiful, with soft fair hair and the features of a Greek goddess. Miss Manvers was a trifle below the medium height, a piquant brunette, plump, shapely, a trifle haughty, and inclined to self-assertion.

Miss Barnard wore soft flowing draperies, and her hair as nature intended it to be worn. Miss Manvers wore another woman's hair in defiance of nature, and her dress was fashion's last conceit, – a "symphony" in silks and ruffles and bewildering draperies.

Miss Barnard was dignified and somewhat reticent. Miss Manvers was talkative and vivacious.

They had learned from Jim Long all that he could tell them concerning the part I had taken in the affair of the morning. The elder physician desired to express his approbation, the younger his gratitude. They had sent for me that I might hear what they had to say on the subject of the grave robbery, and to ask my opinion and advice as to future movements.

All this was communicated to me by the voluble old doctor, who was sitting in an invalid's chair, being as yet but half recovered from his neuralgic attack of the morning. We had met on several occasions, but I had no previous knowledge of his family.

"There will be no further trouble about this matter," said Dr. Barnard, as we sat in the cool, cosy parlor after our late tea. "Our people have known me too long to doubt my word, and my simple statement of my absolute knowledge concerning all of Bethel's movements will put out the last spark of suspicion, so far as *he* is concerned – but," bringing the palm of his large hand down upon the arm of his chair with slow emphasis, "it won't settle the question next in order. *Who are the guilty ones?*"

"That I shall make it my business to find out," said Dr. Bethel, seriously, "I confess that at first I was unreasonably angry, at the thought of the suspicion cast upon me. On second thought it was but natural. I am as yet a stranger among you, and Trafton evidently believes it wise to 'consider every man a rogue until he is proved honest.'"

"From what I have heard since coming here," I ventured, "I should say Trafton has some reason for adopting this motto."

"So she has; so she has," broke in the old doctor. "And some one had a reason for attempting to throw suspicion upon Bethel."

"Evidently," said Bethel. "I am puzzled to guess what that reason can be, and I dispose of the theory that would naturally come up first, namely, that it is a plot to destroy the public confidence in me, set on foot by rival doctors, by saying, at the outset, that I don't believe there is a medical man in or about Trafton capable of such a deed. I have all confidence in my professional brethren."

"Why," interposed Miss Manvers, "the sentiment does you honor, Dr. Bethel, but – I should think the other doctors your most natural enemies. Who else could," – she broke off abruptly with an appealing glance at Louise Barnard.

"I think Dr. Bethel is right," said Miss Barnard, in her low, clear contralto. "I cannot think either of our doctors capable of a deed so shameful." Then turning to address me, she added, "You, as a stranger among us, may see the matter in a more reasonable light. How does it look to you?"

"Taking the doctor's innocence as a foregone conclusion," I replied, "it looks as though he had an enemy in Trafton," here I turned my eyes full upon the face of Bethel, "who wished to drive him out of the community by making him unpopular in it."

Bethel's face wore the same expression of mystified candor, his eyes met mine full and frankly, as he replied:

"Taking *that* as a foregone conclusion, we arrive at the point of starting, Who are the guilty ones? Who are my enemies? I have been uniformly successful in my practice; I have had no differences, disagreement, or disputes with any man in Trafton. Up to to-day I could have sworn I had not an enemy in the town."

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