OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

NO. 3

Price 5 cents

The SECRET of the HAUNTED HOUSE

by "OLD SLEUTH"

OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

A Series of

THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES EVER PUBLISHED

No. 3. | THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY, CLEVELAND, U. S. A. MAY 13th, 1905. | Vol. I.

The Secret of the Haunted House

—OR—

THE GREAT DETECTIVE'S TRAGIC FIND.

By "OLD SLEUTH."

CHAPTER I.

Two young men were walking along a country road after midnight.

Soon they came in sight of a little red house, which stood back from the road, crowning a rising knoll in the midst of an apple orchard.

"Who lives there, Tom?" asked one of the young men.

"An old French miser."

The young man who had asked the question came to a halt, and said:

"A miser? What is his name?"

"I hardly dare to tell you, Robert Deane."

"Why not, Tom?"

"It might shock you."

"How shock me?"

"Well, to tell the truth, that is the home of that beautiful girl you were so taken with to-night, and the miser is her father."

"Do you mean to tell me, Tom, that the father of that lovely girl is a miser?"

"It is the truth, Bob."

"Tell me all about it."

"It is the old story; the old man settled here many, many years ago; bought property which increased in value, and as it was all come in and no go out, he has grown to be the richest man in the State; and he is a regular old miser for all that."

"And you tell me that Emily de Coudres is his daughter?"

"Yes."

"Why, she was handsomely dressed and wore real diamonds."

"The old man, mean and miserable as he is to himself, is strangely fond of his child, and she is the only one on whom he ever spends anything; he half starves himself from year to year."

"But she appeared to be an accomplished and well-educated young lady."

"She has lived away from home the greater part of her life, and it has always been a mystery that her father spent so much money upon her; but now that she has come home to live, he may make her a victim to his greed."

"How long has that elegant creature resided with her father in that miserable house?"

"Oh! she has been home a few weeks, and to-night was the first time she ever appeared in company in our town."

The young men, during the above conversation, had been standing in the road opposite the entrance to the lane that led up to the old miser's house.

"There seems to be a light in the window," remarked Robert Deane.

"Yes," answered Tom Read; "perhaps the old money bags is counting over his gold."

"I would like to take a look in upon him, Tom."

"I don't know about going up there; the old Frenchman is a savage fellow, and if he discovered us, there might be trouble."

"I have a notion to go up, and I will take all chances."

"All right, where you go I will follow. I am going to let no city fellow outdare me."

The two young men were cousins. Tom Read was the son of a well-to-do farmer, and Robert Deane was an orphan, who at an early age had been sent to the city to learn a trade.

The latter was on a visit to Tom when the incident above recorded occurred.

The two young men stole stealthily up the path leading to the dilapidated old house.

There was no fear of dogs; as Tom remarked the old Frenchman was too mean to feed one.

Arrived near the house, the two stole on tiptoe round to the rear.

The house was so dilapidated that there were several wide chinks in the rickety old shutter, through which one could peep.

Tom Read stole up and looked through, and instantly recoiling, exclaimed, in a tone of smothered surprise:

"Great heavens!"

"What did you see, Tom?"

"Look for yourself."

Robert Deane put his eye to the opening and peeped through, and a sight met his gaze that for a moment caused his heart to leap up into his throat.

The miser, a strange, weird-looking old man, was seated before a table, on which was placed a pile of papers that Robert Deane at once recognized as United States bonds.

There were also several rolls of twenty-dollar gold pieces heaped beside them.

Almost fabulous wealth was displayed in that miserable apartment, and a strange, maniacal light gleamed in the old Frenchman's eyes as he gazed upon it.

"Let's go," said Tom Read, in a shaky sort of voice.

"Why?"

"Good heavens! suppose we should be discovered!"

"Discovered be hanged! I'm going to have some fun."

"For Heaven's sake, Bob, do not do anything to betray our presence here. I already feel like as though I had done something wrong."

At that moment a sound was heard within the house, and Bob Deane a second time put his eye to the chink and peeped in.

The old miser was muttering to himself.

He was a fine-looking man despite his sordid nature, and his poor dress, and the squalor that surrounded him.

He possessed a remarkable and striking appearance under the glare of the oil lamp suspended over the table.

"Ah, ha!" he muttered, "I sold out just in time—when values were falling. Land is not worth half what it was two years ago. Ha! ha! ha! I am safe; the fools wanted the land and I wanted the money. I am satisfied, and I care not how they feel; gold is power, and some day the wish of my heart shall be gratified. I wanted gold! I've got gold! Ha! ha! I'm a poor man—only these few miserable acres around this house left—all the rest turned into convertible funds."

"Let's go," pleaded Tom Read.

"Not yet," answered Robert Deane.

The latter was a daring and adventurous young man, and at that moment he had determined upon a little scheme for some fun, little dreaming of the fearful tragedy that was so soon to follow a bit of pleasantry.

The miser, absorbed in the contemplation of his wealth, had seized upon a roll of gold, and holding it up to the light muttered, as his eyes glittered as only a miser's eyes can glitter, at sight of gold:

"There is no depreciation in this; land goes down, but gold—gold has held its value since the days of Solomon!"

The old man had just breathed the jubilant words above recorded, when an end was brought to his mutterings, and he started in terror upon hearing a metallic voice exclaim:

"You are mistaken!"

The miser dropped the roll of gold, and, as a wild look of fear overspread his face, exclaimed:

"Who spoke?"

"I spoke," came the reply, in the same peculiar tone.

The voice sounded as though it came from the roll of gold that the miser had just dropped from his grasp.

The old man trembled in the most violent manner as he attempted to grasp the pile of bonds and hurl them into his money-chest.

To his amazement a voice exclaimed:

"Don't touch me!"

"Mercy!" he exclaimed, and recoiled in amazement.

With starting eyeballs he gazed around the room, knelt upon the floor and looked under the table.

"Whence came that voice?" he murmured, and continued searching around the room.

At length, finding no one, he asked in a trembling voice:

"Who spoke?"

There came no answer.

A few moments passed, he made a second effort to take hold of the pile of gold.

Again came that shrill, strange voice, exclaiming:

"Don't touch me!"

He dropped the bonds and seized a roll of gold, when the voice yelled:

"Let me alone!"

The miser's hair stood on end. He gazed around wildly, and then commenced pinching himself, as though trying to ascertain whether he were really awake.

"What mystery is this?" he asked.

All was silent.

He repeated the question, and still gazed in a wild, perplexed manner at the strange treasure which had so suddenly found a voice.

At length he seized hold of the bonds and determinedly commenced to throw them into his chest.

At once a most strange and wonderful exhibition took place, the chest became a very bedlam of extraordinary sounds.

CHAPTER II.

THE poor old miser actually groaned with terror, as yells and shrieks issued from the old chest. He tossed in the rolls of gold, and the strange sounds increased.

Summoning sufficient courage the old man slammed down the lid, exclaiming:

"There, you are safe, now!"

"You old wretch!" came a voice from the trunk, "your doom is sealed. You'll die a poor man! We're getting our wings and we'll fly away."

For some moments the old man stood silent, but at length an idea appeared to flash across his mind.

He crossed the room, took down a gun and carefully examined it.

Robert Deane had been a witness to the scenes above described, and as he saw the old Frenchman move toward the door he stepped away from the window and said to his companion:

"Tom, it's time for us to leave!"

"Did you hear those strange voices?" asked Tom, as the two youths stole out into the darkness.

"Yes, I heard them."

"The old miser must have company. By George! no one save his daughter was ever permitted to enter his house before!"

The two young men stole out of sight, when Tom again said:

"It's strange the old Frenchman would permit any one in his house, especially when he had all that money exposed."

Bob Deane smiled, but said nothing.

The fact was, that during his absence from his native town Robert Deane had acquired a most wonderful faculty.

He had made a study of ventriloquism, and had met such success that he was, beyond question, the most remarkable performer in the world.

He performed feats with his voice that had never been undertaken by any other student of the strange art.

As yet, the young man had not betrayed his acquirement to a living soul.

His relatives supposed he was engaged in the trade he had been sent to the city to learn.

Such was not the fact, however.

Robert Deane had always experienced a great admiration for the profession of a detective, and at the moment he was visiting among his friends was really employed in the secret service.

The two young men had but just passed beyond observation, when the door of the old house opened and the miser, gun in hand, came forth.

He walked slowly around his house peering in every direction.

The two young men laid low, and after awhile the old Frenchman re-entered his house.

Tom Read was as much amazed as the old miser.

He had heard the voices and was unable to explain the singular phenomenon.

A few moments after the old miser had returned within doors, and at the suggestion of Bob Deane, the two young men advanced again toward the house.

A ray of light shot from the house and glinted across a little rivulet, some inches in width, which flowed from a spring near by.

As the young men approached the spot where the light struck the water, and where the ground was softened, Bob Deane's eye fell upon the imprint of a human foot.

The marks would not have been noticed by an ordinary observer, nor would the detective have noticed it if it had not been for a certain peculiarity.

The sole of the shoe that had made the imprint was spiked.

Bob Deane had made his profession a study as though it were an *art*, and a most singular instinct caused him to make a close examination of that imprint.

Tom Read was astonished at his companion's movements, and asked:

"What in thunder are you up to, Bob?"

"Well, I'm going to measure the size of that imprint."

"What for?"

"Well, I couldn't tell you exactly if I wanted to, but something may come of it."

Little did that keen young man dream how soon something tragical and remarkable was to come of the measurement.

Having taken the measure, Bob again led the way to the place where they had stood and peeped in upon the strange old miser.

When Bob peeped in the second time, he saw the old man seated on a chair opposite his money chest. A haggard look rested upon his ghastly face, as though he was brooding under the shadow of some portending doom.

The only article of value in the room, save the chest, was a French clock standing on the mantel-shelf.

As the old man sat brooding with a perplexed and troubled expression, the clock tinkled *one!*

The old man started and gazed at the time, when, in a voice toned to accord with its silver strike, came the words:

"Thou fool!"

The miser leaped to his feet, and clapping his hands to his temples, exclaimed:

"I must be going mad!"

Bob Deane had set out to exercise his wonderful talent upon the old miser merely to gratify a spirit of fun, but what was fun to him became a solemn scene in the end.

The miser appeared strangely worked upon.

For a few moments he paced the narrow limits of his room, and ever and anon strange mutterings fell from his lips.

He was strangely moved, and Robert Deane at first regretted his strange joke; but after a while as he heard the words that fell from that old man's lips, he felt better satisfied with what he had done.

It was evident that the old miser had accepted the strange words as supernatural warnings, and in a few brief moments his nature had been changed.

"I have been a fool!" he muttered; "a wild fool! I have striven to get all this wealth, and now I am just ready to topple into the grave!"

Little did the ventriloquist detective dream how true were the miser's words, and what good grounds there were for his dark forebodings.

Robert Deane was strangely impressed.

He was astonished at the strange results of the exercise of his wonderful powers.

"Come, Tom," he said, "we will go"

Tom was speaking with terror.

He was a bold young man under ordinary circumstances, but he had been a witness to strange doings that night, that had caused him to quake with fear.

"What an awful mystery!" he said to Bob.

The latter determined not to let on his agency in the matter, and merely answered:

"Yes."

"We must not tell any one what we have seen," said Tom.

"Why?"

"No one would believe us, and we would only become subjects for fun."

The young men proceeded on their way toward home, but their adventures for the night were not over.

CHAPTER III

Robert Deane and his companion had walked about half a mile toward home, when suddenly Tom Read, who had been starting at every sound, and whose nerves were completely unstrung, exclaimed:

"Hark! there is some one coming along the road!"

"Well, what of it?" asked Bob.

"We must not be seen."

The detective, merely to gratify his companion, consented to dodge behind a hedge that lined the road.

Clouds had obscured the previous bright starlight, but a few seconds after hiding in the hedge the two young men saw the outlines of three men passing along the road.

They were evidently rough-looking fellows.

The detective had as fair a chance to study their appearance as the darkness would permit, as the tramps came to a momentary halt directly opposite to the spot where they were concealed.

Poor Read was in such a nervous condition that he hardly dared look at the men, but lay face forward on the ground.

The detective, however, prompted by an instinct that he could not explain, appeared to take a wonderful interest in the fellows, and peered through the hedge to study them as much as he could.

The tragic events that followed caused it to prove a fortunate circumstance that he did so.

The men appeared to be holding a sort of consultation.

They spoke in very low tones, and Bob could not hear distinctly what passed between them, but he did observe that one of the men possessed a singularly peculiar voice.

Occasionally he would hear the words: "bonds," "gold;" and the man with the peculiar voice ejaculated, at times: "By all that's sure in death!"

This phrase appeared to be a habit with the fellow, and his peculiar mode of using it impressed itself upon the detective's memory, so that he could have imitated the man's expression so nearly that the man himself would have mistaken it for his own voice.

After a few moments the men resumed their journey, and Bob and Tom came forth from their place of concealment.

"Let's follow those men, Tom!"

"What do you want to follow them for?"

"To see what they are up to."

"Nonsense! it is only a party of tramps; come along."

"See here, Tom, I would like to see them go past the little red house."

"You're out of your head!"

"No"

"Well, you must go alone, Bob, I am off for home!" exclaimed Tom; and he started down the road.

Bob would have liked to have followed the men, but, as he was Tom's guest, he did not feel at liberty to leave him on the road, and started after him.

The two young men reached home, but a strange oppressiveness overhung the detective's heart.

He could not rid himself of the idea that those men were desperadoes from the city, bent on some errand of crime.

Bob did not sleep a wink after going to bed. He tossed about, his mind fixed upon the three men he had seen upon the road. At length he could stand it no longer.

His companion was fast asleep when the detective arose from bed, and stealthily put on his clothes.

He had determined to make a trip to the old miser's hovel, and assure himself that all was right.

It was not quite dawn as he passed from the house and stole along the road toward De Coudres's home.

A rapid walk brought him to the house, just at dawn.

On the road he had met several persons, with whom he had been acquainted in his early days, and was recognized by each one of them.

Turning through the gate, the young detective stole toward the house.

Everything around appeared right, and he began to think that, after all, he had made a fool of himself.

Little did he dream of the fearful sight he was destined to behold, or realize how strange were the premonitions that had agitated him during the night.

As he approached in front of the house, he saw that the front door was open.

This was strange, as he remembered seeing the old miser lock and doubly bar it the night previous.

He knew that the old man was savage, and yet, urged by an impulse he could not restrain, he approached and stepped across the threshold.

He saw nothing of the old man, and everything appeared in order.

"What a fool I've been," he muttered, and determined to retreat as silently as he had entered.

Returning toward the road, he passed out of the gate, when he met a man whom he knew, and who, in a derisive tone, asked him "if he had been trying to borrow a dollar from the old miser?"

"No; I have just been paying him a bill that I owed him!" answered Bob, in a jocular tone.

The farmer passed on, and the detective stood at the gate hardly determined what to do.

Thus half an hour passed.

It was now broad daylight, and no one had come forth from the old man's door-way.

While still standing arguing in his own mind whether to return and make a more thorough examination, or go home, his glance fell upon something that caused his heart to stand still.

Upon one of the bars of the gate he saw the red stains of finger marks.

"Ah, heavens!" he ejaculated, and with full, fierce, and starting eyeballs advanced and examined the finger marks.

Mingled with finger-prints were a few snow-white hairs.

A thousand strange thoughts and memories rushed through the detective's mind.

He returned to the house. Again he crossed the threshold, and saw everything in order; but a strange quiet appeared to pervade the old house.

There were three rooms in the house on the ground floor.

The detective felt almost sure that some strange sight was about to come under his gaze.

He stepped into one of the adjoining rooms.

At a glance he saw that all his fears were realized.

The most affecting sight met his gaze.

He was not old enough in his profession to have become inured to such a scene and at the first sight he recoiled and closed the door.

A moment he stood irresolute, but summoning sufficient courage he opened the door.

This time he stood and calmly contemplated the scene.

Upon the floor lay the old miser.

One glance was sufficient to show that he was stone dead, and had been for some hours.

His attenuated features were fixed and rigid, and his eyes were fixed in the stony glare of death.

The money chest lay upon the floor open, and rifled of its rich contents of the previous night.

It was evident the old man had been murdered for his money, and the detective's memory recalled the three men whom he had met the previous night upon the road.

Ah! how bitterly he now regretted that he had not obeyed the promptings that had urged him to follow them.

Had he done so, a most foul deed might have been prevented.

At the same moment a recollection came to him of the beautiful girl whom he had met at the party the night before, and she was the daughter of that ghastly victim of a most horrible crime.

He turned from the room of death, stepped toward the door, and at the threshold met her of whom he had just been thinking.

CHAPTER IV.

When Robert Deane met Emily de Coudres he uttered a startled cry of alarm, turned to a ghastly paleness, and then instinctively sought to prevent her from entering the house.

Bob, although young, was possessed of excellent nerve, and was a man of genuine courage.

His alarm was not on his own account, but in behalf of the wondrously beautiful girl who by some strange fate was born to such a miserable parent.

At the time when first introduced to our readers, Robert Deane, with his cousin, Tom Read, was returning from a party where they had been spending the evening.

Robert Deane was the son of a former inhabitant of the village, a well-known and highly talented lawyer. Robert Deane, senior, late in life had married a lovely girl, who had died when her son was but three weeks old.

The husband only survived the wife a year; and while yet an infant, our hero had been left alone in the world an orphan.

He had been adopted by an uncle, Mr. Read, and tenderly cared for until he arrived at an age when it was time for him to strike out into the world to carve his own fortune.

The orphan child had grown into a remarkably handsome youth, and, despite his rather wild disposition, had been quite a favorite with the villagers.

When grown to manhood, at the time of his first visit to his native village, his old friends and relatives discovered that the promises of his youth had been fulfilled, as he had grown to be a remarkably handsome man.

The girls went "wild," as the saying goes, over him, but with all his good looks and high spirits, Bob appeared to carry a heart of stone.

He paid no particular attention to any of the pretty girls who would have been glad to receive his attentions, and it was rumored that his life in the city had filled his mind with notions above the plain country folks among whom he had been born.

Thus matters had stood when our hero made his last visit to his native place.

It was the night preceding his intended return to the city, when his cousin, Tom Read, induced him to attend a party, at the house of the belle of the village.

It was at this party that our hero had first met Emily de Coudres.

The moment his eyes fell upon her more than ordinary interest was aroused.

Bob had met lovely women in the city, but he was feign to admit never one as lovely as the miser's daughter.

He was introduced to her, and found her, in conversation, as charming as she was in person.

His stoicism gave way in those few brief moments, and a violent passion took possession of his heart.

Strangely enough, it appeared as though he had made the same impression as he had received, as Emily did not appear to have a thought for any one else in the room from the moment she had been introduced to our hero.

Emily de Coudres was also a comparative stranger in the village.

Her father had come to the neighborhood when she was but a toddling child, and before she had become acclimated, as it were, she had been sent away, and had never been seen again until about six weeks before the opening of our story. It was a matter of surprise to see such a lovely creature at the tumble-down home of the old miser.

At length one old woman mustered up sufficient courage to call at the house, and coming away, reported that the beautiful stranger was the daughter of old De Coudres, the same little child that he had had with him at the time of his first appearance in the place.

The old woman also reported that the daughter was a charming young lady, not at all like her strange old father, and that the chances were there would soon be a great change about the old De Coudres place.

It was further stated that the young lady, all these years, had been at an expensive boarding-school, had become highly accomplished, and had had no knowledge of her parent's strange peculiarity until she had returned home and found him living in such squalor.

At once several young ladies hastened to call upon her, and all returned from the old house with charming stories concerning her.

Thus it was that one of the young ladies had invited her to a birthday party; and to the surprise of all, the invitation had been accepted. It was at the party that Bob Deane and Emily de Coudres had first met, as above described.

When Emily saw our hero's pale face on that fatal morning, a chill went to her heart.

She appeared to realize instinctively that something fearful had occurred.

She managed to articulate:

"What has happened?"

Bob recovered his voice and answered:

"Nothing; but you must not enter there just now."

"My father?"

"Ah! miss, please ask no questions!"

"Something has happened to my poor old father!" in trembling tones moaned the beautiful girl, "and I must go to him."

She attempted to rush past Bob and enter the house.

The young man caught hold of her and by gentle force tried to hold her back.

"Unhand me, sir!" exclaimed Emily, in a tone of indignation.

"Ah! my dear lady, do not persist in entering that room; it will last your sight forever."

"Let go of me—I will enter!" and the young lady struggled frantically to free herself.

At the same moment a man appeared at the door-way

Seeing Bob and the young lady struggling, the farmer thought all was not right.

He was a gigantic, powerful man, and without waiting to ask any questions, he leaped forward, and struck Bob a blow that sent him reeling against the opposite wall.

In her excitement and terror, Emily did not stop to consider how she had been freed, but rushed toward the door of the room where the corpse of her parent lay.

Bob would a second time have leaped forward to prevent her, but the burly farmer barred the way.

As Emily had opened the door of the room where her aged parent lay, and crossed the threshold, a wild piercing scream fell from her lips, and she threw herself upon the form of her dead father.

Bob sprung to her side; but alas! consciousness had fled.

The young man raised her in his arms, and sought to bear her to another room.

In the door-way stood the old farmer, gazing, with horror-stricken eyes, on the fearful sight.

"Whose work is this?" he asked.

"Out of the way!—this poor lady has fainted!"

"Who did this?" asked the farmer.

"Stand aside! I say."

At the same moment a number of people came crowding through the narrow door-way.

CHAPTER V.

Bob had but just time to bear the unconscious girl into an adjoining room, as the crowd surged into the room.

Cries of horror arose on every side.

Some of the people rushed into the room where Bob had borne the miser's daughter.

"What is the matter?" cried one, in frenzied tones of inquiry.

"There has been a wicked deed committed, I fear!"

"When did it happen?" came the question.

"Last night, I suppose."

"Is the girl dead?"

"No, she has only fainted," answered Bob, and, assisted by some of the others, he set about reviving her.

In the meantime the news of the terrible affair had gone abroad, and a great crowd had begun to assemble.

As a matter of course, each in-comer had a hundred and one inquiries to make, and the comments and conclusions expressed were equally numerous. Among those who had gathered was a foolish boy known far and wide as Cricky Earle. The half-witted youth moved around amongst the crowd, and ever and anon would shake his head in a knowing manner, as though he could communicate something very important if he only had a mind to.

As this was a peculiarity of the boy, little attention was paid to his signs.

The last to arrive was the squire, who, by virtue of his office, was the legal constable.

During all the many incidents that occurred subsequent to the discovery of the terrible tragedy, Bob had given his attention solely to the resuscitation of Emily de Coudres.

Several women had arrived, and knew exactly what to do under the circumstances; but at length some of them began to despair of ever bringing the poor girl around again.

Finally, however, she began to exhibit some signs of returning consciousness, and at length opened her eyes.

Her glance first rested upon our hero, who was standing over her. A look of terror instantly flashed in her eyes, and closing them again, she moaned as though in physical pain.

Efforts were renewed to restore her once more, when the same incident was repeated.

"This is strange!" remarked one old lady, who had been the most active in her endeavors to resuscitate the girl.

Cricky Earle had been a witness to the incident the last time, and having one hand upon the woman who had made the remark above quoted, he pointed with the other toward Bob, and said, with a look of singular intelligence upon his ordinarily simpleton face.

"That gal won't keep her eyes open as long as her first glance falls upon that man!"

"What do you mean?" asked the woman.

"Take him away and you will see!"

Bob was astonished at the simpleton's words, but immediately stepped out of sight.

As he did so, Cricky stepped beside him and whispered.

"Why don't you run for it?"

The only interpretation our hero could put upon the lad's words was that he meant: "Why don't you run for a physician?"

In the meantime Emily de Coudres had once more opened her eyes, and not beholding Bob, had kept them open.

The woman who had been the most active was the only one to attach any peculiar significance to this singular fact.

A few moments later the deceased man's daughter was fully restored, when the squire came into her presence, and in a kindly manner asked:

"Were you the first to discover your father's death?"

"Has my father been killed?" asked the girl.

"Everything indicates that such is the case, my child!"

"Poor papa, poor papa!" murmured the victim's daughter.

"Do you suspect any one?" asked the squire; "or have you any theory as to how your father met his death?"

At this instant Bob stepped into the room and came under the range of Emily de Coudres's vision.

A singular look of horror overspread her lovely face, and involuntarily she exclaimed:

"Ask that man!" and she pointed directly toward our hero.

At the same moment a second voice chimed in and said, pointing in the same direction:

"*Yes, ask that man; he knows!*"

All eyes were turned toward Robert Deane, who started back aghast, as though some terrible revelation had been made to him.

Although it was a remarkable scene, not one present for an instant suspected that the declaration was meant to implicate our hero in the foul deed.

Turning toward our hero, the squire, who had known him from boyhood, asked:

"What do you know about this affair, Mr. Deane?"

A smile overspread our hero's face, although he felt greatly annoyed. Not that he feared implication in the foul deed, but because circumstances had led Emily to suspect him.

He was keen enough to know that even such a suspicion would have a lasting prejudice against him in her mind. He alone had understood her tone and manner when she had said: "Ask that man."

He had also understood Cricky, who had joined Emily in her declaration.

In answer to the judge, Robert said:

"I know nothing about this affair!" and then related all that had occurred, without making any allusions to the curious scene of the previous night, giving some other reason for happening to enter the old miser's house.

The questions and answers were made in the presence of Emily, who lay upon the bed, looking more like a corpse than a living being.

Her lovely face was pale, and appeared fixed and rigid with horror and agony.

She had heard Robert Deane's explanation, however.

Her glance had been fixed upon him during his recital, and his bold, handsome eyes met hers unflinchingly.

A strange look came over Emily's face.

For a moment an inward struggle appeared to be going on in her mind.

The squire, addressing her, asked:

"What ground have you for supposing that Mr. Deane knows anything in regard to the tragedy, Miss de Coudres?"

"I was mistaken; I recall my words."

For a few days there was great excitement throughout the whole county.

Robert Deane was placed under arrest, but in the end was discharged, owing to the fact that no real evidence could be found against him; and yet there were many who, despite his high character, suspected that he was in some way connected with the crime.

Suspicion was first directed against him from the fact that, in an unguarded moment, his cousin, Tom Read, had related their adventures of the night just previous to when the tragedy must have occurred.

The young men admitted having seen a display of the old miser's wealth.

It would have gone hard with them but for one little circumstance.

One part of their story was at the last moment corroborated.

A farmer returning from the depot had met the three men whom both the young men asserted they had seen going toward the old miser's residence.

The great tragedy seemed destined to drift down among the great mass of strange mysteries.

Detectives came from the city, and flourished around for awhile, but eventually went away, stating that no clews could be picked up, and that the perpetrators of the fearful crime would never be discovered, unless some strange accident should furnish a clew.

Immediately after the inquest Emily had been taken to the house of a neighbor, and had there remained.

Owing to sickness that had come upon her, superinduced by the great shock to her nervous system, she had heard nothing of all the rumors and incidents that followed her father's death.

It was fully six weeks after the fatal night, before she was sufficiently restored to converse upon any subject.

It chanced that the parties who had given her shelter were among those who strongly believed in Robert Deane's guilt.

One day, after her full recovery, Emily was seated at her window, when she overheard, unwittingly, a conversation never intended for her ears.

The words she overheard sent a cold chill to her heart.

CHAPTER VI.

A NEIGHBOR had stopped, in passing along the road, to exchange a few words with Mr. Grant, the farmer who had had her brought to his house.

"I say, Mr. Grant, it's strange that no effort is being made to clear up the mystery of old De Coudres's death."

Emily would have fled from the window, but she was too weak to do so, and was compelled to hear what followed.

"It's no mystery to me," answered Mr. Grant.

"No mystery to you?"

"Not at all."

"Why, who do you think was guilty of the deed?"

"Robert Deane."

"Why, Mr. Grant!"

"I mean just what I say. I tell you, if the old miser should rise from his grave to-day he would denounce that young man as his assailant."

"Young Robert Deane is the last youth I should ever suspect, unless unquestioned evidence was furnished against him."

"Well, I think the evidence is pretty dead against him; anyhow, it is sufficient to satisfy me."

"No, sir; I have known young Deane all his life. He used to be a pretty wild, harum-scarum sort of a chap, but there never was any harm in him. You forget how he rescued Farmer Lincoln's daughter from the burning house, when there wasn't a man who dared undertake the risk and peril. Then, again, do you remember how he rescued that nephew of yours from drowning, just as he was going over the dam, and not a man dared to make an effort?"

"Yes, I remember all that and that is why I have kept my mouth shut; but, between you and me there are facts in my possession, never brought out at the inquest, that satisfy me that Bob Deane is the guilty man! I *know* it just as well as though I had seen him do it with my own eyes!"

"You must be mistaken!"

"No, sir; I know how it is with young rustics who go to the city to live. Bob Deane is not what he used to be; there is a mystery connected with his city life that it is not my business to say anything about, and I don't want you to repeat what I have said to-day; but I tell you, I *know* Bob Deane is not so innocent, and he has got all the old man's wealth safe enough, you can wager!"

"But how about the three strange men seen near the house on the same night?"

"Ah! that jury were idiots! Those desperadoes were Bob Deane's confederates from the city, and I could prove it!"

"Then you ought to do so."

"No; I am not going to raise my hand against the man who saved my brother's child's life; but I tell you, if I were a mind to, I could furnish evidence that would hang that young man, and I know it."

Mr. Grant's neighbor went on his way.

Old Peter Grant was a nice sort of man, but one of those smart old gentlemen who always know more than any one else. Besides, he was a great blower, and his neighbor did not take much stock in his declarations, despite the positive manner in which they had been made.

There was one listener, however, who only knew Mr. Grant as an honest, kind-hearted man, and did not know his weakness.

That listener was Emily de Coudres, and she believed that Mr. Grant would not make such positive declarations without good grounds.

It was a remarkable fact that the murderers had made a clean sweep, seemingly, of old De Coudres's wealth.

Not a penny was found of all the gold and bonds he was supposed to have had in his possession.

Although great sympathy was felt for the innocent Emily, still the justices, in voices of holy horror, would proclaim that the old gold worshiper had been served just right after all!

All that Emily was known to possess was the homestead, a place not worth more than seven or eight hundred dollars at most.

A guardian had been appointed for the unfortunate girl by the courts.

Immediately after the close of the inquest, and the burial of the murdered man, Bob Deane had called at Mr. Grant's house to see Emily.

He was informed that she was lying unconscious with a brain-fever, and it would be many weeks before she would be able to see any one, even if she recovered at all.

Immediately Bob left the village, and had not been seen or heard of since.

That same day that Emily had overheard the conversation between Mr. Grant and his neighbor, she had sent for the former to come to her room.

A long interview followed, during which Mr. Grant tried to convince Emily that he had positive evidence that Bob Deane was guilty.

She pressed him to disclose the facts that led to his convictions, but he would not do so; merely shaking his head in a knowing manner, and repeating his declarations.

Before leaving the room he told Emily about Bob Deane's having called to see her just after the funeral, and urged her, as she valued her life, not to see him under any circumstances whatever.

That very afternoon Bob Deane appeared in the village, and proceeded direct to Mr. Grant's house.

Mr. Grant met him at the door.

"I wish to see Miss de Coudres," said Robert.

"Miss de Coudres is not to be seen," answered Mr. Grant, in a cold tone.

"I have learned that she is sufficiently recovered to be seen without risk to her health."

"You can not see her!"

"Am I to understand you that the prohibition is to be placed against me alone?"

"You can not see her!"

"I wish to see her on important business."

"I can not help it."

"Will you take a note to Miss de Coudres?"

"She will not see you; a note is no good."

"Well, will you deliver it?"

"Yes."

Robert Deane wrote on a card:

"Miss de Coudres, it is very necessary that I should see you on important business in your own interest."

Mr. Grant took the card and disappeared. In a few moments he came back, however, with the card in his hand, saying:

"Miss de Coudres will not receive a card from you."

"Will not receive a card from me?"

"No, sir."

"What does this mean!"

"I only bring you her message."

"But I have important news for her."

"Can't help it."

Mr. Grant did not say that he had gone to Miss de Coudres and had told her on her life not to receive the card.

"Listen, Mr. Grant: above all persons in the world Miss de Coudres ought to see me."

"She says she won't, and that's all there is about it; and I will not permit you to force your presence upon her."

Reluctantly Robert Deane turned away, but he was still determined to see Emily.

He went to the post-office, wrote a letter, and dropped it in addressed to her.

Two days passed and the letter was returned to him unopened.

Matters were pressing. Deane had no time to spare; every moment was precious, and yet it was absolutely necessary that he should see Emily.

He hung around the house night and day, but could not even catch a glimpse of her at the window.

At length he came to a desperate resolve.

As he said to himself, desperate cases demand desperate remedies.

He was determined to have an interview with the young lady.

Once again he called at the house and met Mr. Grant.

The latter attempted to bluff him off as before.

"I am determined to see Miss de Coudres!" said Robert.

"See here, Mr. Deane, if you do not leave off trying to force yourself into that young lady's presence she will have you arrested."

"Did she say so?"

"She did."

"Very well, we shall see!" declared Deane, and he again went away.

That same night on here, knowing the importance of the interview, determined to resort to a most extraordinary method for securing an interview with Emily de Coudres.

CHAPTER VII.

The shaft of fate had hurtled through the air, and landed in Robert Deane's heart.

His had been an uneventful life thus far.

He was of comparatively humble origin, and withal was very ambitious to make a name in the world.

He was a born hero, strong in body, handsome in face and figure, brave and chivalrous, and a young man of the highest honor and integrity.

He had been sent to the city by his Uncle Read to learn a trade, but instead had deliberately prepared himself to become a famous detective.

He possessed a natural gift of mimicry and wonderful powers of ventriloquism, and for a year had served with a professional, who had instructed him, until he not only excelled his master, but had progressed so that he could perform feats more wonderful than any of the old-time professors of the strange art.

He had attended the company where he had met Emily de Coudres, and the first glance at her truly beautiful face had set his blood on fire.

A startling tragedy and a curious combination of incidents had connected him with it in a bad light.

He well knew the power and lasting influence of first impressions.

Emily de Coudres, in her innocent heart, held him in some way responsible for her father's terrible death.

The seed of dislike and abhorrence would have taken too deep root ever to be eradicated.

His first purpose must be to disabuse her mind of the damaging impression.

He loved her, and was determined to win her, although she was beautiful, and possibly rich, while he was poor, and without name or fame.

As recorded in our previous chapters, he had called again and again at the house where she had sought temporary refuge, and she had refused to see him, and had even displayed a deep degree of horror at the bare mention of his name.

A crisis had arrived.

Robert Deane knew that he was on the track of the real criminals.

Besides, he had facts in his possession that led him to believe that a large fortune was concealed somewhere, as well as a will bequeathing all to the beautiful girl.

Again, he had reason to believe that the robbers had secured an immense booty that could be recovered.

It was not interest that led him to determine to win Emily de Coudres.

She had won his heart before he even knew who she was; and, though she never became his wife, he was bound to recover for her all the great wealth he felt assured her father had gathered.

The night following his last visit to Mr. Grant's house he dressed himself in a peculiar garb, and immediately after midnight started for the farmer's house.

He had made other preparations, and also knew the room occupied by Emily.

The same night the latter was quietly sleeping, when suddenly she was aroused by hearing a strange, weird voice.

She listened a moment, but concluded that she had been dreaming, when again she heard the strange voice.

Her heart stood still.

The tones of that voice were strangely familiar to her.

With her poor little body trembling with terror she sat up in bed and essayed to scream, but her powers of utterance were paralyzed.

Distinctly came its voice:

"Emily, come to my grave to-morrow night; come alone."

The girl was not at all superstitious, and although she felt assured that the voice was only a creation of her fevered imagination, her terror was just as great.

It was a simulation of her father's voice she heard, and it sounded as though he stood directly beside her bed.

By a great effort she summoned sufficient physical power to leap from the bed and strike a light.

All was still.

She looked around in every direction, and seeing nothing, at length became reassured, and concluded to put out the light and return to bed.

Horrors! Again she heard the voice!

There was no mistake this time.

It came not when the room was shrouded in darkness, nor while she might have been sleeping, but clear and distinct while she was wide awake, and with the lights burning brightly in the room.

The voice said:

"Do not be afraid, my child; thy father will not harm thee; do not call for assistance."

The girl's face was transfixed with terror, despite the invitation from the unearthly spectre not to be afraid.

"My child, I have much to tell thee; be not afraid; speak to me," came the voice.

The girl managed to summon strength to ask:

"Who speaks?"

"Thy father."

"What would'st thou?"

"I would communicate with thee."

"Where shall I come?"

"To my grave."

"When?"

"To-morrow night at the hour of twelve; no harm shall come to thee; fear not; steal forth alone!"

"What would'st thou tell me?"

"*Come and learn!*"

"Why not tell me here?"

"*Come!*"

"Father, one word!"

"*Come to-morrow night!*"

"Who is guilty?"

"*Come to-morrow night!*"

Emily had somewhat regained her courage, and said:

"Give some word."

There came no answer.

"One word!"

"Come to-morrow night; I go now!"

The strain was too great for the poor girl, and she fell forward insensible upon the floor.

How long she lay there she knew not, but when she recovered consciousness she found the light blazing brightly, and everything in the room in proper condition.

Her first thought was to call for some one, and moved toward the door.

Then came a memory of the words, "Come alone!"

Even now she was not satisfied; but, after all, she had been disturbed by a startling and realistic dream.

She returned to bed and slept till morning.

Under the broad glare of sunlight she thought over the startling incident, and at last came to the conclusion that it must have been a dream.

The following night she retired to her room, determined

to sit up until after twelve o'clock and assure herself that she was but the victim of a disturbed brain.

She had no notion of going to the grave-yard, although it was but a short distance from Farmer Grant's house.

Midnight came, and all was still.

She remained sitting at her table reading until she heard the clock below stairs strike one; and, greatly relieved at the idea that she had proved the previous night's experience but a dream, she prepared to retire.

There was no question now as to her being wide awake and in her proper senses, and yet suddenly there came her father's voice, saying:

"My child, thou didst not come!"

The old terror returned.

It was no dream.

She could not hide from herself the startling fact that she had been the hero of a supernatural adventure.

"Will you come?" asked the voice.

Emily, absolutely convinced that it was really the presence of her father, answered:

"I will."

A few moments passed, and all was still.

The voice did not speak again, and Emily retired to bed.

The next day she sat long thinking over the wonderful experience.

That same day Robert Deane called at the house and requested an interview, but through Mr. Grant, she refused to see him.

Night came, and Emily determined to go to the grave-yard.

During the day she had, by indifferent inquiry, learned the spot where her father had been laid.

She had even visited it and knew just where to go when the small hours of the night should come.

It was a fearful undertaking, and yet she felt it was a duty.

CHAPTER VIII.

As resident decreed, it set in a dark, cloudy night, and it was with a shudder that the trembling Emily, closely [illegible] down-stairs about midnight to go over to the church-yard.

Once [illegible] the road the real terror took possession of her.

It was not the dead she feared, so much as the living.

If by any possibility she should meet any one at that hour, what excuse could she give for perambulating after midnight.

At every step she imagined she saw a dark form looming up before her, and when she would stop a moment to take breath, she thought she heard a step stealing after her.

It was certainly a strange and trying ordeal for a delicate and fearful girl to go through.

A stern duty, as she thought, however, urged her on, and after awhile, greatly exhausted, she reached the church-yard gate.

A moment she was compelled to stand and recover herself.

While thus waiting her eyes wandered toward the little white church, which stood for a moment clearly revealed, as the moon shone through a rift of clouds.

Ah, horror! even as she gazed she [illegible] the shadow of a man thrown across the [illegible] of the church.

Her first impulse was to turn, and run home as fast as the world go[illegible]

However, it was no ordinary summons that had brought her out on that dismal night, and though death lay in her path she must make her way to her father's tomb.

Again the moonlight shone through a rift, she looked, and the shadow had disappeared.

Emily stole forward, and soon stood beside the new-made mound where her unfortunate father had been laid.

A moment she stood trembling, when she heard a voice.

There was no question in her mind as to who the speaker was. It was the same tone of voice in which she had so often heard her strange father speak.

"My child, thou hast come."

"I am here."

"I have but a few brief words for your ear; you must ask no questions, and you must accept every word that I say."

"Father, are you at rest?"

"Question me not. I was most cruelly and foully dealt with."

"Father, by whom?"

"I can not name the guilty men, but they will be brought to justice, and justice will be done you!"

"You say men?"

"Yes."

"More than one had a hand in your death?"

"Yes."

A moment Emily was silent. A question rose to her lips for utterance, and yet she hesitated; at length she managed to ask:

"Father, did you ever know a man named Robert Deane?"

"I knew him well; I knew him when but a boy."

"Have I any reason to curse his name?"

There was a tremulousness in the strange voice when the following answer came:

"No; he is a true and honest young man, and I would advise you to accept his counsel should he offer his aid. You can rely upon him as upon no other man."

"What would you direct me to do?"

Chance has opened the subject; I would have you confide in Robert Deane; he has undertaken to bring the guilty men to justice. He will succeed, trust him; but never by word or look let him know concerning what has passed during the last few nights."

Emily would have said more, but there was no response to her question.

Thrice she spoke, but silence prevailed, no sound breaking the stillness save the occasional rustling of the leaves of the trees as the freshening wind played amid them.

With a lightened heart Emily stole homeward.

The beautiful girl had not mourned her father as one would who had known a parent's tender care.

In fact, her father had so dealt with her, that there were times when the question arose whether or not he really was her father.

His horrible death had been a terrible shock to her, and had aroused a vein of tenderness deeper than she had experienced in his life.

Strangely enough, Robert Deane, with his handsome face and manly ways, had made as strong an impression upon the imagination as her beauty had made on his.

She had not learned to love him, but during the few brief hours of their first meeting she had thought him the handsomest and most engaging youth she had ever met.

Thus it was, when she met him at the door of her father's house, upon the morning succeeding the tragedy, a cold chill went to her heart.

She could not conceive why she should feel such a special sense of sorrow at the idea of Robert Deane's being in some way connected with the terrible crime.

Farmer Grant had strengthened her suspicion in every way.

Her judgment had said it was impossible that he could have had a hand in the crime, and her heart as strongly protested against the suspicion, and yet there were certain [illegible] circumstances that prevel heavily upon her.

It now appeared that, in a most miraculous manner, the suspicion had been removed; more than that, from the most solemn and reliable source had come the admonition to trust in Robert Deane above any other man.

Her heart was light, though the night was dark and heavy, as she stole homeward.

The communication from the grave, as she believed it, had lifted a great weight from her heart.

While Emily de Cordres was stealing home with a light heart there was another individual also stealing through the darkness who regarded not the heariness of the night.

Robert Deane had taken a strange method to gain Emily's trust in him.

He had only heard the old miser speak once or twice, and yet had been able to so nearly imitate his voice that even his own daughter had been deceived.

Upon the following day our hero appeared at Farmer Grant's house.

He was admitted, and being shown into the plain farm house parlor, bid to wait.

A few moments passed, and Emily entered the room.

She was dressed in a black dress, and all the plain insignia of one in deep mourning, and yet Robert's heart gave a great thump as he beheld her extraordinary loveliness.

A bright blush reddened her face, while a pallor overspread the youth's countenance.

She was conscious of having indulged a suspicion, and he was conscious of having practiced a strange and singular deception.

The first meeting was a moment of extreme awkwardness. Robert was the first to speak.

Advancing and seizing the beautiful girl by the hand, he said, in a gentle voice:

"My dear Miss de Coudres, I would not have forced myself upon you during such a season of bereavement, were it not necessary, in your own interests, that I should have a few moments' conversation with you."

"You must excuse me for not having seen you earlier, but I have not yet fully recovered from the shock of that terrible event."

The roses left the girl's face at the allusion to the murder, and there was a tremulous tone in her voice.

"A singular series of circumstances have put me in possession of certain facts that invite me to interest myself in your behalf, and, to begin with, I have a secret to impart, and must claim your silence in my behalf. I am a professional detective."

"Did my father know that?" Emily exclaimed, involuntarily.

"I have no reason to suspect that he did. But I have come this morning to offer you my services professionally."

Silence followed Robert Deane's proposition.

Our hero felt constrained to say:

"I do not propose to force my services upon you."

"I would be only too glad to accept your services, Mr. Deane, if I were certain that I would have any means to compensate you."

"Is that your only objection?"

"It is."

"Then consider that I am engaged; and now I am merely your business adviser, and my first information is that undoubtedly your father left a will. Have you any knowledge of such an instrument?"

"I am not assured that my father was possessed of sufficient means to make a will, more than as a formal paper."

"I have some startling news for you, Miss de Coudres!"

CHAPTER IX.

EMILY DE COUDRES had not recovered from the embarrassment that had oppressed her since their first meeting, when young Deane made the sudden announcement:

"I have startling news for you, Miss de Coudres."

Emily made no answer; it was left to Robert to proceed:

"You will remember I was the first to enter your father's house after the murder—accident?"

Emily bowed assent, and a blush returned momentarily to her cheek, as she remembered the suspicions she had indulged.

"I made certain discoveries during those few brief moments that have not been revealed to any one; as a detective, I had a right to hold on to them until such time as I could make the revelation to the party most interested.

The detective now proceeded to relate how he and Tom Read, governed by mere curiosity, had been peeping in upon the old miser the night preceding the murder.

For reasons satisfactory he did not tell anything about the talking gold, and when Emily alluded to the rumor that was going the rounds, he led her to believe that it was a mere idle story.

"Was my father really counting over gold and bonds?" asked Emily.

"He was."

"Poor, dear papa; I would that he had been poor, and had only laid up a treasure in heaven; it would have been far better with him now."

"At the last, Miss de Coudres, he may have surrendered his earthly treasures for those above."

"Oh, sir! I have never spoken to a living soul about my real sorrow, but I will confide in you, and I speak truly when I say that had my father left millions of gold, I would willingly surrender it all to know that ere his death one brief moment was left to him to seek God's mercy and have it so."

"Miss de Coudres, I have every reason to believe that your father had a premonition of his approaching death, and that during the interval a complete change came over him."

"Oh! if I could only believe so, the loss of gold or bonds would never cause me one moment's distress."

"I once heard words that lead me to believe that such was the case, and the contents of a certain paper which I found clasped in the old man's hands after death assures me that my conclusions are absolutely correct."

"Already you have done more for me than the recovery of my lost wealth," said Emily, in a cheerful tone.

"Yes, Miss de Coudres, I can furnish you the most indubitable evidence that death did not overtake your father unprepared."

"You say you have a paper?"

"Yes."

"Will you let me see it?"

Robert Deane handed a written page to Emiry, who, with tears streaming down her face, read as follows:

"MY DEAR CHILD,—I have received a strange warning to-night, and the feeling has come over me that I shall never see your dear face again; it may be but a fancy of my brain, or it may truly be a presentiment of my approaching death. I have concluded, as a matter of precaution, to write a few words to you. If I am alive in the morning I can destroy this paper; if I am dead you will find some consolation in what I have here written. I am satisfied that my life has been a failure, and that throughout these long years I have been worshiping the wrong god, and within the last half hour I have felt a wondrous change come over my heart, and I begin to feel that at last a Christian mother's prayers have caused my eyes to be opened, and my heart at this late hour is turned unto the true God.

"If I live, my wealth shall be expended in such a manner as to in some measure atone for the past; if I die, my child, you, who are my sole heiress, must carry out the following behests, although you will retain but a fair competency—still enough to live far more respectably than your father ever did. There is one fact, dear daughter, I wish to state before naming the manner in which I wish my wealth disposed.

"I am richer, far richer, child, than any one hereabout dreams. I was rich when I first settled here, and I have constantly added to my wealth. Before closing this letter, darling, I will give you full directions as to where all my wealth is invested and *secreted*, and I will also name the person whom I wish to act as your guardian and adviser.

"Dear child, before writing the above-named instructions, I wish to state one fact—and it is true, as true as I have a soul—every dollar of my wealth has been fairly and honestly obtained. I have never wronged any man, nor have I ever demanded or received one cent usurious interest; every penny has been fairly and honestly accumulated, and my only crime has been its accumulation and hoarding, and—"

Here the manuscript ended. What was to follow will never be known in this world.

At the very moment the last word was penned, the robber must have stolen in upon the solitary old man, the death struggle must have followed, and strangely and wonderfully enough the presentiment announced in the opening paragraph must have been fatally fulfilled.

A dead silence followed for a few seconds after Emily had concluded the second reading of that precious paper.

It was not the idea that she was rich that gave her joy, but the satisfaction of knowing that the liming of gold that had incased her father's heart had been pierced by a sense of right at last, and even the desire for atonement for his miserly existence had entered his heart.

"This gives me all the comfort under the circumstances that I could expect to receive," said Emily.

"Yes," answered the detective, "but is there not another idea to be derived from that document?"

"It would appear that my father had learned how wrong had been his love for gold."

"Listen, Miss de Coudres, I am about to speak boldly and plainly; that is a remarkable document. In the first place, it authoritatively announces your father's great wealth; it indicates that if the robbers secured all he had beneath his roof, on that fatal night, they, after all, got but a tithe of all he must have had."

"I care not for the wealth."

"One moment: do you not recognize the legacy of a sacred duty in that paper? The man idea that runs through it is atonement, and a fear that he will not live to carry out his new resolve."

"He would have me spend his money in benevolence?"

"It was the one wish that lay in his heart when the robbers of his wealth struck him down; and it is your most sacred duty to recover the stolen wealth and discover the hidden wealth."

"How can I?"

"Delegate me to work in your behalf, and I promise to recover all that was stolen, and to find all that is hidden."

"If you will be so generous as to undertake such a seemingly fruitless enterprise you have my hearty consent, and if you succeed you shall be rewarded accordingly."

"We will not talk of rewards. I am already on the track of a most horrible and deadly conspiracy. I am on the track of one of the greatest villains of the nineteenth century, and all I ask is your full permission to act in your behalf."

A long conversation followed, in which Robert reached many facts that our readers shall learn during the course of our narrative.

When he left Emily it was with full permission to commence a search for hidden papers, somewhere around the miserable house where the old miser had dwelt.

That night the detective visited the old house, and the visit was fraught with startling results.

CHAPTER X.

ROBERT DEANE had been more and more charmed by the beautiful girl, and was resolved, at any risk, not only to run down the robbers, but to find the hidden wealth to which the old man had alluded.

Robert had told Emily that he had facts in his possession which led him to the conviction that she was a great heiress, but he had no such clew at the time as he was destined within a few hours to obtain.

He was aware that there were rumors around that strange lights had been seen about the old red house after midnight, and although the house had only been tenantless a few weeks, it was reported far and wide that it was haunted by the ghost of its former owner.

The detective prepared himself for his undertaking.

He had heard the stories of the lights having been seen, and made up his mind that some sort of game was being played.

A short distance from the village where the incidents occurred that we have recorded, was quite a large-sized town, that was noted as the abiding-place of a number of very bad and reckless men, and our hero did not for a moment take any stock in the ghost story or attribute the strange lights to any supernatural agency.

It chanced that when he started for the old house a few moments after midnight that it was just as dark and stormy as on the evening he had met Emily, while playing such a strange rôle in the church-yard.

He had given out that he had returned to the city, having left the village on an early train in the presence of a number of acquaintances.

He had left the cars, however, and after dark had stealthily returned to carry out his design.

Upon approaching the house he saw a gleam of light flashing through the partly closed window shutters.

Robert stole up stealthily and peeped in.

A startling sight met his gaze.

It was not ghosts that he beheld, but two men, with shovel and pick in their hands, digging away where they had removed the kitchen floor.

A dimly burning lamp stood upon a stool, and beside it lay a couple of axes.

The men were masked.

The detective had to be very careful.

Men engaged in such business are not very scrupulous when interrupted, and the masks showed they were afraid of recognition.

At the time our hero first glanced in upon them they were hard at work, but after a few moments they stopped to rest, and at the same time engaged in a conversation in a low tone.

The detective strained his ears to discover if he could recognize their voices.

Both were strangers to him, and besides neither of them were the men whom he had met upon the road the night of the robbery.

His first suspicion was that he had come upon the assassins, but his well-trained ears could not be deceived, they were both strangers to him, and men whose voices he had never before heard.

"I tell you," said one, "the people around here are sure the old miser has come back in spirit form, and that accidental throwing of a light the other night was of great service to us."

"That's so; but after all I fear our search is not going to yield us anything."

The men spoke like fellows who were anything but ignorant ruffians.

They may have been villains, but it was evident that they were well-educated and well-bred ones.

"Don't you give it up yet: we have taken too long chances in this little affair to be discouraged until we are sure we are working a fruitless vein."

"Barnton is an awful villain!" exclaimed the other man, after a moment's silence, "and you may just bet he's got all of old De Coudres's wealth, and is bound to beat us out of it!"

"Oh, I know just how much of a villain old Barnton is, and what lengths he'll go; but we'll force him into a divide if we only lay low and play our cards right."

The detective made a mental note of the name "Barnton," and at the same time resolved in his mind what he should do under the circumstances.

The men had stopped talking, and had resumed their work.

The detective patiently laid low for them to commence talking again, and give themselves away.

The men, however, kept steadily at their work, when suddenly one of them exclaimed, as his spade struck something giving a hollow sound.

"Eureka! I have found it! the money is ours!"

Great beads of sweat stood out on Robert Deane's forehead upon hearing the above ejaculation.

As far as he alone was concerned he would have rushed in and assailed the men, and have taken the chances of driving them off.

But, alas! they were armed, meant fight, and were two against one, and should he fall in a combat Emily de Coudres would be the loser.

He was compelled to avoid all risks for her sake.

An idea struck him.

The two villains had played the ghost terror on the people round about; he would, with the aid of his wonderful faculty, give them a dose of their own medicine.

The two men were for a few seconds so overcome by their sudden discovery that both were seized by a fit of trembling, and were unable to proceed with their work, being, as it were, paralyzed with excitement.

After a bit, however, they recovered, and both bent eagerly over the spot where they had struck upon the box.

Bob Deane's turn had come.

The first blow with the spade upon the box caused an unearthly groan to issue, as it were, right from under their feet.

"What's that?" exclaimed both villains, as with ghastly faces they gazed furtively around.

All was still, and after a moment they recovered their courage, and one of them said, in a low, anxious tone:

"Our imaginations are playing Old Sam with us."

"But we both heard it, Andrew Sparkman."

"Aha!" thought the detective, "I've got the name of one of you."

The men commenced to dig again, and a second time a doleful groan issued as though from the box.

Both men, with cries of alarm, leaped from the excavation.

"What can it mean?" whispered the man called Sparkman, in a hollow voice.

"I'll be hanged if I can tell, unless we are frightened by our imaginations."

"Let's try it again!"

"You try it," suggested Sparkman.

"No; you try it," urged the other.

At length one of them jumped down into the excavation, and commenced digging at the box.

The groan did not commence, and the man's courage revived, and at length he exclaimed to his companion:

"It's all right, Sparkman. You're a coward."

Sparkman's avarice overcame, momentarily, his fears.

He did not wish his comrade to have any advantage, and he, too, jumped into the excavation, and struck one blow with his pick.

In an instant, with a yell, he leaped out much quicker than he had leaped in, as a voice came seemingly from the box exclaiming, in a sepulchral tone:

"You villains—begone!"

Sparkman's companion also leaped from the hole and felt over upon his face in a dead faint.

Sparkman could stand it no longer.

He thought his friend had been stricken by the awful hand of death, and without stopping to secure anything, he opened the door and dashed from the place.

CHAPTER XI.

THE other man speedily recovered from his fright-faint, and in a feeble voice called to his pal.

No answer came, and the villain rose to a sitting position and gazed wildly around.

The man had just strength enough to stagger to his feet, and, like his comrade, did not stand upon the order of his going, but fled from the spot where walked the spirit of the murdered man.

The detective had followed, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the two villains racing away with all their might, one wretch chasing the other.

The detective watched them until they were well out of sight, when, quietly chuckling to himself, he returned to the cabin.

His first move was to excavate the box.

Not fearing any interruption from a ghost, and not caring if he had, he soon managed to raise the treasure-box out upon the floor.

It was not heavy, and was simply a wooden box, bound in tin, and about eighteen inches in length and twelve wide.

He thought he had accomplished enough for one night, and placing the box where it would be handy, he secured the weapons left by the two would-be robbers, and extinguishing the light, left the house.

It was dawn when our hero reached the adjoining town to where he had encountered the adventures of the night.

He had wrapped the precious box so as to conceal what it was, and secured a room at the town hotel.

The detective was a very deliberate man and did nothing in a hurry, unless extraordinary dispatch was absolutely required.

He was worn and tired; and, locking his door and securing his box, he threw himself upon the bed and took a good sound nap.

When he awoke he proceeded to open the box.

He was provided with proper tools, and soon had the satisfaction of prying the lid open.

No money, but a large number of papers, met his eye.

Taking all proper precaution to see that no one could peep in upon him, he proceeded to examine them.

He found papers which convinced him that the old miser was a wonderfully rich man.

There were long lists of the numbers of what the detective took to be United States bonds.

There were memoranda of pieces of property and description of deeds, but no sign of a will.

The detective felt that he had made great progress, yet, after all, he was in the dark.

The key to the mystery was still lacking.

He had turned the papers over and over, and examined each one carefully.

At length, from one of the packages, a bit of paper slipped out and fluttered to the floor.

The detective picked it up, and a cry of satisfaction fell from his lips.

He had found a key at last, a clew that might lead to the recovery of every dollar of the vast wealth represented by those papers.

The valuable paper was a letter only partly finished and addressed in a familiar way to a man named Barnton.

There was no direction as to indicate where the man lived, nor were the initials of the man's name anywhere given.

The contents of the letter, however, were important indeed, and showed that the man Barnton had the knowledge of the whereabouts of old De Coudres's wealth; and from certain little indications the detective was assured that the Barnton also held possession of the miser's will.

In connection with the discovery of this letter was the remarkable fact, that one of the men who had been digging in the cabin in search of that very box, had spoken of a man named Barnton, and in some way connected with them, and as an awful villain.

There were certain other little clews furnished by that piece of a letter, which will be duly recorded during the developments of our story.

One thing was certain, the old miser had left a will, and had disposed of vast wealth; and the only thing that remained was to find the will and the depository of the wealth.

Robert Deane walked over to Farmer Grant's house, and had an interview with Emily, telling her all that was necessary, for the time being, of his discovery.

The detective had decided upon his course of action, and arranged with Emily for her to come on to New York as soon as she could receive a certain cipher dispatch from him.

The next day our hero was in the city, and had commenced his search for the man named Barnton.

He felt assured that the man must be a lawyer, and most probably the business agent of the old miser.

The detective was also forced to the conclusion that the lawyer was a villain.

Two days the detective spent in a most thorough search, but could not find the least clew that would lead him to the office of a man named Barnton.

He had recourse to a "Herald" personal, and inserted one, reading as follows:

"If this meets the eye of a Mr. Barnton, he can learn a few valuable points in a certain matter by addressing R. D., Box——"

The afternoon following the appearance of the paper containing his advertisement, the detective called for an answer.

It was with a thrill of delight that he received a missive addressed to "R. D."

It proved a very brief note, asking "R. D." to send his address to the "Herald" office.

The detective at once mailed an answer, and the next morning, disguised as a poor miserable tramp, he hung around the "Herald" office.

He had been there about an hour, when a man, with a shrewd cunning face, but otherwise very respectable appearance, called at the "Herald" post-office, and inquired for a letter addressed to Barnton.

At the moment he inquired for the letter, the tramp was standing right beside him.

Robert Deane did not recognize the man's face, but he did his voice.

It was the voice of the ruffian he had heard on the road the night the murder had been committed.

The man did not stop to read his letter, but walked rapidly away.

The seeming tramp was at his heels.

The man walked up Broadway for a short distance, then struck through a side street, and finally entered a strange, old-fashioned building, over the entrance to which was a sign showing that a *table d'hôte* was prepared there every day at noon.

The basement of this building was occupied as a lager-beer saloon, and it was down into the latter place that the man who had received the letter from the "Herald" office went.

Robert Deane passed on, and quickly made quite a transformation in his appearance, and then returned, and entered the same lager-beer saloon.

He saw his man the moment he entered the door.

The fellow was talking with two other men whose countenances were as villainous-looking as his own.

The detective took a seat at a table near them, called for some refreshment, and, taking up a paper, pretended to be reading.

The man held the note in his hand that he had got from the "Herald" office.

The three men were discussing in a low tone, but the keen-eared detective managed to catch a portion of their conversation.

"I tell you," said one of the men, "it's a job put up by a detective, and you had better have nothing to do with it."

"That's my opinion," remarked another of the men.

The man who held the note was thoughtful a moment, but at length said:

"Suppose it is a cop, may be we may be able to make a compromise with him. Hang it! the swag's no good to us."

"Mind you, Thompson, if this had been only a little 'cracking match,' it would be all right; but, you see, in such a lay-out the swag's nothing compared to nipping the 'stiffers.'"

"I've taken all that in; but suppose it is Barnton who is really advertising for himself, as a blind?"

"What point would he have?"

"Oh! you can't tell; but I tell you, if we can find the man, it's easy sailing."

A great revelation was opened to Robert Deane by overhearing this conversation.

He reasoned out the situation without any trouble.

These robbers had obtained, as a reward for their fearful crime, a lot of bonds which they dared not attempt to negotiate; they had also learned, through some stray papers, something about the mysterious man Barnton.

In fact, they were evidently, in one sense, on the same lay as himself.

An idea struck him.

He would play the rôle of Barnton.

It was a dangerous game to enter upon, but Bob Deane was not the man to be deterred [illegible].

The next morning an advertisement appeared addressed to "R. D."

The advertisement was worded as follows:

"'R. D.'—It won't work. You must sign under your real initial, or in some way show your 'color.'"

The detective sent in his answer, and signed it *Barnton*, and gave notice that a letter might be found at the post-office.

Four days passed, and he received no answer to his last card.

This did not disturb the detective, as he knew the rascals were playing off to avoid being nipped in going for the letter, but he felt sure that in good time his answer would come.

As events proved, he had made a pretty shrewd guess. At the same time, the little game took a most singular turn in another direction.

In watching the "Herald" personals, he found a card addressed to "R. D.," and something in the wording of it led the detective to conceive that the last card emanated from the real Barnton.

Matters were getting sort of complicated.

Our hero's game became a difficult one to play.

The same day that the last card appeared in the "Herald," he also received, through the channel he had arranged, a letter from Thompson, going to prove his surmise correct concerning the last "Herald" personal.

Thompson had taken the bait set out for him.

An invitation was extended to Mr. Barnton to meet a friend at a certain corner in New York, in broad daylight, and the same Mr. Barnton was to give certain signals to indicate his identity.

At the time named the detective was on hand at the appointed place, and some clean game play followed.

CHAPTER XII.

THE detective had adopted the disguise of a feeble old man.

The locality selected for the interview was in the suburbs, near a place where the Hudson River Railroad track skirts the river.

Robert Deane reached the trysting-place and looked around for the man he was expecting to meet, but saw no one.

He twice gave the signal, but there came no response.

An hour passed.

The detective had about made up his mind that he had been sold, and started to move away, when a boat came in from the river, and a man in half-sailor costume stepped ashore.

The latter staggered up the bank and stepped in front of the detective.

He appeared to be under the influence of liquor, and incapable of recognizing his most intimate friend.

The detective glanced at the man, and not recognizing any resemblance to the fellow Thompson, was stepping aside to let the sailor pass, when the latter exclaimed:

"Hold on, cap; I want to ask you a question."

The man had transformed himself successfully, as far as appearance went, but his voice—no voice could disguise his tone from Bob Deane, the ventriloquist.

"Well, what do you want to know?"

"What street is that up there?"

"I am a stranger around here, and I can not tell you."

"Strikes me I've seen you afore."

"Well, who am I?"

"Your name is Barnton."

"No, sir."

"What in thunder were you making some funny signals for then a few moments ago?"

"Ahu! your name is Settle!" exclaimed the detective.

The sailor leaped back, all signs of drunkenness had disappeared, a cunning light gleamed in his eyes, and his whole countenance was expressive of a man suddenly on the alert.

"You came to see a man named Settle?"

"Yes."

"Well, the man named Settle was to meet a man named Barnton."

"I know it."

"And you are not Barnton?"

"I am not."

"What are you doing here?"

"I came to represent Mr. Barnton."

"You know the business in hand?"

"I know as much about it as Mr. Barnton does."

"Well, what do you propose?"

"For what?"

"Certain missing papers."

"I have lost no papers."

"But a friend of yours did?"

"What friend?"

"A man named De Coudres."

"The old man who was murdered?" said the detective, in a severe tone.

"Yes, the old man who was murdered," answered the sailor, in a defiant tone.

"I believe he lost some papers."

"And you are to act for Mr. Barnton?"

"I am."

"You want to recover those papers?"

"Well, I wouldn't refuse to receive them, but I am not overanxious to recover them."

"Well, if you are not anxious to recover those papers, cap, I don't know as we have any further business together."

"Very well," retorted the detective, and he made a movement as though to go away.

"Hold on! Do you know that those papers are bonds?"

"You can't negotiate them, if they are."

"I have not got them, cap. I am like you; I am only a representative."

"Well, whoever has got them can not use them."

"They're worth a little money, though."

"How much?"

"You can get those bonds for ten per cent. of their value."

"How much money will that call for?"

"Well, fifteen thousand dollars will bring them."

"There are more than one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in value."

"Not a cent."

"Where are the rest of them?"

"That is the amount in possession of the parties I represent."

"Those bonds were stolen?"

"Of course they were!" answered the sailor, coolly.

"And you dare admit possession of them?"

"See here, cap, you may be a 'cop' or a detective, but it don't make any odds. We are here to talk business; threats ain't in the schedule."

"You ask too much money for what is of no value to you."

" That's the money will fetch 'em; nothing less."

" I'll give you one thousand!"

" You can go!"

" What is the lowest amount you will take?"

" Fifteen thousand in greenbacks!"

" What guarantee have I that the bonds will be delivered if the money demanded is paid?"

" If you're up to the deal, you know well enough everything will be square on our side. If you play no tricks, everything will go smooth enough."

" When will the bonds be ready for delivery?"

" Any time; to-night, if it suits."

" Will I have a chance to examine the bonds?"

" If you abide by all the conditions, you will."

" What are the conditions?"

" You must come alone."

" All right!"

" I'll have the boat here."

" All right!"

" You and I will meet out in the river—you in one boat, I in another."

" You might murder me!"

" That ain't my game."

" I have no proof that it is not your game."

" We can guard against any chance of foul play on either side."

" How?"

" We will meet here alone."

" Well?"

" I'll give you an advantage. You shall search me for weapons, after we have both stripped to our pants."

" Well?"

" We will pull out into the river in the same boat, neither of us with anything on but our pants."

" You may come with confederates."

" No; it's only my game to guard against a trap. All I want is the money, and you can have the papers. There are other papers besides the bonds."

" What is the nature of the other papers?"

" You will find them valuable; they are no good to me, and I will chuck them in with the bonds."

" At what time am I to meet you?"

" At midnight."

CHAPTER XIII.

Robert Deane had had a difficult rôle to play.

He did not know for sure what papers the ruffian had, and he had been compelled to feel his way.

Bob, though undersized in comparison with the ruffian, was, nevertheless, an extraordinarily strong man, an expert wrestlor and boxer, and with muscles like whip-cords.

He had no fifteen thousand dollars to pay for the bonds, and had made up his mind to recover them by main force or stratagem.

Under any circumstances the detective was bound to take all risks and see the perilous adventure through.

" At midnight?" he said, repeating the words of Settle, as recorded at the close of our previous chapter.

" Yes, at midnight."

" I will be on hand."

" You will have the money with you?"

" I will have it where it can be got at."

" I see we understand each other."

" We appear to."

" Then there ought to be no trouble about settling our business."

" You will find me ready for a settlement," said the detective.

" Remember," added the ruffian, " I am as smart as you are, and only a square deal will pay. Any attempt at a double deal will ' smash the racket.' "

" I will meet you on your own terms."

" Then at midnight we are to be here, both alone."

" I will be alone."

" And so will I," said Settle, and the two men separated.

Robert Deane returned to his lodging, and set about making preparations for the night's encounter; for an encounter, and a desperate one, he knew it would be before he got through with the coming night's business.

He spent two long hours writing, making a complete diary of all his proceedings and successes up to the hour he had parted with the man Settle.

He also prepared a letter for Emily de Coudres, and made arrangements to have both communications delivered in case he should fail in the encounter with the robber with whom he was to deal that night.

One of the packages was to go to a well known detective, to whom Robert Deane intended to will, as it were, the completion of the job to recover old De Coudres's fortune.

The letter was to go to Emily de Coudres, and was very minute in its instructions as to what she was to do under certain circumstances.

Having arranged so much of his business, our hero visited a friend whom he knew had a certain amount of " queer " money which was to be used as a " blind " in his negotiation with the murderer.

At the hour of midnight the brave young detective was on hand at the meeting place.

He was well armed and prepared for a treacherous surprise.

He was kept waiting fully an hour as before, and saw no sign of Settle until he had almost despaired of seeing him at all, when he heard the plash of oars, and a few moments later saw a boat being rowed in toward the shore.

The rower ran his boat on the beach and approached.

There was no attempt at playing off.

" You are on hand?" said the man.

" I am on hand," answered the detective.

" You have brought the money?"

" I can put my hand on it. Have you brought the papers?"

" I can put my hand on them."

" All right; strip!"

Both men moved toward a rock, and commenced laying aside their weapons.

It was a moonlight night, and as warm as midsummer.

After both men had stripped, they approached each other, and Settle said:

" Search me."

The detective did so, and found no weapons.

They walked toward the boat.

Both men held packages in their hands, supposed to be the bonds and money that were to be exchanged.

" Search the boat," said Settle, " and see that all is on the square."

The detective stepped into the boat, and made a thorough examination.

Everything was all square in the boat, and the detective said:

" All right here."

At this moment Settle remarked:

" You strip pretty healthy for an old man."

" You have become transformed from a sailor into a landsman pretty soon also."

" We're even, I guess."

" I reckon so."

The men slowly rowed out into the stream.

Half a mile from shore they rested on their oars, and Settle said:

" Now we can get through our business; let's see your money."

" If a man has an article to sell, he generally shows it up."

Settle fixed his keen gray eyes upon the detective, and said:

" Remember one thing, stranger, if you attempt any little game, you invite trouble."

" I am here to buy something; you must show what I am to buy."

" I will take the chance. I am here on business, and able to shake up if a double deal is tried."

" Bear one thing in mind, my man," remarked the detective; " I have no proof but that this is all a put up job on me. I have come into all your conditions up to this point, and we can go no further unless you show up."

" Well, I guess, as you and I have the river to ourselves, there ain't much risk," and as Settle spoke he commenced untying the string that bound his package.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was a critical moment.

The detective knew that the instant was approaching when he would be compelled to drop his mask; when it would end in a struggle for life.

Settle untied his package, and held to view a packet of bonds.

The detective reached forward to take hold of them, but the man drew them back, saying:

"Let me see your money."

The detective displayed his roll of bogus bills.

"All right. We will exchange."

"Not until I examine those bonds."

"You want me to trust you, and you will not trust me."

"You can do as you please."

"Well, it's man to man. Here, look at them!"

For the first time, just a slight tremor passed over the detective's frame.

He took the bonds and carefully examined them.

He was sufficiently posted to know that they were genuine.

They were registered bonds, and the name of De Coudres was embodied in them.

The papers were genuine.

Settle patiently waited for awhile, but at length said:

"Are they all right?"

"They are all right."

"Then hand over the cash, and they are yours."

"Hold on, my friend; were these bonds ever *yours?*"

"What do you mean?"

"These are stolen bonds!"

"Well, what did you expect they were?"

"Stolen!"

"Hand over the money or the bonds!"

"Hold on; go slow, my man."

Settle's face assumed a fearful expression as a suspicion flashed across his mind.

"See here, my friend," he said, "you may be joking; if so, come down to business. If you are in earnest, say your prayers!"

"I am not in a praying mood."

"I give you one second to pass over those papers."

"I can't do it."

"You can't do it?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I represent their rightful owner."

"And you are going back on the deal?"

"Yes."

"You don't intend handing over the money?"

"The money is bogus."

The detective was so cool and bold, that for a moment Settle was paralyzed with astonishment.

Suddenly, however, he leaped to his feet, and made a spring at the detective.

The latter was prepared for the onslaught, and in a second the two men were grappled at arm's-length.

The boat began to rock, the men swayed from side to side, and both slid over into the water.

Down beneath the flood they went, locked in a tight embrace.

To the surface they came, and the water foamed about them, and yet neither let go nor relaxed his hold.

At this moment a most singular, and for one of the combatants, a fortunate accident occurred.

A steamer passed near them, and sent great cutting lateral waves foaming over the previously calm water.

The waves caught the boat, and as the two men came to the surface for the third time it was lifted toward them.

The boat, with tremendous force, struck against Settle's head.

His hold upon the detective relaxed, the latter broke loose and struck out for the boat, while the robber of old De Coudres sunk beneath the waves.

The detective reached the boat, and, although in a terribly exhausted condition, managed to crawl in.

His great anxiety was the package of bonds.

He saw them lying in the bottom of the boat safe and sound.

When he reached the shore he put on his clothing.

Knowing what might occur he had provided himself with extra clothing, and was soon clad all nice and dry.

He went very deliberately about his work.

The boat he pushed out into the stream, and let it drift away on the tide.

Within the next twenty-four hours the detective was the hero of a still more startling adventure.

CHAPTER XV.

ROBERT DEANE had received another communication in answer to his strange advertisement in the "Herald," and from what had transpired he was satisfied that the other communication was from an entirely different party.

He remembered that one of the men whom he had frightened off from digging in the old miser's house was Andrew Sparkman, and he had reason to believe that this same Sparkman was in some way connected with some scheme of villainy to rob a poor orphan of her rights.

Bob had made a thorough examination of the papers he had recovered, but had found no will.

There was a paper containing a minute description of certain property, and indications going to prove that, in reality, the old miser, at the time of his death, was worth over a million.

The next few days the detective spent in a sort of cipher correspondence with the man who had signed himself Barnton, and at length brought matters down to a point where a meeting was arranged.

The day had arrived when the appointment with old Barnton was to be kept.

The detective got himself up as a feeble old man, and proceeded toward the point where the interview was to take place.

The disguised officer arrived in front of a dilapidated looking old house that stood environed by factories and great warehouses, in a portion of the great city, where it was not much of a thoroughfare.

He walked up and down past the house several times, and took a quiet survey of all surroundings.

At length he tottered up the steps, and feebly sounded the old-fashioned brass-knocker—there was no bell—evidently a relic of former days.

The detective was compelled to rap two or three times before there came any response to his summons.

At length the door was partly opened, and a hideous gray-haired old negro woman protruded a black, distorted face partly through the opening.

"Does Mr. Barnton live here?" asked the detective.

"Dis am his house, sah."

"Is he at home?"

"What may yer business be, sah?"

"If you will let me know whether Mr. Barnton is at home or not, I can tell you better whether I will name my business."

"Better go way, sah. I am shuah dat Mr. Barnton done got no business wid yer."

"All right, you can tell your master that Mr. D. called, as per appointment, and can not make it convenient to call again."

At that a sweet voice called from within the hall:

"What is it, Betsey?"

"Dar am a man here dat wants ter see de ole man."

"Show the gentleman into the parlor, Betsey."

The old negress opened the door, and said, in a surly manner:

"Come in, sah; come in! Dar ain't no use gwine again Missy Em'ly in dis yere house."

The detective, still walking feebly, like an old tottering man, passed through the open door-way, and was shown into a parlor furnished in a most singular manner.

Old pictures, covered with dust and dirt, hung upon the walls; antique furniture, such as may have been new in the time of old Petrus Stuyvesant, was piled pell-mell about the rooms.

The detective managed to find an old-fashioned ottoman, on which he seated himself, and waited to learn what singular development would follow his strange adventure.

Fully fifteen minutes passed, when a most startling incident occurred.

A young lady, dressed in a white muslin dress, glided into the room.

The detective leaped to his feet in amazement, for the instant forgetting his assumed character, while he involuntarily exclaimed:

"Heavens! Emily de Coudres! I did not expect to meet you here."

The young lady laughed in a pretty, flippant manner, totally unlike the usual subdued deportment of Emily as he had seen her.

A chill shot to the detective's heart, but in a moment it passed away.

His keen eyes had scanned the girl before him.

He discovered that a wonderful likeness had deceived him, and he was about to beg pardon for his rudeness, when a remark fell from the young lady's lips that checked him, and left him lost in greater amazement than before.

"I am certainly Emily de Coudres," she said; "but I have no recollection of ever having met you before."

Robert Deane was once again on the point of committing himself, but suddenly a faint realization of certain possibilities flashed through his mind.

"You are the daughter of the late Mr. de Coudres, of L——?"

"I am his daughter, certainly," answered the girl in a peculiarly positive manner.

"And you do not know me?"

"I do not remember having seen you before."

"Where were you when your father met his death?"

A frown settled upon the young lady's handsome face, and a deep flush reddened each cheek as she answered, sharply:

"What business have you to question me? Who are you? What interest have you in the affairs of my father?"

The detective was a ready-witted man.

His keen perceptions had unraveled a most singular skein of singular possibilities.

He knew that there was a deep mystery somewhere behind this remarkable adventure, and he judged that a cunning game of fraud had already been inaugurated.

A game which, if successfully carried out, would balk him at every turn.

The young lady who claimed to be Emily de Coudres, and who had learned to play her part in such an amazing short time, had proclaimed herself a person whom she was not. The detective, in a brief moment, had determined to play fire against fire.

In reply to the girl's question, he said:

"And you are really Emily de Coudres?"

"Have I not answered that question once? And now, who are you?"

"If you are Emily de Coudres, you ought to know who I am."

"I never saw you."

"Indeed! Then some other time we will go into the matter; at present my business is with Mr. Barnton."

"My guardian!"

"Mr. Barnton is your guardian, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I suppose he must be in possession of your father's will?"

The young lady's face suddenly paled, and a look of terror widened her eyes.

"It is certainly remarkable that you, a perfect stranger, should take so much interest in my affairs, and show so much curiosity concerning me!" exclaimed the girl, in a sharp, nervous tone.

"I do not know as I have shown any particular interest in you or your affairs."

"Who are you?"

"My business is with Mr. Barnton."

"You can not see Mr. Barnton until you have answered my questions."

"Indeed. By what right do you assume so much?"

"I will tell you. I am the daughter and heiress of Mr. de Coudres, and I am aware that there are certain parties who are trying to wrong me out of my just rights. You appear to know something of these measures against me, and I have a right to demand certain answers to certain questions."

"I do not know as I am acquainted with any scheme against the rights of Emily de Coudres?"

"Well, who are you?"

"You ought to know who I am."

"I tell you I never saw you before!"

"Well, I never saw you before!" retorted the detective.

"You will be compelled to tell who you are!" exclaimed the young lady, her handsome face suddenly becoming contorted with a fierce rage.

At this moment the strange dialogue was interrupted by the entrance of a very singular-looking personage.

CHAPTER XVI.

WE can not at this moment reveal to our reader all the suspicions that had found lodgment in our hero's breast.

The facts will become perfectly plain to our readers as we proceed with our narrative.

The person who had entered the room, as described at the close of our previous chapter, was a man past middle age, of a tall and robust form, and possessed of a remarkable face.

Whom have we here?" he asked of the young lady who had proclaimed herself Emily de Coudres.

"I do not know," answered the girl. "He appears to be an old man who has lost his senses. I should not be surprised to hear him announce himself my father."

"Who are you, old man, and what is your business in this house?"

"I came to see a gentleman named Barnton."

"That is my name."

"I am the party with whom you have been exchanging a correspondence through an advertisement originally in the New York 'Herald.'"

"Ah, yes; I remember a certain mysterious party appeared anxious to visit me; and so you are the individual?"

"I am the individual."

"Well, I have granted you an interview. What is your business?"

"I believe you were the business agent of Mr. de Coudres, of L——?"

"I was his business agent."

"His will was deposited with you?"

"His will is in my possession, and it has already been submitted to probate."

"In whose interest?"

"The interest of the sole legatee."

"And who is the sole legatee?"

"First, tell me what right you have to ask these questions?"

"I am asking them in the interest of the sole legatee."

"Then, if you know who the legatee is, why do you put the question to me?"

"Simply because we may differ as to who is the sole legatee, or, rather, as to the *identity* of the sole legatee."

The man who had announced himself as Mr. Barnton did not betray any excitement, but was cool and pleasant, and seemingly undisturbed as a man who was doing perfectly right and just.

"I am afraid, my old friend, that you have been imposed upon in some way, and I certainly can hold no further converse with you, unless you tell me just who you are, and by what right you have assumed to make any inquiries in this matter at all."

"Did you ever hear that Mr. de Courdes had a brother?"

The man Barnton showed instant signs of inward agitation; but he was a man evidently possessed of wonderful self-control, as it required the keen eyes of the detective to detect that he was moved at all.

The young lady who had proclaimed herself Emily de Courdes was not so successful in concealing her agitation.

It was evident that the implication conveyed in the detective's words was a sudden and unexpected blow.

Mr. Barnton, in an outwardly calm tone, said:

"I know that Mr. de Courdes did not have a brother."

"How do you know?"

"I have all his private papers."

"And you are sure he had no brother?"

"I am sure."

"You possess all his private papers?"

"I do."

"And no one else is supposed to know anything of the deceased Mr. de Coudres's affairs?"

"Mr. de Coudres was a very reticent man, and I have reason to know that no one else had any knowledge of his affairs. He confided in me alone."

"Were you a relative?"

A cunning smile swept over Barnton's face as he answered:

"If Mr. de Coudres had a brother, that brother ought to know whether I was a relative or not."

For an instant the detective was knocked over, but speedily his ready wit came to his assistance, and led him to blurt out a staggerer in return.

"Suppose that brother had always lived in France, and had no knowledge of what relatives may have been gained by a marriage?"

"Well, that knowledge would be his, not mine."

"It strikes that brother," said the disguised detective, "that he has a faint recollection of news to the effect that Felix de Coudres married one sister, while a man named Barnton married the other!"

Robert Deane had landed a shot clean between wind and water.

Barnton betrayed a strange but sharp inward uneasiness, as in a sharp, quick manner, he said:

"Then you would impose yourself on me as a brother of the late Mr. de Coudres?"

"I have not said that I was his brother."

"I am the executor of the late Mr. de Coudres's will, and I have expected all along that there would be some French rascals coming forward to claim a share of his estate."

"I have not proclaimed myself his brother! I do not claim any interest in his estate!"

"Well, I must say that I should have thought that even an impostor would have had a little better French accent than you appear to possess."

"You may run away with a great many strange ideas, Mr. Barnton, if you choose; suppose I should proclaim myself as an agent for a brother?"

"I should proclaim you an impostor all the same, and if annoyed by you I should speedily hand you over to the police."

"You would really hand an impostor over to the police?"

"I would."

"I can point out an impostor to you."

"Do so, and he shall be handed over to the police."

"Suppose it was a female impostor?"

"It would make no difference," coolly answered Barnton, who may have had an inkling of what was coming.

"Well, just hand that young lady at your side over to the police; she is an impostor."

"What do you mean, you old villain?"

"I mean just what I say."

"Be careful, or I will hand you over to the police."

"You are at liberty to do so as soon as you choose, but, nevertheless, that young lady at your side is an impostor."

"In what way?"

"She claims to be Emily de Coudres, the daughter and sole heiress of old Felix de Coudres; but she is no such person, as I, my brother, and the daughter of Mr. Barnton.

The face of Mr. Barnton became almost livid with rage. He ordered the young lady to leave the room.

The latter was evidently frightened, as she unguardedly exclaimed:

"Oh, papa, do no violence!"

The disguised detective gave a derisive laugh, and said:

"That's it; do no violence, *papa!*"

Mr. Barnton appeared to be stricken dumb.

For a moment he stood with a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

He was a large and powerful man, and evidently not a coward, but possessed of a great deal of physical courage.

He turned to the young lady and said:

"Emily, leave the room!"

There was a fearful force in Mr. Barnton's voice that the young lady walked out of the room.

The detective knew that a scene was to follow, but he was a cool, brave young man, and prepared for any emergency.

After the girl had left the room, Barnton fixed his keen eyes upon the detective, and, in a strange tone, asked:

"Now, sir, what is your game?"

CHAPTER XVII.

ROBERT DEANE did not flinch, but met Barnton, look for look.

"What is your game?" repeated Barnton

"I am here to defeat a game," said the detective, boldly.

"You have come into this house in disguise."

"Well, possibly I have."

"Why did you do so?"

"I concluded that I would have a bad man to deal with, and I wanted to take my bearings before throwing off my mask."

"Do you know that the chances are that you will never leave this house alive?"

"Well, I can't help that. I am not going to leave it until I get ready!"

A desperate struggle might have followed, but the girl came rushing into the room, and threw herself into Barnton's arms.

"Never mind, my dear niece," said Barnton, coolly. "Do not be alarmed."

"Oh, uncle, I feared you would lose your temper!"

"The rascal provoked me sadly."

"Ah! let him leave the house."

"Thank you, miss, but I am not ready to leave the house just yet."

"You will remain at your peril!"

"Not much peril since I know that man's game."

"If it were not for the presence of this young lady, I would give you an opportunity, you meddling villain, to make your words good."

"You had better sit down, and talk this matter over calmly with me."

Barnton fairly writhed with rage.

The man had played so deep a game and held the cards, as he supposed, so well in hand, that the very idea of any one's stepping in to balk him set him beside himself.

He had not the least idea as to whom his visitor was, but he felt assured that cards were out against his hand that he had not dreamed of.

A few seconds, however, and his passion apparently subsided.

He was a cool, level-headed man, and began to realize that he was losing points by the way he had acted.

Violence was not his usual mode of procedure. As a rule he depended upon deep cunning and most excellent diplomacy.

"I was wrong to behave rudely, stranger, but you riled me. If you have any business with me, name it, and I will listen to you calmly."

"As the custodian of the will of Felix de Coudres, I have business with you."

"Name it."

"I came here to know why you have not consulted with the dead man's real heir."

"I fear you are laboring under some hallucinations, my friend."

"You will find that I am not."

"Whom do you claim is the rightful"

"Emily de Coudres."

"This is Emily de Coudres," and the man pointed to the handsome girl, who still clung to him.

"Emily de Coudres—the real Emily—is at L——."

"Indeed! The real Emily de Coudres is at L——, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, produce her and justice shall be done to her."

"I shall do so," answered the detective; and he proceeded to leave that strange scene.

He knew that he was in danger and he backed toward the door leading to the main, while he kept his eye upon Barnton.

But Barnton made the least movement toward an attack, he would have been defeated, as Robert Deane held himself in readiness for any emergency.

Our hero at length reached the street door and passed out in safety.

Once in the street he said to himself:

"I must proceed at once to L——. A deep and desperate game is on the tapis against Emily, and I must play my cards well or she will be robbed out of her rights."

The detective did not understand on what basis Barnton dared attempt his game, but, within twenty four hours from that time, the brave detective was destined to learn facts that caused his hair to stand on end with horror.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE detective feared that some attempt might be made on the life of the real Emily, and when he got well clear of Barnton's house, he resolved to go at once to L—— and take all proper precautions against harm to the lovely and innocent girl.

It was night when the detective arrived at the village where his boyhood had been passed.

For reasons of his own, he had gotten himself up in disguise, so as not to be recognized by any of his former acquaintances or relatives.

When he alighted at the railroad station, he discovered that something of an unusual character had occurred.

Excited groups were gathered at different places discussing some exciting event.

Bob joined one of the groups, and the first words that fell upon his ears were ominous enough.

"I don't believe there has been a murder."

"If you do not believe there has been a murder where is that girl?" asked another of the group.

"She may be dead, but I don't believe it was murder."

"What do you believe?"

"In my opinion, the trouble through which she has passed crazed her, and she committed suicide."

The detective had joined the crowd.

The disguise he had assumed was that of a hale, hearty old farmer.

Addressing one of the men, he asked:

"What young girl is missing?"

"Miss de Coudres, the beautiful daughter of the old Frenchman who was murdered a few months ago."

It was as the detective had feared the moment he heard it whispered that a crime had been committed.

So great was his agitation, however, although partially prepared for a confirmation of his suspicions, that for a moment his brain whirled so that he was literally blind.

All was darkness before him, and he could not summon sufficient resolution to inquire into the details of this fresh tragedy.

When sufficiently recovered he walked away.

He dared not remain and seek the information he desired from the parties he had first addressed, lest he should betray himself.

He proceeded to the village tavern, where a great many were assembled, and where the tragedy was being more fully discussed.

From what he overheard, he learned that Emily de Coudres had left Farmer Grant's house early in the afternoon on the previous day, and had not been seen alive since.

The farmer's family had not noticed her non-return until supper time, when Mr. Grant expressed considerable uneasiness.

The supper was concluded, darkness fell, and the girl came not, and the farmer went down through the village searching for her.

He could not see any one who had met her.

The night had passed, and still she had not returned, and it was then that Mr. Grant made the fact of her mysterious absence public.

A search was commenced, and not until late in the afternoon was any discovery made.

Some boys had been fishing in the Little river that skirted the borders of the town, and on returning home, had run their boat ashore in a little cove, where the shore was deeply wooded.

One of the boys was startled upon discovering blood-stains against a tree.

The boys all were gathered around examining the tree, when one of them espied a lady's bonnet lying near by.

The lads had not heard about the missing girl, and brought the bonnet to the village, where it was at once recognized as having belonged to the missing girl.

A searching party was at once organized, and beside the bonnet a parasol was found and identified.

The implements were at once secured, and the river was dragged, but no body was found, and had it not been for the blood-stains, the suicide theory would have gained general credence.

Bob Deane learned a great many little details of fact that are immaterial to the course of our narrative.

One fact he discovered, however, that wore a pretty serious complexion.

In some way his name had become associated with that of the missing girl, and some folks darkly hinted a possibility that Bob Deane might be able to tell something about it.

The detective made up his mind that in a few hours he would be able to tell something about it, but not just in the manner intended by the reflections of those who expressed themselves.

The detective determined to wait until the following morning, when he would proceed to the scene of the tragedy, and examine matters himself.

During that night our hero's thoughts were busy.

He had reason to believe that Emily de Coudres yet lived. He put no faith in either the murder or suicide theories. He had a theory of his own, as within a few hours he had discovered a person who might have a motive in abducting the missing girl.

He would have been filled with despair if it had not been for this theory.

The next morning, long before daylight, he was on his way to the scene of the supposed tragedy.

He knew the locality well, and had no difficulty in finding the place.

He commenced at dawn a most thorough and critical search.

Such a search as only a keen, experienced man is capable of making.

Not far from the tree, on which the blood was so plainly visible, he found unmistakable signs of a struggle.

His heart began to sink within him.

He feared that after all his theory had been blown to nothing, and that something serious had happened to the girl.

He tramped the whole ground over, and found unmistakable signs of a murder.

He found traces of a struggle that had not been discovered by the searching party from the village.

He was still searching, when he was startled by hearing a human voice.

Turning about he recognized Cricky, the half-witted fellow who had met him on the morning after the discovery of the old miser's death.

"You bird of ill-omen! what do you here?" muttered the detective, through his teeth.

Bob Deane did not like the fellow Cricky.

In fact he did not take as much stock in the fellow's lack of wit as some others did.

He had met a good many chaps who had a foolish way of acting, but who were really more cunning than they appeared.

"What are you looking for, old man?" asked Cricky.

"I am looking for a turkey I lost."

"A hen turkey?" said the half-witted, in a jeering tone.

"Who are you?" asked Bob.

"Oh, I am one who can tell you more about the one you are looking for than any one else."

"Well, what am I looking for?"

"You are looking for that pretty girl that is missing."

"Well, what do you know about the missing girl?"

"I know a good deal if I were a mind to speak."

"Tell me."

"Who are you?"

"A friend, I hope."

"We—a friend of mine—I am not going to tell you anything."

Bob came nearer to the youth's face and measured him, and stopped to a pitch to make the fellow open his budget of news if he had any.

"You don't know anything about this affair, you fool!"

"Do you think I am a fool?"

"I know you are!"

"And you think I ain't got anything to tell about this matter?"

"I know you haven't."

"I could tell a good deal if I chose."

"Why don't you?"

"I have a good reason."

"What is your reason?"

"Well, there is a man comes around here whose name is mixed in this affair."

"What man?" asked the detective.

"You," answered the fellow, with a cunning laugh.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE detective made a leap forward and caught hold of the fellow, and held him pretty hard.

"Let go of me, Bob Deane! I know you."

"If you tell, you scoundrel, what you know, I'll serve you as I did the girl."

"Oh, you didn't hurt the girl, but I know who did; but

people think it was you, and I am going to let 'em think so. I hope they'll hang you!"

The detective was puzzled what to do.

He knew that it would be rather awkward for him if it should be known that he had visited the place in disguise.

He did not fear being held for the crime, as it would be no trouble for him to prove an *alibi*: but he could not afford the waste of time, and, besides, the discovery would prevent him from carrying out some investigations he wanted to make after his own fashion.

Something must be done with Cricky.

Should he let him loose, the fellow would make heaps of trouble for him.

"How do you know I am Bob Deane?"

"Oh, you can't fool me. I wouldn't know you only for one thing, though."

The detective thought he had planned his disguise well, and was anxious to know how Cricky had penetrated it so easily.

"How did you come to know me?"

"I won't tell."

The detective closed his hands tightly around the lad's throat, when he gurgled:

"You can squeeze me to death, but I won't tell!"

"I will give you a dollar if you will tell me."

"A good dollar?"

"Yes."

The detective had loosened his hold upon the lad's throat.

"Well, if you will give me a dollar I will tell you."

The detective handed the lad a dollar, when he said:

"I knew you by your eyes. I would know any person by their eyes, dead or alive."

The detective had heard of persons who possessed this faculty, and, as he knew his disguise was perfect, he felt bound to accept the boy's statement.

Finding that a dollar had opened the lad's tongue so well on one matter, the detective thought he would try the efficiency of another one.

"Now, see here, Cricky, you told me one thing for a dollar, tell me all you know about this matter and I will give you five dollars."

"I wouldn't do it if you were to give me ten."

"I will give you ten."

"I wouldn't tell you a word if you were to give me fifty!"

"I'll give you a good whaling first!"

"I wouldn't tell if you did."

At that moment voices were heard approaching the spot. The detective had no time to lose.

He caught Cricky up in his strong arms, although the half-wit was a great hunk of a fellow.

Cricky commenced to squeal, when the detective jammed a gag in his mouth, and ran on out of sight.

Bob hardly knew what to do, but after a moment an idea struck him.

He set Cricky on his feet and compelled him to walk.

About a mile from where the scene related had occurred there was a shaft that had been sunk by some speculators in search of oil.

The detective knew that it was necessary to keep Cricky out of the way until he had concluded his investigation, and he determined to lower the rascal down the shaft, and leave him there until he felt it safe to let him out again.

Bob carried his prisoner to the shaft and succeeded in letting him down.

The shaft was in an out of the way place, and Cricky might halloo himself hoarse without any chance of being heard.

"Are you going to leave me here to starve?"

"No."

"Then let me out."

"Not now."

"When will you let me out?"

An idea entered the detective's mind—an excellent one—and he called down the shaft:

"Cricky."

"Sir."

"I will go and tell your mother where you are, and she can come and haul you out."

"I don't believe you. I am to starve to death here in this hole!"

"No; I will send your mother to come after you to-night. In the meantime, I will bring you something to eat."

Cricky was a stubborn fellow, and much smarter than people in general believed him to be.

He had no idea that Bob would really leave him there to starve; and, swearing vengeance, he made up his mind to abide his time until he was released.

In the meantime the detective returned and joined the party who had commenced once more to drag the river.

Our hero was almost heart-broken.

The idea had taken possession of his mind that there was a possibility that poor Emily had really been made away with.

He now remembered with what confidence Barnton had challenged him to produce the girl.

The detective was satisfied that if Emily had really been murdered, that Barnton was at least the instigator of the crime, if not the actual committer of it.

He was resolved that if the girl had been done away with, to devote his life to bringing the assassin to the gallows.

Bob, however, still indulged a lively hope that she had not been killed, in spite of the clews pointing toward a murder that he had found. The river near where the tragedy occurred was a sluggishly flowing stream, and experienced men said that there was not sufficient current to carry a body more than a few feet beyond the place where it had been thrown in, and all hands were forced to the conclusion, that if a murder had really been committed the body had not been thrown into the river anywhere near that point.

The mystery deepened and the excitement increased and it was determined to make a thorough search in every direction for the remains of the girl.

Bob began to grow uneasy.

He feared that some inquisitive chap might take it in his head to go and examine the old shaft where Cricky lay concealed.

The party returned to the village.

Bob's appearance as a stranger did not excite any comment, as the rumor of the mystery had drawn strangers from many adjoining towns.

On the way back to the village the crowd was met by an old woman who proved to be the mother of the half-wit Cricky.

The good woman was in search of her son.

The detective paid particular attention to the old woman, and listened to every tone of her voice.

He had often heard that Cricky's mother had a most wonderful influence over him; and when our hero had told Cricky that he would send his mother after him, it was with a view of availing himself of a mother's influence in a very peculiar manner.

The detective was busy all day searching for clews, and when night fell, he started for the shaft where he had left his prisoner.

He carried some provisions with him, and was prepared to obtain by cunning strategem what he had failed to obtain by intimidation or bribery.

It was a clear, starlight night, and early in the evening when the detective arrived at the mouth of the shaft.

Bob stole up cautiously, and a moment later a voice called down the shaft:

"Cricky! Cricky!"

"Is that you, mother?"

"Yes, my son."

"Why did you not come sooner?"

"I did not know you were here, my boy."

"Bob Deane put me in here."

"Yes; he told me so. And why did you not tell him what he wanted you to, my son?"

"I hate Bob Deane!"

"Why do you hate him?"

"Ah! I have good reason."

"What was it he wanted you to tell him?"

"About what I know about the man that I saw with that girl Emily de Coudres yesterday."

"Did you see a man with Emily de Coudres, my son?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE detective had played well his part.

He had simulated the voice of Cricky's mother so well that the lad did not for an instant suspect the little fraud that was being played upon him.

"Why do you refuse to tell him about the man?"

"'Cause I hate him, and people think that he committed the murder, and I want them to think so."

"Why, my son?"

"Because I hate that man, and I want to see him hung."

"What makes you think the girl was murdered?"

"I saw the man kill her."

The detective could not speak.

The power of ventriloquism was knocked all out of him upon hearing this startling announcement.

"Why don't you let me out?" called Cricky.

"I will in a moment; but tell me about the murder."

"I saw Miss Emily meet the man on the day she was killed."

"Where did she meet him?"

"At the Four-roads corner."

"Did she know him?"

"I guess not. The man handed her a letter, and after she had read the letter she seemed to know him."

"What kind of a looking man was it, my son, who met Miss Emily?"

The boy described the man's appearance, but the description did not in any manner answer for the lawyer Barnton.

"You said you saw the man kill her?"

"I did not see him kill her, but I saw them struggling."

"Where did the struggle take place?"

"By the river where the hat and parasol were found."

"How did they come to go from the Four-roads corner?"

"The man asked her to go."

"How do you know he asked her to go there?"

"I heard him."

"And you followed them?"

"Yes."

"And saw him strike her?"

"No; but I saw him clutch her in his arms, and she screamed."

"What happened then?"

"I got frightened, and ran away."

"And you saw no more?"

"No more."

"I'll help you out now, Cricky, my boy," said the detective, in his natural voice.

"Who's there?" asked Cricky, in a frightened tone.

"Only me."

"Who is 'only me'?"

"Bob Deane."

"Where is my mother?"

"Home, I suppose."

"But she was here a moment ago."

"Well, she ain't here now; but do you want me to help you out?"

"Of course I do. You put me in here."

The detective helped the boy to the surface, and then said:

"Now listen to me, Cricky: if you ever say one word of what has happened between you and me to-day, I will send old De Coudres's ghost after you."

"Ah! I ain't afraid of no ghost. People never come out of the grave."

"Well, old De Coudres's ghost is behind that tree now."

"You can't scare me."

"You ask him if he is there."

"You can't fool me."

"Just ask the question."

In a spirit of bravado, Cricky asked:

"Come, old ghost, are you there?"

"I am here, Cricky!"

Cricky was the only person in the town of *L*——, save his own daughter, who had ever been on terms of intimacy with the old miser.

The boy had, upon occasions, done chores for the strange old man, and knew the tones of his voice well.

When the answer came from behind the tree so natural and life-like, Cricky turned pale and commenced to tremble all over.

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed the detective, "didn't I tell you he was there?"

"I can't see him."

"Well, you heard him speak—you can never see ghosts before twelve o'clock at night."

Cricky! Cricky!" came a call, in the voice of the old miser, from behind the tree.

"Answer him, Cricky."

"I daren't."

"He will always haunt you if you don't answer him."

"What do you want?"

"Will you mind what I say?" came the voice.

"I will."

"Well, mark me, if you ever say one word about what has happened to-day, I'll haunt you every night of your life, and some night steal you when you are asleep and carry you away to my grave with me."

The boy was fearfully frightened, and answered:

"I will never say anything about it."

"Remember, remember!" said the ghost, in a warning tone.

Cricky trembled and gazed in wonder as the voice receded, repeating: "Remember, remember!"

"You can go now, Cricky," said the detective, smiling inwardly at the success of his cunning trick to close the boy's mouth.

"You will remember what the ghost said?"

"I will remember, you bet!" answered Cricky, and he ran away for dear life, ever and anon turning his head as though fearing that the ghost was in pursuit of him.

The detective had discovered all that he wished so far, and he resolved to change the scene of his operations to New York.

Despite Cricky's story, our hero believed that Emily was still alive.

He still considered it merely a case of abduction.

That same night he took the train for New York.

He was determined once more to rely upon his ventriloquistic talent for making a discovery.

Bob Deane was a very handsome man, and although possessing a strong and well-built frame, was not at all robust or stout.

It was an easy matter for him to get himself up as a female.

The day after his arrival in New York, a fashionably dressed lady ascended the stoop of Mr. Barnton's residence, and rang the bell.

It was a long time before there came any answer to his summons.

He was kept waiting even longer than he had been at the time of his first call.

The door was opened finally by the same old colored woman.

"Is Mr. Barnton at home?"

"Who wants to see Mr. Barnton?"

"Tell him a lady."

"Dar ain't no use telling him dat, kase he won't see no lady."

"I want to see him on very important business."

"Last night he told me not to let nobody in, so yer kin just go away."

"But I must see him."

"Can't no use, yer can't."

The lady suddenly stepped forward, and forced herself through the door.

"My lordy massy, missy, yer gwine ter force yerself inter people's house dat way?"

"I will wait here; go and tell Mr. Barnton that a lady from L—— wishes to see him, and if he sends word that he does not wish to see me I will go away."

"Well, yer am jist de brazenest pusson I ever did see, but as yer boun' ter come in, why yer kin jist wait where yer are; I ain't gwine ter go and take no messages, dat am sure."

"All right; I will wait."

"Well, jist shut de door and wait; and when yer are ready to go yer may ring de bell, and I will come and let yer out."

The detective was forced to smile under his veil, despite the seriousness of his business, at the persistence of the obstinate old colored woman.

A few moments passed, when the detective overheard voices.

"Who was at the door, Betsey?"

The voice was that of the same young girl whom the detective had seen at his former visit.

"A woman was at de door."

"What did she want?"

"Dunno."

"Was it a young woman?"

"Dunno."

"Did she leave any word?"

"No; didn't leave no word."

"Did she tell her business?"

"Dunno."

"Well, why didn't you ask her, Betsey?"

"Well, Miss Emily, if you want to know her business, yer kin jist go and ask her yerself."

"How can I ask her when she has gone?"

"No, she ain't gone; dar she stands in de hall, and she swore dat she stand dar till she seed somebody."

CHAPTER XXI.

An exclamation of astonishment fell from the young lady's lips as she came clattering down the stairs to see the strange woman who was determined to remain until she saw some one.

The girl came to the door where the detective was standing, and asked:

"Who do you wish to see?"

"Mr. Barnton."

"What is your business?"

"I can only tell my business to the gentleman named."

"Mr. Barnton is not receiving visitors nowadays."

"My business is very important."

"Who shall I tell him wishes to see him?"

"He will know me the moment we come face to face."

"Walk into the parlor."

The disguised detective had carried his point, and walked into the parlor.

The girl who had claimed to be Emily de Coudres left the room, and fully half an hour passed before a heavy step was heard descending the stairs.

"The villain has taken his time," muttered the detective under the veil.

Mr. Barnton entered the room.

"Do you wish to see me, madame?" he asked, in a sharp, impatient tone.

The supposed lady answered:

"I do."

Barnton gave a start, and a sudden pallor overspread his face.

"What is your business?"

"I have come to see you about my late father's affairs."

"Your late father's affairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who was your father, pray?" asked Barnton, trying to speak in a stern tone, but failing to do so, as his voice trembled very perceptibly.

"You certainly must know who my father was."

"I certainly do not know who your father was, madame; nor do I know who you are."

"*I am Emily de Coudres!*"

Barnton almost gave a yell, and immediately, with a fearful curse, he added:

"Has Jaynes gone back on me, and failed to fetch that girl?"

Barnton intended to speak in a very low tone, but, in his excitement, he spoke loud enough to be distinctly overheard.

The detective, however, pretended not to overhear him, when Barnton said:

"Will you raise your veil, madame?"

"There is no necessity for me to raise my veil."

"If you do not raise it, since what you have claimed, I will be compelled to raise it for you."

"Why do you wish me to raise my veil?"

"I want to see the face of the daring woman who has impudently claimed to be Miss Emily de Coudres!"

"I do not understand you."

"Raise your veil!"

"Sir, what do you mean by this implied outrage?"

"Raise your veil, or I will send for the police."

"You can send for the police; but this is not the treatment I expected to meet at the hands of my late dear father's executor."

"Why, you crazy woman! I know that you are no more the daughter of the late Mr. de Coudres than I am. His daughter has been residing with me ever since her father's death!"

"Do you claim that the young woman who showed me into this parlor is the daughter of Mr. de Coudres?"

"If you do not show me your face I will tear your veil off!"

"You had better not try it!"

"I will have you put in prison."

"You had better not try to have me put in prison!"

Barnton made a step forward.

The supposed woman had risen when he had entered the room, and during the conversation above recorded had stood facing him.

"Do not dare to approach me!" the supposed woman exclaimed, in a voice of simulated alarm.

Robert Deane during the whole interview had, through his wonderful ventriloquial talent, been imitating the voice of the real Emily de Coudres.

It appeared that Barnton had recognized the voice, and it was this startling recognition that had caused him to give utterance to the exclamation, coupled with the name of some person named Jaynes.

The detective had certainly advanced one step.

He had ascertained that Barnton had been instrumental in the sudden and mysterious disappearance of Emily de Coudres.

Whether the exclamation implied that this mysterious Jaynes was to have made away with the girl or merely abduct her, was still an unsettled question.

The cool, level-headed detective was determined before night to settle the strange question definitely.

When the disguised woman called to Barnton not to advance, the latter paid no heed, but leaped forward to seize the woman.

Instantly a most extraordinary scene ensued.

The supposed woman deftly caught hold of the man, and tripped him up, so that he fell headlong toward the floor.

The detective caught him, however, and let him go down easily and noiselessly, and in a trice the surprised and astonished Mr. Barnton was securely gagged and handcuffed.

The whole incident did not occupy two minutes.

The detective dragged the man to one side, tied him still more securely, and then started on a tour of investigation through the house.

Robert Deane felt assured that he could find Emily de Coudres concealed somewhere in that old residence, or at least find some clew that would direct him to her whereabouts.

He ascended to the second floor of the house, when, in the hall-way he met the young girl whom he had decided in his own mind was Barnton's daughter.

The girl, upon seeing the veiled woman, uttered a little scream of terror, and would have rushed by, but the disguised detective seized hold of her, and said:

"Do not scream. You are in no danger; your father sent me upstairs to get a paper lying upon the table in his room."

"Why did *my father* not come himself?"

The detective smiled.

He had "clewed" this simple girl down to an admission at the first attempt.

"He said you would get the paper for me."

"What paper does he want?"

"The letter he has just written to the man Jaynes," answered the detective, at a venture.

"I know nothing about any such letter—let me go down and ask *uncle* about it."

The girl had "tumbled" back to the part she was to play.

"Come in the room and I will show you the letter."

"No: let me go down and speak to uncle first."

The detective laid his hand on her arm, and said:

"You must come with me!"

The girl uttered a shrill scream.

Bob Deane would not take any risks.

He did not desire to use violence toward the poor girl, who was but the innocent instrument of her wicked father, but the emergency demanded that he should prevent her from screaming.

Quickly and dexterously he clapped a gag he had brought for the purpose between her lips, and forced it in her mouth.

He had come to that house prepared for every emergency.

He meant business, and was determined not to be deterred from his purpose by any obstacles.

The girl struggled, but he forced her through the open

door into one of the rooms, and closed the door behind him.

He had just succeeded when the door was forced open and Mr. Barnton burst into the room.

Fortunately the detective was glancing in the polished face of the mirror, and although his back was to the door, he saw the man Barnton come to prepare for a struggle.

One chance saved the detective's life.

Barnton meant mischief, and was prepared to stop.

The detective, quick as a flash, dragged the girl in his arms, swung her around, and used her as a shield.

His presence of mind saved his life.

The muzzle of Barnton's pistol was elevated, and the bullet buried itself in the ceiling.

Still holding the girl in his arms, the detective advanced until he was near enough to her father to let her go and seize him.

A sharp struggle followed.

The detective was by far the stronger and quicker man of the two, and succeeded in disarming his antagonist.

Barnton fairly foamed at the mouth as a second pair of handcuffs were clasped around his wrists.

"You the daughter of De Coudres!" he hissed.

"I am the representative of the daughter of the dead millionaire as against you and your daughter."

"A thousand curses on your head! You are playing a deep game, but you'll lose—you'll lose!" shrieked Barnton.

"It is you who would play a deep game, but you will lose; you can not palm off your child as the real heiress!"

"Who are you?"

"None of your business! It is enough for you to know that I am the man who will spoil your game!"

"We'll see—we'll see!"

The detective had swept aside the veil, and stood revealed as a man in disguise.

He bound the man once more.

A moment's thought led him to conclude how Barnton had freed himself, and he was determined that he should not be freed by the same agency again.

He started to go down-stairs, where he knew he should meet the negress.

The latter set out to scream, but her mouth was speedily stopped with a gag, and Rebecca Deane had the game all to himself.

He had all the people that he had knowledge of in the house securely bound and gagged, and he set about a deliberate search for new clews that he needed.

He passed into the front room of the house.

On every side he discovered evidences proving that the old mansion had once been richly furnished.

Over the mantel he saw the portrait of a lady.

The features struck him as familiar, when suddenly an idea crossed his mind.

He had previously observed that most of the articles in the house were of French manufacture, and there were numerous small ornaments scattered around that also betrayed their French origin.

In one corner of the room stood an old clock, and it was toward the clock that the detective made his way, as he hoped to find several important articles in it.

CHAPTER XXII.

ROBERT DEANE did nothing in a hurry.

He went about his work calmly and deliberately.

He might never have another chance, and he was resolved to avail himself fully of present opportunities.

The portrait he saw over the mantel, he concluded from the striking lines of resemblance, was a memento of Emily's mother, as, on the opposite side of the room, he saw another portrait hang against the wall.

The latter, he felt assured, was a portrait of old De Coudres himself, taken when he was a very young man.

"I'll be hanged if I don't believe this house once belonged to old De Coudres," said the detective to himself. And added: "It more probably belongs to the estate now."

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, he had been prying open the old desk, which was securely locked.

He at length succeeded, little dreaming of the glorious prize that awaited him.

The first thing that came into his possession was a package of letters addressed to Mr. Barnton.

The detective sat down to peruse a number of these letters.

One of them proved a clew of inestimable value.

It gave the date of Isabella's birth, and alluded to the birth of a little [illegible] as daughter of Mr. Barnton, who was [illegible] the daughter of De Coudres.

The letter also betrayed the fact that De Coudres and Barnton had married sisters, and were brothers-in-law.

Several other matters, of a family nature, were disclosed, and hints were made to the circumstances that had led old De Coudres to bury himself in the country.

Allusions, in another letter, were made to the draught of the will, wherein large amounts of property were located, and the details concerning them furnished.

The terms of the will were also sketched, proving that, beyond certain legacies, the old miser had made his daughter his sole legatee.

The detective felt assured that the will was not far off.

Under some circumstances it might have been destroyed, but the novel mode Barnton had hit upon to rob the orphan and gain the money for himself and child had necessitated the preservation of the will.

The detective was busily engaged searching for the will among the papers in the desk, when a most startling incident occurred.

He heard a step in the adjoining room.

As he had bound and gagged the only three occupants of the house, he was startled upon hearing the tread.

He listened attentively, and ascertained that the noise proceeded from the hall room adjoining the large one where he was carrying on his somewhat investigations.

The detective was for a moment to secure the coveted paper to find out who was in the other room, and continued his search.

A few moments passed, and he was disturbed by hearing a number of groans, followed by low cries of anguish.

Again he listened.

The sounds were in the tones of a woman's voice.

Suddenly a fearful suspicion flashed across his mind.

What if the beautiful Emily were a prisoner in that room?

What other female would have cause to moan and cry with anguish in that house?

The detective rose to his feet, crossed the room, and tried the knob of the door.

It was securely locked.

An examination revealed the startling fact that the door was made of iron.

A prison beyond question.

The detective tried to open the door, but found it securely fastened.

The sobs and cries had ceased.

The detective returned to the desk determined to make a more thorough search for the will.

He had just commenced, however, when the cries and moans of anguish recommenced.

He resolved to force an entrance into the room, and learn who it was thus sorrowing.

He went prepared with certain ingenious little tools for use in cases of emergency, and soon managed to force the door open.

A fearful scene met his gaze.

A female, emaciated, with hardly any clothes upon her, and with hair streaming unkempt down upon her shoulders, was attached by a chain to the floor.

The detective was horror-stricken.

For a moment he stood and gazed in dumb amazement.

The conviction came to him that the woman was some poor maniac, who had been confined there instead of being sent to an asylum.

The fact was now explained why no one was admitted into that house, and why the outer windows were always masked by old-fashioned, solid, iron-bound shutters.

The room was padded, and in the center was a very curious arrangement.

The detective dropped to the invention at a glance.

It was a sound conductor—or, in other words, a scream escape.

A funnel-shaped sheet-iron tube was adjusted in the ceiling, and graduated like a flue to the roof.

The room was padded, and every crevice stopped up.

Fully two whole minutes—a long time under the circumstances—the detective stood and gazed at the miserable-looking creature before him.

Her chain permitted her to walk to and fro across the room, but was so constructed and adjusted to her limbs that she could not avail herself of it as a means for self-destruction.

The woman approached the detective, and in a perfectly natural tone of voice and sane manner, asked:

"Who are you?"

The detective hardly knew what reply to make, as the question was a double surprise.

He had not anticipated hearing a straight, sane question from that horrid-looking object.

"Who are you, I ask?" repeated the woman.

At a venture, the detective answered:

"I am a visitor."

"A visitor to this house?"

"Yes, lady."

"You call me lady, and you are a visitor to this house?"

"Why should I not call you lady?" answered the detective, in a soothing tone.

"Why should you not call me lady? Well, you would not be here unless you were the friend of a fiend, and the fiend has taken the name of lady away from me—away from me forever."

The detective saw that the momentary naturalness had fled, and that the insanity of the poor creature's brain was about exhibiting itself.

The woman had spoken the last words in a mournful tone: she sobbed, but no tears fell from her eyes.

Alas! the tender-hearted detective did not know that the fountain of tears had long been dry, and the agony of that poor creature was the intenser, because she could only sob, with no tears to come to her relief.

Our hero knew that a safe way to get along with insane people was to humor their weird fancies, and he said, at random:

"The fiend you speak of has no influence over me."

"Then why are you in this house?"

"I came into this house because it was my fancy to do so."

"Then you must have come as a friend to the fiend?"

"I am not a friend to any one beneath this roof, but it might be that you would permit me to call myself your friend."

A strange look shot into the maniac's eyes as she fixed them intently upon the detective.

"You, my friend!" at length she said, in slow, measured tones.

"Yes, why should I not be your friend?"

"If you are my friend unclasp these chains, and lead me forth from this house."

The detective smiled.

He knew that it was an old and common hobby with lunatics to desire to be set free.

Little did he dream that at that moment he was talking with a person as sane as himself.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"You shall be freed in due time," said Bob Deane, in a soothing tone.

"In due time? Aha! you are a friend of the fiend! May be a tool and instrument! You tell me I shall be freed in due time; do you know how many years I have been here?"

"I do not."

"Then do not tell me I shall be liberated in due time!"

"How many years have you been here?"

"I have been chained in this room for seventeen years!"

The detective gave a start.

The fact seemed too fearful for belief, and again he fell back upon the consolation that insane people always get down their hallucinations to a semblance of possibility.

Hoping to soothe the poor creature by humoring her, he said:

"Really, you must be joking when you say you have been here seventeen years."

"Do I look like a creature who could afford to joke?"

"My heavens!" exclaimed the detective; "can it be possible that I am talking to a perfectly sane person?"

"What! Do you think me insane?"

"If you are not insane, why are you chained in this room?"

"I am chained in this room because it has suited the will of the fiend."

"Who is the fiend?"

"Barnton."

"Who are you?"

"I am Madame de Coudres."

The detective commenced to realize that light was flashing in upon the dark mystery.

"What was your husband's name?"

"Felix de Coudres."

"And what relation is Barnton to you?"

"Barnton married my sister."

"If you are perfectly sane, why should you have been put here and chained?"

"I am the victim of one of the most gigantic wrongs that a human soul ever suffered."

"At whose hands?"

"At the hands of Barnton."

The detective began to feel convinced that despite the extraordinary surroundings, he was really and truly talking to a person who was perfectly sane.

Again he felt convinced that he was talking to the injured mother of Emily de Coudres.

Despite her emaciated face, there remained sufficient of her former self to indicate that once she must have been a beautiful woman.

"Madame," he said, "I am not a friend of Mr. Barnton; I am his deadliest foe. I entered this house by force to circumvent a fresh scheme of villainy that he has under way."

"Oh! thank Heaven, there is hope for me! You will set me free; you will give me a chance to prefer my complaint against this man?"

"I certainly will aid you in obtaining justice."

"Thank Heaven! thank Heaven! But why do you hesitate to free me at once before Barnton comes and discovers us? He will kill us both."

I guess there is no danger," said the detective, who remembered that he had the fellow securely bound and gagged.

"Undo these chains."

"I will—I will—but listen. You must answer me a few questions."

"Free me and I will answer you."

The detective did not dare to free the poor lady at once. He feared that the sudden revulsion of feeling attending her liberation would have such an effect upon her mind that she would be unable to answer him certain questions.

It was necessary that he should have immediate answers.

"Madame, I swear not to leave this house without taking you with me, but, in your own interest you must answer me certain questions."

"Ask them, quickly."

"You say you are or were the wife of Felix de Coudres?"

"I am his wife. If he has gotten a divorce from me, it is a fraud, secured on the false testimony of that fiend Barnton."

It was evident that the woman did not know that De Coudres was dead.

"Mr. de Coudres is dead."

"I can not weep for him," said the woman, after a moment of intense silence.

"You have been greatly wronged?"

"I have been."

"Barnton was at the bottom of all your wrongs?"

"He was; but my husband should not have believed that man's terrible tales; they were all false."

"Your husband was an older man than you were a woman."

"He was nearly thirty years my senior."

"Old men are ever ready to believe false stories against young wives," remarked the detective.

"I had never given my husband reason to be prepared to believe any false stories against me."

"He is dead."

"Were you his friend?"

"I am a friend of his interests."

"My husband was very wealthy, unless Barnton succeeded in robbing him of all he possessed."

"I am playing against Barnton to prevent him from securing the estate."

"Then my husband left an estate?"

"He did; a large one."

"How long has he been dead?"

"Nearly half a year."

"'Tis fearful, and yet I can not weep. My husband was cruel—cruel to me."

"Madame, I must ask you one important question."

"I will answer you truly."

"Did you have a child?"

"I did; and they murdered my child, although they told me it died!"

"Was it a male or female child?"

"It was a lovely little girl. In Heaven I'll claim it. Ah! to be a mother, and to have the company of your child but for a few hours, and then have it torn from your arms, is terrible—too terrible!"

"Who told you your child was dead?"

"Barnton."

"Did you see it after death?"

"I did."

"And recognized it as your child?"

"I did."

The detective was thoughtful for a moment. He was a most wonderful theorist.

"You had a sister?"

"Yes."

"She married Barnton?"

"Yes."

"Your sister resembled you?"

"We are twins."

"Well, was it not possible that your sister was blessed with a child about the same time you were?"

"She became a mother within the same week. Her daughter was older than mine."

"Just as I thought," muttered the detective. "Now, madame," he continued, addressing the woman, "tell me your story."

"Can I really believe that you are a friend?"

"You will find that I am almost as an angel sent from Heaven before you and I part."

"My story is briefly told."

"Lose no time."

"My sister and I were the children of a merchant in this city. We were looked upon as pretty girls, and my father had spared no means to have us perfected in all the accomplishments of the day.

"My sister and I both had suitors.

"Mr. Barnton was paying attentions to my sister, and a young man named Maillaird was waiting upon me.

"I also had another beau, in the person of Felix de Coudres, a wealthy Frenchman.

"I loved Maillaird. I did not love De Coudres."

"I begin to anticipate what I am to hear," remarked the detective.

"My lover and I had a lover's quarrel. It would have been made up between us, but I afterward learned that it was the man Barnton who came between us and widened the breach."

"He hated you from the first, then?"

"No; I was the victim of his hatred toward Maillaird."

"Proceed."

"Days passed. Maillaird did not come near me, and De Coudres pressed his suit; but I spurned him; my heart was with my younger lover."

"And Barnton was pretending to be your friend?"

"He was. Half a year passed. Maillaird did not come near me during that time, and at length I saw the announcement of his marriage in the morning paper."

"And in spite, you accepted De Coudres?"

"I first attempted to kill myself; but afterward pride came to my rescue, and I married De Coudres."

"Because a wrong had been done to you, you committed a wrong upon another?"

"No. When I married Felix de Coudres, I banished the image and memory of Maillaird from my heart forever, although I learned almost immediately after my marriage to De Coudres that Maillaird and I were the tools and victims of a scoundrel."

"And Barnton was the scoundrel?"

"Yes, Barnton was the villain; but his villainy had but just commenced."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"WERE you happy with De Coudres?" asked the detective.

"I was; and I learned to love him," answered the woman. "He proved to be a true and noble man."

"How did Barnton manage to come between you?"

"He took advantage of my former love for Maillaird, as it was subsequently admitted that the notice of my lover's marriage to another was false."

"He poisoned De Coudres's mind against you?"

"He did, and by a wicked device led me into a trap, so that he made it appear that he had proven his charges against me."

"You were fooled by him into affording proof of guilt where you were really innocent."

"Yes; he induced my husband to pretend to leave town, and the following day sent a letter to me ostensibly from my husband, bidding me come in all haste to a certain place. In the meantime he had been carrying on a forged correspondence with Maillaird, leading the latter to believe that I was the author of the letters."

"Did not Maillaird know your hand-writing?"

"He did, but Barnton had hired an expert to imitate my handwriting, and in these letters it was made to appear than I regretted my marriage with De Coudres and still loved Maillaird."

"An old trick."

"Yes, an old trick, and disastrously successful, as far as I was concerned. When I received the letter purporting to come from my husband, I hastened to the appointed place. I was astonished that my husband should send for me to meet him at such a strange place and at such an unseemly hour, but a reason was given, and a poor, innocent wife was fooled."

"Where were you to meet your husband?"

"In a public park."

"At what hour?"

"Between eleven and twelve, at night."

"And you kept the tryst?"

"I did."

"You did not meet your husband there?"

"No."

"You met Maillaird?"

"Yes."

"What occurred?"

"I saw at once that I had been duped, but had no idea of the real depth of the duplicity that had been practiced upon me."

"You fled away at once?"

"No; I believed that Maillaird was the guilty person who had practiced the deception upon me."

"And you accused him of the deception?"

"I did."

"He protested his innocence, of course?"

"He did more, and when, at length, I sought to flee from his impetuous protestations, he caught my hand, and commenced an explanation of the circumstances that had led to our first separation. I was but a weak young woman. I did not love him then, but my sympathies were aroused, and I was beguiled through pity to listen to his explanations."

"You are satisfied that he had no hand in the deception that was practiced upon you?"

"I would attest to his honor with my life; he did not tempt me to be unfaithful to my husband; all he desired was to set himself clear before me, and in his excitement he seized my hand, and proclaimed how he had loved me, and just at that moment my husband rushed upon the scene."

"The villain who had set about ruining you was waiting to catch you in some such compromising position?"

"He did; and through many years made my husband believe that he was his best and only friend, and his ultimate object was to gain possession of all my husband's estate, and most likely he has succeeded."

"He has not succeeded, and never will!" exclaimed the detective; "but tell me about your child!"

"My child was born two months subsequent to the terrible tragedy that ended in the death of Maillaird."

"And your child died?"

"Yes, the poor child died."

"Did you ever see your husband again?"

"I never saw him from the moment he fled after the meeting with Maillard."

"It's a wonder the villain did not spirit away the child!" muttered the detective, musingly.

"He would have done something to the poor child had it lived."

"It did live!" said Deane.

The woman advanced, and clutching the detective by the wrists, exclaimed, in a wild, frantic manner:

"What is that you say?"

"I say the child lived!"

"No! no!"

"You were deceived; your daughter lives now, Mrs. de Coudres."

"Oh, man, man! what mean you?"

"You were deceived. Barnton did not dare, for some reason, to touch your child, and it was brought up and educated by its own father."

"Who are you?"

"I am a friend of your daughter, Emily de Coudres. I am a detective, I am working in this case against the villain Barnton, and I will run him to earth!"

"You say my child lives?"

Robert Deane related to the woman all that had occurred during the previous half-year.

He had expected that she would rave and go on in a wild manner, but she was perfectly calm, and questioned in a cool, level-headed manner.

"You will take me from this place?"

"I will."

"Where is my daughter now?"

"I fear she is in the power of Barnton."

"He will kill her!"

"He dare not. He knows that I am on his track; his game is up forever. But tell me how I find you here."

"I was sick a long time after the supposed death of my daughter, and when I became well, I was inveigled into this room, chained, and kept a prisoner as you found me."

"Where was your sister all this time?"

"I have reason to believe that my sister was innocent of any part in my misfortunes."

"But she must have known of what was being done to you."

"No; she was away during the whole time, and her husband managed to keep her away; and I have since heard that she died in giving birth to her child."

The detective had released the woman, and the next question was to secure proper clothing for her.

Mrs. de Coudres told him of a certain trunk that had once belonged to her.

The detective searched for the trunk, found it, had little difficulty in opening it, and left the released woman to robe herself while he continued his search for the will.

The search proved a failure, and at length the detective felt that for the time being he must give it up.

He had hit upon a certain plan, not only to recover the will, but to force Barnton to tell where Emily de Coudres was concealed.

Bob Deane felt assured that she was alive.

He did not for a moment mistrust that Barnton had dared to kill her.

It was night when he was prepared to leave that house, under the roof of which so many crimes had been committed.

Although Mrs. de Coudres was robed in old-fashioned apparel, our hero was amazed at her wonderful beauty.

Time and confinement had been unable to destroy the exquisite regularity of her features, and within a few hours her new-born hopes had lent a lightness and brilliancy to her eyes, which in contrast to the pallor of her features, made her more startlingly beautiful.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE detective, before leaving, released the old colored woman, so that she would be able to release Barnton and the false Emily.

Mrs. de Coudres was taken to an obscure hotel, and left in safety.

The detective had accomplished so much, he felt assured that it would be an easy matter to bring Barnton to terms.

Once again he determined to have recourse to his ventriloquism.

He resolved to haunt Barnton as though one had come from the grave.

The day following the scene recorded the detective occupied in making ready for an extraordinary experiment.

He was well acquainted with the figure of old De Coudres, and had no doubt of his ability to get up in a style to appear very like the old man when in life.

Upon the second night, about midnight, Barnton was seated alone in his room.

A fearful shadow rested upon the man's face.

He knew that some one was on his track, but whom he could not tell.

He was not subdued, however, nor did he give one thought toward a relinquishment of his wicked scheme.

He had evaded the penalty of too many crimes to weaken when one obstacle appeared to stand in his way.

He had come to a pretty cute conclusion concerning the identity of his pursuer.

He had sent a man to L—— to make inquiries, and the man had brought a ragged sort of statement, implicating a young fellow named Robert Deane as having considerable interest in the affairs of Emily de Coudres.

Barnton did not learn that Deane was a professional detective, and concluded that he was merely some daring young rustic who was working a game of his own.

In fact, if his conclusions were correct, he had a pretty fair proof of the young man's cunning and daring. "But, after all," muttered Barnton, as a sinister smile swept over his villainous face, "what chance will a young fellow like that have, no matter how cunning he may be, with an old schemer like myself?"

Barnton had come to a desperate resolution, and was about laying a dangerous trap for his pursuer.

The man dared not fight in courts, or call in the aid of the law.

He had defied law too long covertly to dare invoke its aid.

Barnton did not propose to stand at any means.

He had progressed too far, and schemed too long to be balked at last by a bold, cunning country boy.

While he sat in his room, a whistle sounded in the street in front of his house.

He anticipated future visits from the man who was on his track.

When the whistle sounded, Barnton leaped to his feet, and exclaimed, as a fierce light gleamed in his eye:

"Aha! my man is on hand, and if I am not mistaken, a certain Mr. Robert Deane will be missed by his friends some fine day!"

Barnton left the room, walked down-stairs, and proceeding to the main front-door, cautiously opened it.

A moment passed, and a dark figure crossed over from the opposite side of the street.

"Who is there?" asked Barnton.

"Radone."

"Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"Where are your confederates?"

"Handy—after you and I have come to terms."

"Bring your men with you."

"No; you and I must arrange everything first. Remember, Radone does no business until every point in the game is well understood."

"Well, come in, hang you!" exclaimed Barnton, in an impatient tone.

The man Radone followed Barnton to his rooms.

The former was a rather handsome man, possessing a steely gray eye, and clear-cut features, and whose face wore an expression of great determination.

Once seated, Radone said:

"Now, then, what is the work you want done?"

"I want a man tied up. I don't care how."

"What sort of a man is he? an old or a young man?"

"A young man."

"Not an officer?"

"What sort of an officer?"

"A detective."

"What difference would that make?"

"A great deal."

"I can't see how."

"I don't care what you see, but I tell you plainly that we take no chances with a New York detective!"

"He is a poor farmer lad."

"Don't attempt to deceive me, because I will know in time whether you tell me the truth or not; and if you tell me false, I'll squeal on you."

"I am telling you facts."

"All right!"

"When do you want us here?"

"This very night."

"We will arrange signals."

"Yes."

"And myself and pard will be concealed in the house all the time?"

"Yes."

At the very moment that Radone had followed Barnton into the room, the figure of a man came stealing stealthily down the stairs from the upper story.

When the door was closed, this man stole up to the door of the room where the conversation above recorded was in progress, and listened to every word.

That listener was Bob Deane, the detective.

It chanced that the latter had selected that very night for his visit to Barnton in the character of old De Coudres.

The detective had scraped an acquaintance with the porter and watchman of a warehouse that adjoined the residence of Barnton.

The latter's residence was the only private dwelling on the block.

Warehouses had been erected on the sites of the former buildings, or the latter had been transformed into business stores.

Many owners had sought to purchase Barnton's property, but had always failed in inducing the man to sell.

He was looked upon as an eccentric old miser, and as few people were ever seen leaving or entering the house, little attention was paid to what might happen in the old place.

Money will go a great ways sometimes, and money had bought the porter over to the interests of the detective.

The latter, however, had been forced first to satisfy the porter that he was a detective, and that he was on legitimate business.

Shortly after the close of business in the warehouse, the detective had arrived and had been admitted.

He had passed out upon the roof of the warehouse, and from there had lowered himself down to the roof of Barnton's house.

Once on Barnton's roof he had managed to remove the old-fashioned scuttle, and had prepared a place for entrance when the proper time should arrive for the commencement of his operations.

He had elected midnight as the time when he would begin his extraordinary experiment.

It so happened that he had just descended into the house at the moment that Barnton was ascending the stairs, followed by the man who was to be employed to capture him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was fortunate for Bob Deane that he overheard the arrangements.

Forewarned, he was forearmed. Had it not been so, he knew that the chances would have been dead against him.

He listened until he heard the signal arranged, and then slipped upstairs, as Radone rose to leave the room and seek his confederates.

The man promised to return within two hours.

The detective knew that two hours would allow him ample time to carry out the first part of his programme.

The man passed down the stairs, and Barnton let him out.

With a chuckle of satisfaction, Barnton returned upstairs, re-entered his room, closed the door behind him, and turned to witness a sight that caused the very blood to freeze in his veins.

Seated in the chair that Radone had but just vacated was the figure of an old man.

One glance was sufficient for Barnton.

The grave had given up its dead! He recognized his much injured brother-in-law, De Coudres.

Barnton would have fled from the room, but he was paralyzed with terror, and could not move.

"Sit down," said the old man seated in the chair, and it was the voice of De Coudres.

"Who are you? What brings you here?" gasped Barnton.

"Sit down, and I will tell you."

"No, no! begone whence you came."

"I will not harm you; but you must listen to me."

"Begone! Begone!"

"Sit down, or die!"

Barnton staggered across the room, and seated himself in a chair, when the old man, who had appeared so mysteriously, said:

"You have greatly wronged me, Barnton; stop where you are, or great trouble will come upon you."

"You were not killed?"

"No matter what happened to me, I have learned of your perfidy."

"I was your best and truest friend. Had it not been for me, you would have died upon the gallows."

"Dare you say that?"

"You know I speak truly!"

"Barnton, you know that I was but your tool."

"Be you ghost or mortal, what you say is false!"

"Maillard was innocent; my poor, wronged wife was innocent: and you were the arch-fiend who robbed me of my happiness—who destroyed my family!"

"Again, I say your charges are false!"

Barnton spoke with great energy. He was a cool, level-headed man. He had recovered from his first terror; in fact, he suspected the identity of his visitor, and had in his own mind determined to catch his pursuer in his own trap.

He was not astonished that the pretended old man had a knowledge of certain facts, as he knew that the mysterious stranger who had suddenly turned up to balk him was the rescuer of Mrs. de Coudres, and could have obtained all the facts he possessed from her.

Barnton also recollected that this stranger possessed the wonderful power of imitating the voices of others, as he had imitated the voice of Emily de Coudres.

The detective had not been two minutes in conversation before he became convinced that the supernatural dodge had failed, and that the deal had settled down to a fine play between two cool, cunning men.

Barnton's game was to delay his visitor two hours, until the arrival of the men.

One strange fact had slipped Barnton's mind altogether. He did question as to how the pretended ghost gained an entrance into his house.

The detective, although satisfied that the supernatural dodge had failed, still resolved to play it out.

He also determined to give Mr. Barnton a good fright, by the exercise of his ventriloquial powers, in an extraordinary manner.

Taking up the conversation where, for a moment, it had been dropped, the detective said:

"You betrayed my wife into a meeting with her former lover, and you deceived Maillaird. I know now your whole game of treachery."

Barnton, also for reasons of his own, resolved to let the supernatural dodge go on.

"You know better, De Coudres; you are insulting one who all through your life was your best friend."

"Ah, papa!" came a voice seemingly from the room where Mrs. de Coudres had been confined so many years.

Barnton glanced toward the door of the room and turned pale.

A deep groan issued from the room followed by a sharp, sudden cry of anguish.

Barnton leaped to his feet, seized a lamp from the table and rushed to the door of the room.

He glanced in and saw no one, but from the very center of the room came the ominous word:

"Villain!"

Barnton began to tremble.

He swayed his lamp to and fro and glanced about in every direction, but could see nothing.

The suspicion flashed through his mind that after all it might be a supernatural visitor with whom he had been talking.

He remembered at length that it was a most remarkable circumstance that flesh and blood could have gained an entrance into his house, where every door was barred and bolted in such a secure manner.

He retired to his seat, having resolved to satisfy himself in regard to the character of his visitor, no matter what the consequences might be.

Barnton was physically a brave man.

Even ghosts or goblins could not long rob him of his nerve.

Seating himself, he asked, abruptly:

"Are you man or ghost?"

"Stop in your career of crime, or you will learn to your sorrow, when too late, who I am."

"You are not Felix de Coudres?"

"Where is my child?"

Barnton suddenly leaped to his feet, resolved at all hazards to grapple with his extraordinary visitor

He knew that the assistants would soon be there, and that the chances were in his favor.

The detective was not taken unawares, and as Barnton came toward him, a terrible shriek issued from the adjoining room.

Barnton stopped his advance, and in a strange tone, muttered:

"By Heaven! what strange spell surrounds my house this night?"

At that same moment there came a summons at the lower door.

The men had arrived.

It was a critical moment for the detective.

He would be a single man against three determined scoundrels.

Barnton had reached the door, when an appealing voice, and seemingly that of his daughter, pleaded:

"Papa, papa! do not admit those horrid men!"

The man Barnton turned in amazement, and again went toward the room from whence the voice appeared to proceed.

The room was empty, but still from the middle of the apartment came the daughter's voice:

"Oh! papa, papa, do not go further in the terrible scheme. I have had such awful dreams, and mamma has been at my bedside."

"A curse upon you and your mamma!" yelled Barnton, in answer to the mysterious voice.

The man had but given utterance to the fearful words of defiance, when the voice of his daughter was heard wailing and sobbing, and at the same time a louder summons came from below.

The men were becoming impatient.

Barnton was in a perfect frenzy. Between the mysterious appeals of his daughter and the raps of the men, he hardly knew what to do.

He once more started toward the door, when a succession of fearful shrieks issued from the adjoining room.

The hard-hearted man had set his mind to pay no attention to the cries, and appeared determined to admit his hirelings.

A most singular scene occurred.

A dog barked at his heels.

The man leaped into the air with terror, turned, and saw no dog.

A cow lowed in his ear.

He became frantic.

"My house is bewitched!" he exclaimed; "or I am going mad."

"Oh, papa!" came the daughter's voice, "desist, desist!"

And now came another singular incident. The voice of the old negress was joined with that of the daughter in pleadings with Barnton.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE man Barnton sunk back into a chair, and moaned with agony.

The strange noises all suddenly ceased.

A few moments of awful stillness followed, broken at length by the detective, who said, still imitating the voice of De Coudres:

"Barnton, it is useless for you to strive against your doom. You must stop where you are, or perish!"

"Who are you, in Heaven's name? Tell me!" gasped Barnton.

"You know who I am, and I warn you to forbear the crimes you meditate."

"I would commit no crime. If you be a man, name your purpose with me; and if you be a visitant from the grave beyond, you have no call here."

"Fool, fool! you're rushing to your doom!"

"Hence, hence, I say! As you came, begone!"

"It is useless for you to struggle against doom. Repent and be honest, and you are safe. Continue in your wicked scheme, and the shadow will close over you."

Barnton made an effort to move again toward the door, determined to admit the men, who had again sounded a summons at the front-door.

At once the room was filled with a most wonderful and singular confusion of sounds.

Groans filled the air, the squeak of pigs, the hissing of serpents, the mew of cats, yells, shrieks, and all manner of hideous noises.

Again Barnton halted, and at once the strange din ceased.

"Do not attempt to admit the assassin, Radone," came the command from the detective, in the voice of De Coudres.

At last Barnton's courage failed him entirely.

The detective named the whole plan that had been set to capture him.

Barnton became like a man stricken with paralysis.

He staggered from the door and reeled like a drunken man across the room.

"You will repent, you will do justice?" said the detective.

"I will," moaned Barnton, as he fell helpless to the floor. It was his last word. Remorse and fear had been too much even for his hardened brain and conscience.

The detective went to Barnton and knelt beside him.

A brief glance revealed the truth.

The schemer was stone dead, and the archenemy of the De Coudres family had ceased his evil machinations forever. Bob Deane was in a critical position.

He had been alone in the room with the man, and although he was innocent, still the situation was an awkward one.

The detective was still kneeling beside the corpse, when he heard a slight rustling noise.

He glanced up and beheld Barnton's daughter like a ghost standing in the door.

Bob's heart swelled with grief at the thought of the fearful calamity that had come to this poor innocent girl.

The girl, whose name was Lucy, entered the room on tiptoe.

In a strange voice, she asked:

"What has happened?"

The detective had determined to meet the situation boldly, and answered:

"Your father is dead."

The girl uttered a low moan, and threw herself upon the body of her parent.

A few moments passed—moments of fearful silence.

At length the girl raised herself from the body of her father, and with tears streaming down her beautiful face, murmured:

"I dreaded the ending! I feared it would come to this!"

"My poor girl!" said the detective.

"Who are you?"

"The hour for concealment is passed," answered the detective; "I am an officer who has been upon the track of your father."

"I thought so from the first. I told papa so. Woe! woe is mine!"

"I regret what has occurred. You have my warmest sympathy. I am not your enemy—I would be your friend. My dear girl, it is an awful calamity; but it might have been worse had your father lived."

"How worse?"

"I must speak plainly; he would have been brought to punishment for his crimes."

"What shall we do?" asked the girl.

"I must report the matter to the police."

For a few moments the girl stood lost in deep thought, but at length she said:

"Do you know where my cousin Emily is at this moment?"

"I do not."

"Do you know whether she be living or not?"

"You are asking questions of me that I should ask you."

"I know nothing of my cousin. I never saw her in my life, although I have reason to know that we resembled each other personally."

"The resemblance is wonderful."

"You must know that I was never in sympathy with whatever scheme my father may have contemplated."

"I am glad to hear you say that."

"I never really knew what his real purpose was, but I suspected."

"Do you know that your cousin is an heiress?"

"I have suspected that she was; and I have also suspected that my father had some plan for substituting me for her, so as to rob her of her wealth."

"And you were not a willing party to any such scheme?"

"Never; you must know that my father was almost as a stranger to me. I was reared and educated by relatives; I lived away from my father, and only became an inmate of his house since the death of old Mr. de Coudres."

"Did you meet your father after, during the time you remained with your relatives?"

"I never saw him but once since I have been old enough to remember his face, until I was brought home here to live with him."

"And you know nothing of the present fate of your cousin?"

"Nothing."

"Have you any idea where your father kept his private papers?"

"I know of no receptacle, save yonder desk."

A long talk followed between Lucy Barnton and the detective.

During the conversation the detective learned that the old negress was not a party to the schemes of Mr. Barnton.

The detective removed his disguise, and proceeded direct to the office of the chief of police, told his story, and surrendered himself up.

The day following the death of Barnton the coroner held an inquest.

The detective told his story, only concealing the real facts as to his reason in "piping" the man.

The true reasons were given to the police officials and to the coroner, but were not made public.

Dressed in deepest mourning, Lucy Barnton gave her testimony.

Her testimony was concise, direct, and positive, and the jury rendered a verdict clearly exonerating Robert Deane the detective.

The coroner held our hero to mere nominal bail, and the matter closed.

Matters rested until after Mr. Barnton's body had been consigned to the tomb, when a messenger came to our hero from Lucy, asking him to call at the house.

The detective began to fear that after all poor Emily was dead.

He had been in constant communication with Mrs. de Coudres, the missing girl's mother, but did not disclose his suspicions to her.

The latter had never seen Lucy, and, as it was subsequently learned, Lucy Barnton had known nothing of the real facts concerning Mrs. de Coudres.

She had been led to believe that the prisoner in the iron-bound room was a sister of her father's, and supposed that she was as well treated as it was possible to treat a poor unfortunate, bereft of reason.

It was late in the afternoon when the detective reached the house where the tragedy occurred.

The door was opened to him by the old negress.

The latter was tidied up, and, although a hideous-looking old black woman, appeared quite cunning and intelligent for one of her condition in life.

The detective found her even more cunning than he had anticipated.

He was shown into the parlor, where he met Lucy Barnton.

It seemed a strange fact that the latter appeared to feel no bitterness toward him.

The detective had not seen her since the moment she had appeared as a witness in his behalf.

She was dressed in deep mourning, as he discovered upon entering the room, and the horrors of the past few days had made a wonderful change in her appearance.

"You are a friend of my cousin," she said, abruptly, as the detective entered the room.

"I am."

"I sent for you simply because, through old Betsey, I think we can aid you in discovering her fate."

"I see you are disposed to do all in your power to aid in having justice done to your cousin."

"I am, and Betsey will aid us, but, Mr. Deane, I greatly fear that a most appalling discovery awaits us, but the truth must be known at any cost."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE detective felt a cold chill run through his heart, as he feared the fair girl before him had some certain news to impart, and was doing it in a careful and considerate manner.

"Have you any decided reason for believing that your cousin is dead?"

"No."

"Then why do you anticipate some appalling discovery?"

"We will let old Betsey come in and tell her own story."

The old colored woman entered the room, and seated herself, when Lucy said:

"Tell this gentleman what you know."

The old negress commenced by saying:

"My late master used to have a clerk."

"His name was Sparkman," interrupted the detective.

"Yes, his name was Sparkman; but how de debbil you know dat?"

"Well, go on with your story, and I will tell you some other time how I happen to know it."

"Dat yer Sparkman was a berry bad man."

"I don't doubt it."

"Yes, I knew all de time he wer' bad, and schemin' against de old master, and tell him so; but it wer' a long time 'fore master foun' him out dat he was so bad."

"How long ago did he find it out?"

"Well, only two or three weeks ago; jis' arter dat 'ar Sparkman kidnapped de gal."

"Ah, ha! Sparkman was the man who did the kidnapping!"

"Yes, sah; he was de man; 'kase I heerd de master talkin' de matter ober wid him."

"Did they arrange to kidnap the girl?"

"Dey only 'ranged dat dey kidnap her."

"Then what makes you think that they killed her?"

"I wer' jis' gwine ter tell yer why I t'ink so—kase dey wer' how de ole master and Sparkman fell out."

"Tell me about it."

"Well, yer see, de feller Sparkman he wer' gone away two or three days, and one day he jis' come back and den dar wer' high words 'tween master and him."

"What were the high words about?"

"Well, I guess de high words wer' 'bout money."

"And how did the quarrel terminate?"

"Well, ole master he called Sparkman all kind of hard names, and den dar wer' a scuffle."

"And how did it all end?"

"Well, dar ar man Sparkman left de house swearing vengeance against de ole master."

The detective had no idea that the girl was dead—he now knew just how he would have to proceed to find her.

He remained some time talking over matters, when there came a rap at the front-door.

"Oh, golly! who am come now?"

An inspiration caused the detective to exclaim:

"Sparkman, for a million!"

Old Betsey rose to go to the door, when the detective said:

"For safety's sake I will hide—let whoever it is come in, and have no fear."

A few moments passed, when the detective heard the cunning old negress say, in a loud tone:

"Halloo, Mr. Sparkman! how do you do?"

She had spoken in a loud voice on purpose to notify the officer who the visitor was, and she continued her game by answering the man's query in a still louder tone, saying:

"Yes, sah—yes, sah; walk in; Miss Lucy am at home, right dar in de parlor. Yes, sah; yes, sah."

Sparkman entered the room.

The man had come with a purpose, and he went direct to the object of his visit.

He spent but a moment in expressing his sorrow at the death of Mr. Barnton, and then said that he had some private papers in Mr. Barnton's desk that he wished to secure.

Lucy was taken unawares, and did not know what answer to make.

It was at this moment that the ventriloquist gave a most wonderful exhibition of his powers, and used his great talent in an extraordinary manner.

The detective caused his voice to sound like a whisper in her ear.

"Let him look for the papers."

The girl started, and looked around in amazement.

Sparkman also started in surprise as he had heard the singular voice.

"Who is in this room?" asked Sparkman.

At that moment the voice of old Betsey was heard, exclaiming:

"See heah, Miss Lucy; come quick; I want to speak to yer."

"Ah!" exclaimed Lucy; "it is old Betsey!"

"Certainly," chimed in Sparkman; "it is old Betsey; hang it, I ought to have known her voice at first!"

"Come quick, Miss Lucy—come quick," came the voice.

Lucy rose from her seat, saying to Sparkman:

"Excuse me a moment, and I will go and see what Betsey wants of me."

"Certainly, I will wait—I will wait."

Lucy left the room, really believing that it was Betsey who had called her.

Once in the hall, she met the detective.

The latter raised his hand to his lips to caution silence, and said:

"It was I called you."

"You called me?"

"Yes."

"What strange mystery is this? It was Betsey's voice."

"Well, never mind; listen to me. Give the man permission to search for his private papers."

"Dare you trust him after what Betsey has said about him?"

"No, I do not trust him; but yet I want you to let him have his own way."

"He may work some evil."

"He may work some good!"

"You take the responsibility?"

"I will take the responsibility, and you must remember that I am on hand, and, without fear, let the man do whatever he chooses."

"I do not see through your object."

"I will catch him at his own game; let me alone."

Lucy returned to the room.

The detective had given her a few other cues, and she was posted just as to how she should act.

"What papers do you want to look for, Mr. Sparkman?" she said, upon re-entering the room.

"Some private papers belonging to myself."

"Where are those papers?"

"I intrusted them to your father."

"Then I can not aid you."

"I know just where your father kept them."

"I hardly dare let you look over any papers."

"You can trust me to secure only what is my own."

"I suppose I am doing right?"

"Certainly you are. You could not do otherwise. I repeat, I am entitled to my own."

"Well, sir, I consent; but you must only take what belongs to yourself."

"You may depend, I only want my own."

"In which room did my father keep your papers?"

"In the front room over this."

"You are at liberty to go there and get them."

A smile of triumph swept over Sparkman's face.

He had set out to play a cunning game.

He was a rogue—a heartless rascal, and little dreamed that a shrewd, cunning man was only letting him into a good rat-trap.

Sparkman ascended the stairs, and entered the front room, and proceeded right to the desk that Robert Deane had once pried open.

The fellow had come prepared for work.

It took him but a few seconds to open the desk.

He evidently understood every department of it.

He opened a private drawer that had escaped the attention of Robert Deane.

From this drawer he drew forth some papers, and at once exclaimed:

"Aha! I've got them at last, and the whole of the De Coudres estate is mine!"

A voice sounded in his ear, saying:

"Villain, you lie!"

Sparkman leaped to his feet, looked around in every direction, and saw no one.

Again came the voice, and it was that of Barnton, saying:

"Sparkman, you are playing a deep game, but you will lose!"

The man gazed around in a bewildered manner, and let the papers fall from his grasp.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Yes; drop them, you scoundrel," came the voice.

"Who speaks?" gasped the man.

"I speak," spoke the detective, in his natural voice, and he stepped into the room.

Sparkman made a grab for the papers, but he was anticipated by the detective, who seized them.

"Who are you?" asked Sparkman.

"None of your business."

"Give me those papers."

"Not to-day."

"You must."

"Must is a hard word."

"They are my private papers."

"I can't help that."

"Will you give them to me?"

"No."

"Keep them at your peril!"

"I'll risk the peril."

"Who are you?"

"I told you once, none of your business."

"What is the meaning of your actions?"

"Well, I have been upon your track for some time."

"On my track?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"You are a kidnapper, and a thief, and I have run you down at last."

"'Tis false!"

"We will see about that."

"Once again, who are you?"

"I am a detective."

Sparkman wilted; the pluck was taken clean out of him. That simple word, "detective," had a most wonderful effect upon him.

"Why are you on my track?"

"Never mind; your little game is played out."

"I have been playing no game."

"Where is Emily de Coudres?"

"I know nothing about Emily de Coudres."

"You know nothing about her, eh?"

"No, sir."

"You did not enter into a bargain with Barnton to kidnap her, eh?"

"No, sir."

"And you went back on your bargain after securing the girl?"

"It's all false!"

"Tell me where the girl is."

"I know nothing about her."

"See here, Master Man, I've got you down fine, and you might as well own up."

"I have nothing to own up."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you want to go to prison?"

"Give me those papers first."

"Those papers do not belong to you, and never did."

"They do."

"How did you come to have any right to Mr. de Coudres's last will and testament?"

Sparkman was dumfounded.

"I tell you I have got you down fine," continued the detective. "I have had you down to a point ever since the night you dug up the kitchen-floor of old De Coudres's house at L——."

Sparkman fully realized that his game was really played out, and that a wonderful man was holding him at bay.

"What do you want of me?"

"I want you to surrender the girl Emily de Coudres."

"I know nothing about her."

"Very well, I will take you at your word and take you to prison."

"Suppose I know where the girl can be found?"

"All the better for you."

"Why all the better for me?"

"Simply because you are being held for her safety."

"She is not dead!" exclaimed Sparkman, involuntarily.

"You had better disclose her hiding-place."

"She is not far away."

"Where is she?"

"Is there a reward offered?"

"No."

"Will I be paid if I tell where she can be found?"

"No, scoundrel!"

"Then I won't tell."

The detective drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket.

"Hold!" cried Sparkman.

"Well, what is it?"

"I will give up the girl on one condition."

"What is your condition?"

"That you give me a chance to leave the country."

"Your condition shall be complied with."

"I will lead you to her at once."

"Enough, lead the way."

Sparkman was really a great coward, and having once weakened, he gave right in without any more struggle.

He led the detective to a house in an obscure portion of the city.

Once in the house, he said:

"I have done the girl no harm; she will testify herself that she has been well treated."

"So much the better for you."

Sparkman led the detective upstairs.

Again he stopped in the hall, and said:

"You will keep your promise with me?"

"I will."

Sparkman opened the door, and the detective beheld the long lost girl.

With a cry of joy, the latter sprung toward him, and the detective said:

"My dear girl! I have found you at last."

Emily looked as handsome as ever, save a slight pallor that whitened her fair face.

The detective was a straightforward man, and, dismissing Sparkman from the room, he sat down and related to Emily all that had transpired, even to the discovery of her mother.

We will not dwell upon the scene that followed the part of the narration that disclosed to Emily the fact that her mother, whom she had never seen, still lived.

It was well into the night when Emily concluded her story.

She had been betrayed by a supposed letter from Deane.

It always remained a mystery to our hero how Sparkman had hit upon his name to decoy the girl.

That same night, when all the explanations were completed, Emily was led into the presence of her mother.

Again we must draw the curtain, and not attempt to describe the scene that followed the meeting of mother and daughter.

The papers the detective had succeeded in securing from Sparkman proved to be the wills of both De Coudres and Barnton.

The latter left to his child almost as large a fortune as old De Coudres had left to his daughter.

The two cousins were united, and it was tacitly agreed to let the dreadful past remain buried forever.

But little difficulty was experienced in having both wills probated.

Robert Deane had done his work well, and was fairly entitled to his reward.

One day, not long after the scenes we have related, Mrs. de Coudres came to our hero to talk to him about his reward.

"I will call in a few days, and tell you about it," was the singular reply.

In a few days Robert Deane called upon the De Coudreses.

He did not ask for Mrs. de Coudres, however, but for her lovely daughter.

When Emily entered the room, Bob said:

"Your mother called upon me the other day in regard to my reward for the services I have been fortunate enough to render you and her."

Emily made no answer, but her beautiful face flushed.

"You once spoke to me about a reward," continued the detective, "and I told you I would settle it with you at some future time."

The blushes deepened upon Emily's beautiful face.

The detective caught her hand, and said:

"All the reward I claim is this hand, but I do not want it unless the heart goes with it."

Emily found voice to say:

"The heart and hand, if sufficient payment, are gratefully given to a true, brave, and honorable man."

A few months later, Bob Deane claimed his reward, and received it, and has never regretted the pay he received for his great services.

THE END.

Old Sleuth Weekly

EDITED BY "OLD SLEUTH."

CLEVELAND, U.S.A., MAY 15, 1908.

A publication devoted to high-class Detective Literature. Published on alternate Fridays.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE.

Per Year..... $1.50
Six Months..... .75
Three Months..... .40

Postage paid to all parts of the United States, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, the Canal Zone, Hawaii and the Phillipines. Stamps accepted the same as money. *Address letter to*

The Arthur Westbrook Company, Cleveland, U.S.A.

Tit-Bits of General Information

FROM ALL THE WORLD.

Over 30,000 horses are annually slaughtered in Paris for food. The carcass of an average horse yields about 360lb. of meat.

General Booth's latest project is to establish a fleet of Salvation Army steamers to carry the army's emigrants across the Atlantic.

The Somali soldier keeps himself in perfect fighting condition on a diet of nuts. He eats only twenty a day, but they are nuts of a very nourishing kind.

A light breeze moves at about five miles an hour; a gale hurries on at the rate of thirty or forty miles; a true storm at fifty; and a hurricane at eighty to a hundred.

Picture books for the benefit of travellers are kept in the Paris police-stations. It frequently occurs that foreigners lose things which they are unable to describe, because of their unfamiliarity with the French language. The picture-books contain representations of various articles, and the inquirer has only to turn the leaves and point out the illustrations which resemble the property he has lost.

Biggest Clock in the World.—"Big Ben" in London is the largest clock in the world, but its 22½ ft. diameter of dial and its gigantic internal economy will soon have to take second place among the "striking" things of the clock world. New York is putting up a bigger clock—one with a dial of 25ft. diameter. The hands, which will be 12ft. long, will be fastened together 346ft. above the street, in the tower of the new Metropolitan Life Building, and the figures on the face of "Big Jonathan" will be 4ft. high.

Young Lady (entering music-publisher's shop, to young man sorting music): "Have you 'Kissed Me by Moonlight?'"

Young Man (turning round with surprise): "It must be the other young man behind the counter, I've only been here a week!"

DARING DEEDS OF FAMOUS DETECTIVES.

(*Continued from No. 2.*)

He found it at last. The humped-backed lady was a seamstress, and Vidocq made himself so agreeable to her that he quickly learnt all about the lodgers in the building. Fossard, under another name, of course, tenanted a room at the top of the building. How was he to be got at? He was a man of prodigious strength, a man who had vowed he would never be taken alive, a man who always carried firearms, ready to slay anyone who might seek to harm him.

Fossard Captured in Bed.

"Such a man is best taken in his bed, M. Henri," suggested Vidocq. The only difficulty was how it was to be managed to take him so.

Fossard, in spite of his being such a desperate criminal, was a bit of a fob. He used to keep a bottle of eau-de-Cologne in his room. That scent was to prove his undoing. It is not the only occasion that perfume has proved disasterous to criminals who have indulged in it. A few nights later, when Fossard was in bed and fast asleep, he was awakened by a timid knock at his door. Calling out to know what he was disturbed for, he heard a timorous child's voice in reply. It informed Fossard that the knocker was poor little Louis, the nephew of a woman on the next floor wh had been taken very ill, and who had sent the child to beg M. Fossard to lend her his bottle of eau-de-Cologne. Fossard groped round for the bottle, and with it in his hand threw open the door. Vidocq and his helpers were on him in an instant.

"The Most Terrible Man in Paris."

"The most terrible man in Paris,"—such became the description among the dangerous classes of Vidocq, now a recognized agent of the police.

He was not regarded with favor by members of the detective service. They might well, indeed, look askance at a man with such a record.

"I have never caught any criminal who more deserved imprisonment than M. Vidocq," protested an indignant officer to M. Henri one day.

But Vidocq was to useful to be hastily set aside. Never had the criminals of Paris such a bad time as they were now enjoying with Vidocq in the detective force.

Thieves Who Became Detectives.

He organized the first really efficient detective service on the Continent. The task of selecting twelve assistants was confided to him. Vidocq chose the majority of them from the cleverest thieves he knew. Those that had been pick-pockets he made wear gloves. It was impossible for them to indulge in their former bad habits while wearing those fashionable articles!

Why He Was Clean-Shaven.

Tall, of magnificent physique, with what is known as an "open" countenance, with large twinkling blue eyes, and a mouth that seemed to be ever ready to break into good-natured laughter, Vidocq was perhaps the last man in the world to be taken for a detective.

"I always regretted," he declared once, "that my duty prevented me from cultivating a moustache, but it would be a sad hindrance to my disguising myself. I had to

give the idea up. Criminals would have got to know that moustache of mine."

So he remained a close-shaven man to the end of his days. Perhaps there never was a more energetic disguiser than Vidocq. He relied upon his marvellous facility in making up to utterly bewilder the professional criminals he had to deal with.

In one day's hard work he assumed no fewer than twelve distinct disguises!

He went, when he was not in disguise, constantly armed. A pistol lay ready to his hand in a pocket of his handsome clothes, and a dagger was concealed in the front of his coat.

At the end of ten years' service he retired.

"Vidocq Has Been Arrested!"

The news spread all over Paris. Vidocq, who had made the police of Paris more feared than they had ever been before, was actually in the hands of the police!

He had, after his retirement from the force, established a private inquiry office, and clients of all kinds flocked to him. Then he opened an agency for the protection of shopkeepers and merchants against fraudulent customers. He had as many as 8,000 customers on his books when the police arrested him, and he was now accused of having in many cases become the ally of the very people from whom he was supposed to be protecting his customers. He was found guilty, and sentenced to eight years' imprisonment. When he at last got the conviction reversed Vidocq found himself a ruined man!

The Fallen Vidocq on the Stage.

One of the attractions at a place of entertainment in London some fifty years ago was M. Vidocq. The great detective had taken to the stage! Enormous audiences came to see the strange man, who related his extraordinary experiences and seemed like a dozen different men upon the stage by his marvellous quickness in changing his appearance.

One day in 1857 a white-haired, feeble, mumbling old man lay dying in a bed in the garret of a house in a miserable Paris street. He was Vidocq, the marvellous detective. Helpless, in poverty, dependent on the charity of friends, the once terrible man lay there awaiting the approach of death. Almost his last words, according to one who attended on him, were, "You are my prisoner."

HOW THE GREATEST JEWEL FOR THE KING'S CROWN IS BEING CUT.

Ten Fully-Armed Men Place it in a Strong-Room Every Night.

The responsible and difficult work of preparing the famous Cullinan diamond for a place of honour among the Crown jewels of Great Britain has been entrusted to Messrs. I. J. Asscher, the famous diamond cutters of Amsterdam. In the cutting of this Royal treasure all the ingenuity and skill that man can devise will be brought into play.

The "cutting" of the stone is the most intricate part of the process. The Cullinan contains several flaws, which must be removed without reducing it too much in size. To avoid this the firm made an exact model of the diamond, and treated it in the same way as the real diamond will be treated. By this means the cutters have been able to decide into how many parts the jewel is to be divided. This decided upon, the real cutting of the stone commences. Special wooden "dops," which resemble a drumstick in appearance, are made on the top of which the diamond is to be embedded in cement. This is held in the left hand, while the right hand will also hold a thin wooden stick with cement on the top, in which is embedded a sharp cutting diamond.

The process of cutting is a very slow and tedious one, for the greatest care has to be observed. Each incision will be about three-quarters of an inch. When the desired depth has been reached the diamond is placed in a lead socket and a specially constructed knife-blade made of the finest steel inserted in the slit. Then, with the aid of a heavy steel stick, a terrific blow is aimed, cutting the stone in two. The other divisions will be made in the same way till all the flaws are removed.

As soon as this has been completed the jewels will be handed over to an expert polisher, who polished the famous Excelsior diamond, weighing 971 carats, some years ago. Whilst he is working on the diamond he, with three assistants, will every day be locked in a specially-adapted workshop by the manager, where for a year, from seven in the morning until nine o'clock at night, they will be engaged at their task.

Owing to the size of the Cullinan all the polishing instruments have had to be reconstructed. A special "dop" with pewter top has been manufactured, weighing about 20lb. and measuring 5½in. across. The mill on which the stone is to be polished is also much larger. It is 16½in. across—whereas the ordinary ones are about 12in.—and makes 2,400 revolutions per minute. This is lubricated with a preparation consisting of crushed diamond powder and oil.

When the polishing process is finished the stone will then be ready to adorn King Edward's crown. Its weight will have diminished by the end of the year from 1½lb. to about 1lb., but will be worth quite £1,000,000.

Every precaution is being taken by Messrs. Asscher to prevent thieves stealing the diamond. At night-time, when the work has ceased, the stone is conveyed by the manager, accompanied by ten fully-armed men, from the workshop to the strong-room, where it is impossible for any of the safe-breaking fraternity to obtain admission. Its walls are three-quarters of a yard in thickness, and composed of iron and cement, secured by a formidable door, which can only be opened by a combination of numbers known only to the three heads of the firm.

Inside the strong-room are several cabinets with secret sliding panels. Behind one of there, with its nine locks completely hidden from view, lies a tiny safe in which the Cullinan diamond is placed. As an additional safeguard an armed policeman is stationed at the outer door throughout the night.

A church of solid coral is a curiosity of the Isle of Mahé. This island, rising to 3,000ft., is the highest of the Seychelles group in the Indian Ocean; its buildings are all of square blocks hewn from massive coral and glisten like white marble.

YELLOW PERIL RAILWAYS.

Did you ever hear of the railway that was exiled for manslaughter? The unlucky line was one extending between Shanghai and Woosung, and the incident occurred when the nineteenth century had almost run its course. The road was the first in China upon which steam locomotives ran, and, as it chanced, it was constructed in the face of a dogged refusal of official sanction. The Emperor and his advisers deemed the innovation sacrilegious, and resolutely declined to grant any concession likely to lead to the steam hooter of the "foreign devils" disturbing the last rest of the ancestors of even the meanest coolie. But railwaymen are not easily baffled, and the promotors of this scheme took the matter into their own hands by buying up privately a strip of land between the points named sufficient to carry the line, which was duly built and opened for traffic. The Chinese public took to it amazingly; they regarded it as a kind of merry-go-round, and paid to go backwards and forwards simply for the pleasure of the thing. Passengers had in fact to be turned away from almost every train, and things were going swimmingly when a Chinaman was, most unfortunately, run over and killed. Thereupon traffic was peremptorily stopped; the Chinese Government bought up the whole concern on compulsory terms, and solemnly condemned it to be deported. Locomotives, carriages, trucks and rails were "scrapped," and the lot shipped to Formosa, where everything was bundled out on a muddy shore and left to dwindle to a mere pile of rusty iron. The stations were pulled to pieces and temples erected upon their sites, with the idea of thus propitiating the deities who had been offended by the introduction of the murderous innovation.

All this happened within the experience of men who are still young, but it put a stop to railway development in China until after the Boxer rising and the siege of the Pekin Legations. That occurred only seven years ago, but already, within that period, almost 4,000 miles of railway have been opened in China, whilst further concessions have been recently granted which will increase the mileage by leaps and bounds within the immediate future. To white people the circumstance is of direct personal interest for several reasons. The first of these arises from the change in the Chinese point of view; or rather in that of the Chinese Government because the mass of the people were never antagonistic to mechanical locomotion. Now that it is not only permitted but encouraged, it is obvious that the vast Empire, with its cheap labour and immeasurable natural resources, must soon become a formidable competitor in the markets of the world. At the moment there is only one mile of railway to every ten million Chinamen; in the same proportion there would only be about five miles of line in the whole of the United Kingdom. Yet the Chinese question is already clamant in Australia, on the Pacific slope, and in the Transvaal. What is it likely to become when the teeming millions of labourers in the inland provinces of China find that they can be carried to the seaboard to emigrate if they will, at a cost approximating to ten miles for half a cent?

That may be in the future, though it is not far distant. A more immediate reason for the interest of Europe and America in Chinese railway development is the demand which it will make upon the world's supplies of raw iron and manufactured steel. It is fairly common knowledge that iron ore is becoming scarce. It is equally well-known that the great steel industries on both sides of the Atlantic are running rapidly through their orders, and that a period of stagnation appears to be ahead. That is precisely where the Chinamen will come in, because it is worth noting that he is now building his new railways himself. British shipowners know by experience how the Chinese have bought up cheap steamers and nobbled the best of the business on their own coasts. They will carry out a similar policy with the railways, for they will come into the market for rails and rolling stock when trade generally is slack, and will build them with the least possible expenditure of capital; land, of course, they will take care to secure for little or nothing. Thus the lines will be operated at a cost far below those elsewhere, and this, in conjunction with labour which considers itself well paid at two cents per day, must react upon trade and industry amongst Western peoples. If a Yellow Peril exists at all it will assuredly become acutely dangerous when China is crossed—as it may be within a decade—by railway lines from the borders of Burmah to those of Siberia, and from Tibet to the bustling ports of the Yellow Sea.

LADIES, BEWARE.

A well-known humorist tells the following story, evidently meaning it to convey a warning.

"When I was a boy in Geneva," he says, "I was once taken through an asylum that was not far from the town.

"Many strange, many terrible things I saw in this place, but what affected me most deeply was the sight of a young man, of intelligent and refined appearance, who sat with his head in his hands, mumbling over and over and over again, without a pause:—

"'I can't strap it round my waist, and it won't go in my pocket. It isn't a motor horn, because it won't blow. It isn't a lamp, for it won't light, I can't put it on my feet, and it will not go over my head. It is neither a fountain pen, a pipe, nor a balloonist's barometer. It looks like a golf glove, but it is not a tennis racquet. I can't——'

"Turning away, I asked the keeper the young man's history.

"'Ah, sir, a sad case,' the keeper said. 'One year ago that there young man was prosperous and renowned—the finest puzzle inventor and decipher for miles round. But last Christmas his young lady friend gave him a present made with her own hands, and in tryin' to determine its name and its use the poor fellow became what you see.'"

The most remarkable burglar-proof safe in the world has just been placed in a bank at Newburg Island. At night the safe is lowered by cables into an impregnable metallic-lined sub-vault of masonry and concrete. After reaching the bottom it is fastened down by massive steel lugs, operated by a triple time lock. Until these lugs are released automatically at a desired time, no human agency can raise the safe, and to break in through a mass of stone and concrete which measures 10ft. by 10ft. by 16ft. with dynamite would wreck the building without making the safe available.