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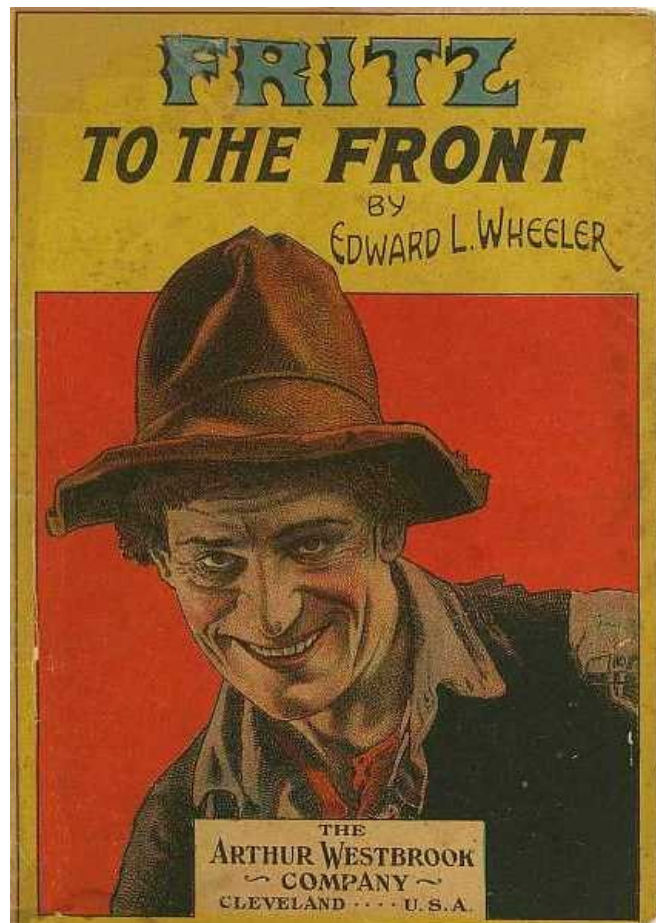
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Fritz to the Front
by
Edward L. Wheeler

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FRITZ TO THE FRONT

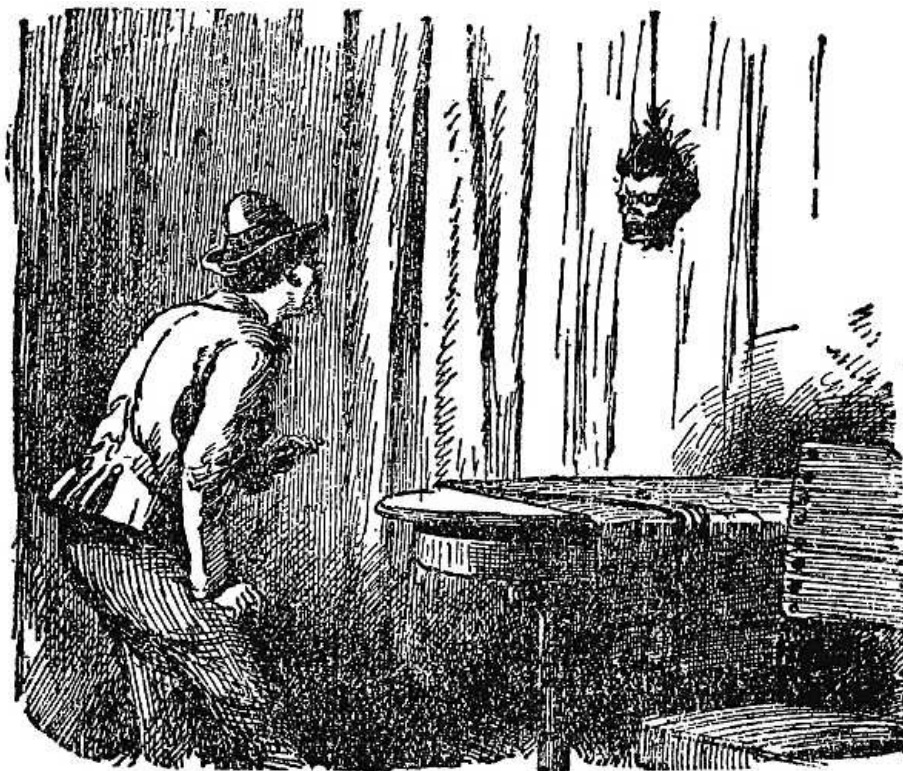
OR,
THE VENTRILOQUIST SCAMP-HUNTER.
BY

EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "FRITZ, THE BOUND-BOY DETECTIVE," "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD
ROB" NOVELS, ETC.

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FRITZ BEHELD AN OBJECT WHICH CAUSED HIM TO UTTER A GRUNT OF STARTLED
ALARM.—See page [41](#).

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FRITZ TO THE FRONT.

[5]

CHAPTER I

MADGE.

One bright, hot August morning a cheap excursion was advertised to leave South Street wharf, Philadelphia, for Atlantic City—that lively little city by the sea, which is so fast growing in size and popularity as to rival the more noted of the Atlantic coast summer resorts. A cheap excursion which is within the means of the working class is ever a success, and this one was no exception; it gave the masses a chance to escape from the overheated city for a small sum, and they grasped at it eagerly.

Bright and early the ferry-boat was crowded and still there was no cessation of the stream of humanity that surged toward the river front. There were representatives of every trade in the city, nearly, and likewise a mixture of several nationalities; there were young folks and old folks and little children; then there were roughs, bruisers, and bummers, an indispensable adjunct to summer excursions; and, all in all, a heterogeneous collection of humanity.

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Just as the hot August sun peeped up over Jersey's sandy horizon, the bell of the boat rung, and the huge ferry-boat began to move out across the Delaware, toward Kaighn's Point, where connection was to be made with the railway.

It was a noisy crowd aboard the boat, there being a good many roughs among the pleasure-seekers, who were more or less under the effect of Dock Street "soothing syrup," and who were disposed to have something to say to every one.

Among the passengers was a young lady of eighteen or nineteen years of age, who sat in the stern of the boat, seeming to have no friends or acquaintances.

She was by no means unprepossessing in face, and was trimly built, and dressed rather stylishly, compared to the others of her sex aboard the boat.

It was not long before several of the roughs noted the fact that she was unaccompanied, and determined to know the reason why.

Therefore, one lubberly, raw-boned young bruiser, with a freckled face, blood-shot eyes, and a large, red nose, approached her and tipped his hat with tipsy gallantry:

[7]

"Scuse me, young lady, but (hic) may I ask ef yer got (hic) company?" he asked.

"Plenty of it, sir," the young lady replied, her eyes flashing. "I do not know you; you'd confer a favor by not addressing me."

"I'll do as I please, my gal; don't ye sass yer cuzzin. Don't ye know me? I'm a 'full moon' solid Mulligan Muldoon, I am."

Greatly annoyed, the young woman turned her head away without answering.

This, however, did not abash the "full moon," for he advanced closer, and laid one burly hand upon the railing beside her.

"Now, (hic) see here, my beloved Miss Moriarty," he began, but before he could proceed further, a foppishly attired young Jew, with red hair and a hooked nose, stepped forward and slapped the Fourth Ward man on the shoulder.

"Yoost you bounce oud, mine friend," he said. "Der young lady don'd vas vant some off your attention."

"Hello! who in blazes are you?" Muldoon demanded, gruffly, not offering to move. "I are Muldoon, ther solid man, I am, an' I allow I kin lick any man on (hic) ther boat." [8]

"That don'd make any difference. Dot young lady don'd vant you near her, und uff you don'd vas gone away, right off quick, I'll throw you oud—dot's der style off an excursionist I am!" cried the Jew.

"Oho! you wull, wull you? You'll throw me out, hey?—me Full-moon Muldoon, ther solid man? I'll hev a kiss from the girl an' then I'll heave yer Israelite carcass overboard for the fishes."

And, making a drunken lunge forward, he threw his arms about the young lady's neck, amid indignant cries of a crowd of bystanders, and attempted to kiss her.

But he failed in his purpose, for she pluckily threw him off, and the next instant the Jewish-looking young man came to her rescue.

Seizing the rough by the coat and trousers he jerked him away; then with the strength of a Hercules, raised him from the floor and hurled him forward down the cabin stairway to the lower deck.

A cheer of approval at once went up from the larger share of the spectators, and the Dutchman became the hero of the hour. [9]

Some of Muldoon's companions rushed to his rescue and found him doubled up like a jack-knife, and groaning over severe bumps.

His rough usage, however, had evidently cowed him, for he made no attempt to show fight or create further disturbance.

The young lady thanked the Jew, but that was all, until the boat grated up alongside Kaighn's Point wharf, when she caught his eye and motioned for him to approach.

"If you will be so kind as to assist me in finding a seat in the train," she said, modestly, "I would esteem it a great favor."

"Vel, you bet I vil! Id is a purdy rough crowd for a young lady without some company. My name ish Fritz Snyder; vot ish yours?"

"You may call me Madge," was the quiet reply.

Then Fritz took her little traveling-bag, and they left the boat with the crowd, and boarded the excursion-train which was close at hand.

Being among the first to reach it, they had no difficulty in finding a seat, and made haste to occupy it, as the cars were fast filling.

"I reckon ash how you vas goin' to der sea-shore?" Fritz asked, having some curiosity to know. [10]

"I presume so, if the cars take me there," the young lady replied, with a faint smile. "Is it a nice place?"

"Vel, I don'd know. I vas neffer there, but I hear id vas a nice place. You see, I vas goin' there on pizness—I—I—don'd know off I stay long or not."

Little more was said during the overland trip to the ocean.

The young woman did not appear inclined to talk, and Fritz finally excused himself, and moved to another seat.

"Der ish somedings vot don'd vas right apoud dot vimmens," he soliloquized. "She ish not goin' to der sea-shore for vone object alone, I'll bet a half-dollar."

Just ahead of him, in the next seat, sat two old ladies, who were discussing that topic uppermost in their minds—spiritualism. One was a believer—the other an unbeliever.

"Pooh! you can't stuff such nonsense into my head, Marier," the unbeliever declared, taking a pinch of snuff. "Speerits don't trouble me."

"But, that is because you have no faith, Mehitable. Now, my Sammy's speerit converses with me, every day and night, and keeps me posted about the realms of eternal bliss, and when I ax him to appear, he comes before me as natural as life." [11]

"Has he got that wart behind his left ear yet?" apparently asked a man in front of the ladies, though Ventriloquist Fritz was of course the author of the question.

"Sir-r-rh!" the spiritualist cried, indignantly, "I'll have you know my Samuel had no wart upon his person!"

"But he had bunions, though!" a portly old gent across the aisle seemed to declare.

"It's a lie—a shameful lie! I'd like to know how you dare cast your insinuations about one you never knew, sir?" and Mrs. Marier arose in her seat, excitedly. "My husband was a good moral gentleman."

"For the land's sake, Marier, do set down," the other woman cried, feeling embarrassed.

"No I won't set down!" Marier declared. "That old bald-headed, pussy fabricator said my Sammy had bunions!"

"My good woman, I never said anything of the kind," the portly party declared, getting red in the face.

"The old woman's crazy!" another man seemed to cry. [12]

"Crazy, am I?" Mrs. Marier cried, snatching up a freshly baked pumpkin pie from the seat beside her, and holding it ready to hurl at the offenders. "I'll show you if I'm crazy. Jest ye open yer

mouths, ary one of ye, an' I'll show ye how crazy I am! Oh! I'll learn ye to insult a respectable woman, who minds her own business!"

And the woman came off victor, for Fritz ventriloquized no further, and the passengers had nothing to say, having no desire to get plastered up with freshly prepared pumpkin pie.

In the course of three hours the train arrived at Atlantic City, and before the ocean's blue expanse, as it billowed away to meet the horizon.

The grand stretch of level beach was thronged with people, despite the pouring heat of the midday sun, and many queerly costumed pleasure-seekers were buffeting about in the water for recreation and health.

Fritz was among the first to leave the cars, and he stationed himself where he could watch the movements of the girl, Madge.

Some subtle instinct prompted him to do this, with the impression that she was—what?

That was an enigma. He could not, for the life of him, have told why, but he was impressed with an idea that there was some strange romance connected with her visit to the sea-shore—that she did not come alone for pleasure, but for an object that might be worth investigating.

She left the cars, and at once took a carriage for the principal hotel.

Not to be balked, Fritz jumped into another carriage, and directed the driver to take him to the same hotel.

His conveyance arrived first, and he was standing on the veranda, when the carriage drove up with Madge, and she got out.

She scarcely noticed him as she came up the steps and passed into the hotel; but, after she had registered, she came out, and touched him on the arm.

"You are watching me—what for?" she asked, when he turned around facing her. "Am I an object of suspicion to you, sir?"

Fritz flushed uncomfortably, and hardly knew how to answer.

"Vel, I—I—"

"There! don't make any apologies or excuses; I know you are, and shall look out for you. Please understand I am no criminal!"

Then she turned around again, and swept haughtily into the hotel, while Fritz walked away toward the beach in meditation.

"She vas sharper ash lightning," he mused, "und dot makes me t'ink some more dot for some reason or odder she vil bear watching."

He took a bath in the ocean, and then went back to the hotel. He was not quite satisfied to drop the matter where it was. Something urged him to pry further into the affairs of this young lady, whose case had struck him as being singular.

On examining the register, he found that she was registered as Miss Madge Thurston, and assigned room 43.

As nothing more offered, he sat down on the veranda, and watched the stream of people that surged in and out of the hotel, and to and from the beach—men, women, and children by the hundred, and yet there were scarcely two faces alike.

During the afternoon an elegant close carriage, drawn by a superbly harnessed pair of high-stepping bays, which were in turn driven by a liveried negro, came dashing down the avenue, and drew up before the Brighton.

A man of some thirty-five years of age leaped from the carriage, and entered the hotel—a man with a sinister yet handsome face, ornamented with a sweeping mustache, and a pair of sharp, black eyes. He was attired in spotless white duck, with patent-leather boots, and a white "plug" hat, and was evidently a person of some importance!

He soon came out of the hotel, accompanied by the young woman Fritz had defended, and entering the carriage, they were whirled away down the avenue out of sight.

"Dot settles dot! My game's gone und I don'd got some professional detective gase, there," Fritz growled, as he watched the receding carriage. "I'll bet a half-dollar I neffer see dem again."

But he was mistaken.

That evening when the moon was sending a flood of brilliant light down upon the long level beach, he was one of a thousand who took a stroll along the water's edge, over the damp sands of the sea.

He was thus engaged, and watching the great luminous moon which seemed to have risen out of the distant watery waste, when a man touched him upon the shoulder.

"Excuse me," he said, respectfully, "but are you Fritz, the young man who took a young lady's part, on a ferry-boat near Philadelphia, to-day?"

"Vel, I dink I am, uff I recomember right. Vot of it?" Fritz replied.

"Well, sir, you are wanted to bear witness to a marriage ceremony, to-night, up the coast, and I was sent for you. Step this way, to the carriage, sir."

Scarcely knowing what was best to do, Fritz followed, got into an open carriage, and was driven rapidly north along the beach, through the romantic moonshine.

But, how romantic was his little adventure destined to turn out? That was what he asked himself, as he gazed doubtfully out upon the greenish blue of mother ocean.

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CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGE MARRIAGE.

In the course of little over an hour, the carriage stopped at the inlet, where Fritz was told to get out and take a small boat and row across the water to the other shore, where he would find another carriage to complete his journey in.

He accordingly did as directed, and had soon crossed the inlet, found the second carriage, and was once more rolling northward, along the sandy beach.

It seemed hours to him ere his conductor drew rein in front of a jutting bluff which interrupted their further progress along the beach, from the fact that it reached to the water's edge; for another hour he followed the driver, a grim, uncommunicative fisherman, on foot up a jagged path, which finally led into a lonely ocean cave which the high tides of many centuries had washed out to about the size of an ordinary room. A torch thrust in a crevice in the rocky wall, lit up the scene in rather a ghostly way. [18]

About in the center of the cave stood three parties—Madge, a clerical-looking party, and another well-dressed man, with black hair and full beard.

He stepped forward as Fritz and the fisherman entered the cave, and said:

"Ah! I am glad you have come. Was fearing that you would not accommodate us, sir."

"Vel, I didn't vas know vedder to come or not," Fritz answered, "but ash I am here, vot you want off me?"

"I will tell you. The young lady yonder and myself are about to be married, and, to make things legal, we prefer to have a couple of witnesses to the ceremony. You will only be required to attach your signature to the marriage certificate, and will then be taken back to Atlantic City."

"Vel, off dot ish all, go ahead mit der pizness," Fritz said, perching himself on a rock. "I don'd know off id is a legal dransaction or not, but I'll do vot ish right by der lady."

"Then let's have the ceremony," the prospective bridegroom said. "Are you ready, Madge?" [19]

"Quite ready," the young lady replied, smilingly.

Then they clasped hands, and the aged clerical-looking gentleman read a marriage-service, asked the usual questions, and pronounced them man and wife.

The parties to the consummation were announced as Miss Madge Thurston and Major Paul Atkins.

At the conclusion of the ceremony the clergyman filled out a certificate, signed it himself, and then requested Fritz to come forward and do likewise, and also the old fisherman.

His request being obeyed, Major Atkins said:

"Your favor is duly appreciated, Mr. Snyder, and, if an opportunity offers, I shall be happy to be of service to you. You may now return to town in the manner you came."

Accordingly, Fritz did so, not a little puzzled at his adventure and the strange wedding in the coast cave.

Day was just beginning to lighten the eastern horizon when he arrived back at Atlantic City, and went to his room for a nap.

But he found that sleep would not come to his relief, and so he was among the early fashionable bathers at the beach. [20]

After a good, refreshing bath he went back to the Brighton and took a seat on the veranda.

He had not been seated long when a rapidly driven carriage whirled up before the hotel, and an elderly, portly man leaped out and hurried into the hotel, his face flushed with excitement.

He was well-dressed, wore a little bunch of gray side-whiskers on either cheek, and was evidently all of sixty years of age.

Fritz surveyed him closely with the short glimpse he got of him, and then scratched his head as if in quest of an idea.

"I'll bet a half-dollar I see into der whole pizness now," he muttered, with a chuckle. "Id vas plainer ash mud to me. Dot couple vot got married vas elopers mit each odder, und dis pe der old man on der war-path after 'em, madder ash a hornet. Der next t'ing is, who vas der bully veller, vot ish honest und haff der rocks to support dot virtue?"

After a few minutes the old gentleman came out of the hotel, and stood looking out upon the ocean, with rather a savage expression of countenance—and his was a face that could be very stern, when occasion required it.

"I don'd know vedder I better poke mine nose inder dis pizness, or not," Fritz muttered, taking a second survey of him. "He looks like ash if he might swaller a veller off he got mad, und I don'd vas care apoud imitadin' Jonah." [21]

As if interpreting his thoughts, the old gent turned rather gruffly, and took a searching glance at the young man.

"Well?" he said, "I suppose I look as if I wanted to cut some one's throat, don't I?"

Fritz laughed lightly.

"Vel, I vas t'inking somedings like dot," he admitted.

"I thought so. I ain't a fool; I know when I am mad, I *look* mad. Do you know of any party around here who's particularly anxious to end his career, and ain't got the grit to do the job?—I would like to operate on such a chap."

"You feels like ash off you could pulverize some one, eh?"

"Humph! I'll contract to lay out the first man that durst look cross-eyed at me. I'm mad, I am—mad as thunder, and I come from Leadville, too, where they raise thunder occasionally. Bah! I wish some one would step up and kick me!"

"Well, I'm your man, if you really want a *bona fide* job done!" Fritz caused a pompous-looking man to say, who stood near—ventriloquially, of course. "I'm the champion patent kicker from Kalamazoo!"

[22]

The old gent from Leadville turned and gazed at the pompous-looking man a moment, his dander rising several degrees.

"Oh! so you're anxious to kick me, are you, my Christian friend? You want to kick me, do you?" he ejaculated.

"Who has said anything about kicking you, sir?" the pompous party demanded, in haughty surprise. "You'd evidently better go to bed and sleep off your 'cups,' my friend."

"I haven't drank a drop, sir, in ten years. And for you to deny expressing a desire to boot me, sir—why, man, I heard you!"

"You are a liar, sir; I said nothing of the kind. Besides, I am not in the habit of picking quarrels with strangers."

And with a shrug, the pompous man turned on his heel, and walked off, indignantly.

Leadville's angered delegate gazed after him a moment, with unutterable contempt—then turned to Fritz:

"Poor fool. He's no sand, or he'd not cut and run, after calling a man a liar. Up in Leadville things are supremely different, but here alas! is a lack of back-bone. I say, young fellow, have you ever cherished dreams of becoming rich?—a man of millions, as it were?"

[23]

"Vel, I don'd know but I haff some off dose anxiety to get rich, vonce in a vile," Fritz admitted.

"Well, sir, I can tell you just how you can do it the easiest, if you will stroll upon the beach with me."

Accordingly Fritz arose, and sauntered down to the beach with this eccentric Leadvillian, whoever he might prove to be.

"Now, I suppose you'd like to know what I'm mad at," the old gent began, pushing his gold-headed cane into the sand, as they strolled along. "Well, before I tell you, I want to know who you are, and what your business is?"

"My name vos Fritz Snyder, und I vas vot you might call a detective—or, dot is, I vas trying my luck at der pizness."

"Indeed? Then perhaps it is well I have met you, for I have a case, and if you can win that case, you can also win five thousand dollars. How does that strike you?"

"It hits me right vere I liff, ven I ish at home," Fritz grinned. "Yoost you give me der p'int, und I'm your bologna, you can bet a half-dollar on dot five t'ousand-dollar job. Vot's der lay—suicides, murder, sdole somedings, or run away mit anodder vife's veller?"

[24]

"Neither. A girl has run away from her home, and is wanted—five thousand dollars' worth. She is my daughter, and is a somnambulist, and consequently of unsound mind, at times. She frequently goes into a trance, and remains thus for weeks at a time, eating and drinking naturally enough, but knowing nothing what she has been doing, when she awakens—though to outward appearance, she is awake, when in this trance, but not in her right mind. I have consulted eminent physicians, but they pronounce her case incurable, and say she will some day die in one of these trances."

Here the man from Leadville grew pathetic in his story, and wiped a tear from his eye; but finally went on:

"Well, as you may imagine, I have had a deal of trouble with her, for in her state of trance she has often robbed me of sums of money. And wandered off, too, sometimes; but this last blow has been the most severe. It came to my knowledge that she had become the prey of an unprincipled Eastern rascal. He had met her during her somnambulist wanderings, and prejudiced her against me, and caused her to rob not only me but others, and surrender the stolen booty to him. On learning this, myself and neighbors formed into a vigilance committee to hunt the rascal down, but he took to his heels, and fled Eastward. A few days later, my poor child turned up missing, and with her the sum of twenty thousand dollars, which had been paid me from the sale of a mine, and which I had lodged in my safe for safe keeping until I could deposit it, the next day!"

[25]

"Twenty t'ousand—so much ash dot?"

"Yes—a big sum, and likewise nearly all the money I then possessed. I immediately took up the trail, but egad! 'twas no use. The girl is sharper than lightning, and eluded me at every turn. I found that her destination was Eastward—doubtless to join her evil genius—and so I telegraphed to Chicago and St. Louis for the detectives to look out, and intercept her, if possible. But all to no avail. She was seen in those places, but owing to some irregularity beyond my comprehension,

was not captured. When I arrived in Chicago, I found that she had two days before left the city, Eastward bound. I trailed her to Philadelphia, and there lost all track of her. Thinking quite likely she would come to this summer resort, I came on, to-day, in hopes of striking the trail, but all to no avail. I have as yet heard of no clew to her whereabouts."

[26]

"Vel, dot ish purdy bad," Fritz assented. "Vot ish your name?"

"My name is Thornton—I am a mining speculator from Leadville, Colorado."

"Und your daughter's name vos—?"

"Madge. She is a pretty young maiden, aged eighteen, and left her home very well dressed."

"Und der feller vot vas pocketing der money—vot vos his name?"

"It is hard to guess what his true name was. At Leadville he was called Pirate Johnson—at Pueblo he was known as Griffith Gregg."

"Gregg—Gregg?" Fritz said, meditatively. "I am on the look-out for a man by that name. But my man is a smuggler."

"This villain may be connected with any nefarious piece of rascality. If I only had him here one or the other of us would get laid out—that is as good as sworn to. God only knows what perils my poor child will pass through before I succeed in finding her, if I ever do."

[27]

"Vel, I reckon ve can find her, uff der ish such a t'ing in der dictionary," Fritz asserted.

He then went on to relate the particulars of his assisting the lady on the boat, and of the marriage in the cave, which excited Mr. Thornton greatly.

"By Heaven! I see through it all! Madge Thurston is no more or less than my daughter, and she has wedded this rascal, Atkins, who is one and the same person who was the Gregg or Johnson out West. God forbid that my child is married to such a wretch. Describe him."

Fritz obeyed, giving a description according as he remembered the bridegroom—also of the man who took Madge Thurston from the hotel.

"The latter was undoubtedly Gregg," the speculator declared, "and the other also, was, it is likely, disguised for the occasion, with a false beard. Now, Fritz, I want you to help me find my child, and break the neck of this rascal, and you shall have for reward the sum I promised you. We'll search this world high and dry but what we'll recover my child. Come, let's seek a conveyance to take us to the cave."

They accordingly went back to the Hotel Brighton, ate dinner, and afterward secured a carriage and set out for the scene of the strange wedding the night before.

[28]

And thus Fritz entered into a five-thousand-dollar chase, which was destined to lead him into more adventures than he had yet experienced.

[29]

CHAPTER III.

THE BLUFF HOUSE.

In due time they arrived at the cave, where the ceremony of the previous night had taken place, but a thorough search of the cavernous wash-out failed to yield any tidings of the romantic lovers.

"Pshaw! there's no use of further search in this direction; they have long ere this set out for some other portion of the country, and we are wasting time in tarrying here."

"Mebbe dot ish so, but I dink dey vas go on up der coast, instead off cum pack by Atlantic City."

"Not impossible. In that case, it will be our best lead to go back to Atlantic, take the cars to Philadelphia, and strike for some sea-coast point ahead of them."

"Dot would pe a purty good idea vor you, but I t'ink better I remain on der coast stardting vrom here, und follow der trail in der rear. I'll bet a half-dollar I find 'em first, afore you do."

[30]

"Very well. It shall be as you deem best. I will leave you here and join you, or rather be there to meet you, when you reach Long Branch. If nothing results in our favor by that time I'll decide what is the next best course to pursue. Here is a hundred dollars, toward defraying your expenses. If you need more, telegraph to Jim Thornton at the Chalfonte, Long Branch, and I'll remit."

And placing the sum of money in Fritz's possession, he soon after took his departure.

After he had gone, Fritz sat down on a rock in the mouth of the cave, which overlooked the ocean, and gazed thoughtfully out upon the sunlit waters.

"Vel, here I vas—but der next question ish, vere vas I?" he soliloquized. "I haff undertaken a job mitout any bases vor a start-off. I kinder vish Rebecca vas here, too—but ash vishin' don'd vas do some good, pizness is der next consideration."

Night was not far distant, but he resolved to continue on up the coast in hopes of finding a

fisherman's house, where he could obtain food and lodging.

He accordingly left the cave and continued his journey. He soon came to a level stretch of beach again, and followed its northward course for a number of miles—until sunset, when he found himself as far from any human habitation as he had in the start. [31]

He accordingly sought a grassy spot, back from the beach, and lay down to rest.

Arising early the next morning, he struck out once more on his journey, feeling decidedly anxious to find some kind of a human habitation, as he was very hungry.

He soon spied a farm-house, inland from the beach, and made for it in double-quick time.

A gruff-looking man sat upon the front veranda, as he entered the well-kept yard, and eyed him with an expression of suspicion.

"Well, what d'ye want, young man?" he demanded, sourly.

"Grub—somedings to eat," Fritz replied, spiritedly. "I vas hungry like ash a sucker after a hard winter."

"Get out! I don't want no tramps about here. Clear, I say, or I'll set the dog on you," the farmer growled, stamping on the veranda with his cane.

"But, I don'd vas no tramp, nor I don'd vas skeardt at der dogs!" Fritz replied. "I wants some preakfast, und ish able to pay vor id like a shendleman." [32]

"Go to a tavern, then. I don't keep no puttin'-up place."

"But I don'd find some tavern, und I ain'd going no furder ondil I get somedings to eat. So trot oud der best vot you haff, und I pay for 'em."

"Didn't I tell you, you couldn't get something to eat here?" the man cried, getting exasperated. Then he began whistling for the dog. "I'll show you who runs this place."

"All right! Fetch oud der canine," Fritz grinned, perching himself on the fence, and taking a pistol from his pocket. "I yoost ash leave haff dog steak ash peef stew. Anydings to fill up ven a veller vas hungry."

"What! how dare you, sir! I'll have you arrested for carrying concealed weapons, you scamp!"

"Den I haff you arrested vor causing cannibalism, py not giffin' a veller somedings to eat. Come, now, mister; yoost set oud der vittles und der von't pe no droubles; otherwise, der may be an exposure off somedings!"

The farmer started at Fritz's unmeaning declaration, and giving him a swift, startled glance, arose and entered the house.

Fritz noticed what effect his thoughtless shot had had, and gave vent to a low, peculiar whistle, denotive of surprise. [33]

"Hello! vot ish dose I've done?" he mused. "I give der old chap a sour grape, dot time, all of which proves dot he is 'fraid off der exposure off somedings, und don'd vas got a clear conscience. Vel, dot ish purdy goot, too. Von t'ing leads to anodder—mebbe I vil discover somedings else. Anyhow, I'm going to stay right here undil I gets somedings to eat, und I reckon der old man vil fetch or send id."

Nor was he wrong in his reckoning, for shortly afterward a plump and pretty maid brought him out a tray of victuals that looked most tempting.

There was bread and butter, cold meat, cake, pie, apples, and a bowl of rich milk. No wonder Fritz's eyes sparkled with satisfaction, as he sat down upon the carriage-block, and received the offering.

"I thank you more ash a t'ousand times," he said. "Der old man didn't vas goin' to give me somedings, but I told him I would expose him, und dot fixed him. Vot's der old crab's name, young lady?"

The girl stared.

"Mr. Sample, do you mean?" she asked, in surprise. [34]

"Yes, I reckon dot's der one—der old vinegar-barrel vot yoost sot on der veranda. So his name vas Sample, eh? If he vas a sample off der neighbors around here, I dinks I stop no more. He vas got a segret, don'd he?"

"How should I know, sir?"

"Oh! vel, I didn't know but you might haff heard somedings."

"If I had, I don't believe I should confess it to you," the maid retorted. "When you get through eating leave the server on the block."

"But, hold on—you ain'd going?"

"Yes."

"But vait aw'ile! I say no. I vant to ask you some questions."

"What?"

"Vel, one t'ing—ish der a town somevere's near, on der coast?"

"Yes, several."

"Vot one is der nearest?"

"Forsyth Landing."

"Vot is der population?"

"Four people."

"Shimmy dunder! So mooch ash dot? Any old maids among der lot?"

"Nary a maid!"

"Vel, dot's all. Much obliged."

After she had departed, Fritz finished his meal, and then resumed his tramp along the lonely beach.

Half an hour brought him to the landing, but he did not pause.

Two rough-looking old sea-dogs were lounging outside a sort of a hut, but their appearance did not inspire Fritz with any desire to cultivate their acquaintance.

About sunset he arrived at a far prettier spot than he had yet encountered.

A great bluff of land rolled up to an abrupt and precipitous ending at the ocean's edge.

In high tide it would be impossible to walk along the beach at the base of the bluff, owing to the depth of water, while at low tide the beach was quite bare.

The evening tide was rolling in close to the base of the cliff, when Fritz reached it, and so he paused and took a reconnoissance.

Far up on the top of the bluff he saw a large, rambling, old house, in a grove of trees, but whether it was deserted or not, he could not tell.

It looked so grim in the weird sunset light, and so isolated in its lone watch by the sea that one might easily have fancied it an abode of spooks, and their like.

"I s'pect dot I'll haff to climb up und go around that bluff," Fritz muttered, not at all liking the idea. "Uff a veller vas to try und wade along der front, he'd like ash not get drowned, und dot vould pe a duyfel off a fix. I wonder ef der folks who lif up yonder ar' samples off dot Sample I met dis morning? Looks like ash uff it might be a ghost factory."

He was considering what was best to do, when he felt a tap upon his shoulder, and wheeled about with a nervous start.

Before him stood a ragged, frowsy-haired, bare-footed girl, some sixteen or seventeen years of age—a girl with a well-rounded figure of but medium stature, and a face at once peculiar and attractive, from the sparkle of its eyes, the broad grin of its mouth, and the amount of dirt gathered about it.

She had evidently but recently emerged from the water, for her long black hair as well as her wet garments were dripping with drops which the dying sunlight transformed into diamonds.

"Ha! ha! ha!" she laughed, putting her pretty arms akimbo, and staring hard at Fritz. "Don't I look silly, though?"

"Vel, I don'd know apoud dot. I dink der abblication uff some water mit your face vould make you look petter ash vot you are now!" Fritz answered, somewhat puzzled.

"Water! ha! ha! I just came out of the water. But oh! I'm so silly—that's what everybody says, and I guess it must be so; anyhow, they call me Silly Sue. Was you ever silly, boss?"

"Vel, I don'd vas know so mooch apoud dot, vedder I vas or not," Fritz replied, with a doubtful grin. "Do I look silly?"

"Oh! lordy! you are the silliest-looking goose I ever saw. I never saw a Yankee but what he was silly."

"But I don'd vas be a Yankee!"

"Get out! Don't dispute me! I know just who and what you are. You are Neptune, come up from the bottom of the sea."

"You lie like dunder!" Fritz retorted, backing up, and beginning to get considerably alarmed, for he began to suspect that she was crazy. "I vasn't no Neptune at all—no von but Fritz Snyder. Id's a vonder you don'd call me Joner, vot swallered de valebone."

"Nop! you're Neptune. Do you see the house up yonder?"

"Vel, yes; vot off it?"

"Oh! that's a high old roost. Ghosts and skeletons perch up there after dark and grin and rattle their bones at you. They don't do it to me, because I feed 'em snuff. Ha! ha! can you snuff the silly part of that outrageous gag? Say, boss, where you going, ef it ain't askin' too much?"

"Vel, I don'd know dot myself."

"Don't know where you're going?"

"No; I vas huntin' vor somebody."

"Oho! so am I! I was huntin' for some one, when I discovered something, and they called me silly because I refused to tell what. Well, good-day; swim over to England when you want to see me again."

Then, with a peal of elfish laughter, she ran and sprung into the water, and swam around the base of the cliff out of sight.

"I'll pet a half-dollar dot gal vas drunk or crazy, von or der odder, und der pest t'ing vor me to do is shlip away vile I can!" Fritz ejaculated.

To think was to act with him, and he accordingly set out clambering up the steep side of the bluff. In due time he reached the top and found a level spot of a couple of acres extent, in the center of which the house was situated, surrounded by sentinel rows of sighing hemlocks. A general aspect of desolation was perceptible on every hand, showing the premises to be untenanted.

The garden was grown up with rank weeds and the house weather-worn and old, some of the

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shutters hanging by one hinge.

It was a large structure of many queer gables, wings and projections, and fronted upon a road which had been used to communicate with some thoroughfare further inland.

"Dot looks like ash uff it vas going to rain," Fritz muttered, gazing at an ominous bank of clouds that was gathering in the west. "I dink maybe I petter sday in der old house till morning, uff I und der ghosts can agree. I don'd vas much affraid off ghosts, anyhow."

And he evidently was not, for he boldly entered the house by the creaking front-door and closed the door behind him.

When the clouds had overspread the sky in an inky mass, and darkness had set in around the gloomy edifice, two black-whiskered men came along and stopped at the mansion.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE GHASTLY RELIC.

Meantime Fritz had been in the old rookery some time prior to the arrival of the bearded men.

No sooner had he entered the large hall, and closed the door behind him, than he felt a sort of dread of something, he knew not what. There was a damp, musty, deathly smell about the place that he did not quite like.

"I don'd know vedder I vas afraid of ghosts or not," he soliloquized, pausing and gazing around him. "It looks ash uff dis might be a blace vere dey manufacture ghost shows; but somebody has liffed here vonce upon a time."

The carpet yet remained upon the floor of the long hall, and also upon the staircase which led to the upper floor. There was also a large picture hung upon the wall.

Passing along the hall, Fritz tried each of the doors which opened off from it, but in each instance he found them locked, and was unable to effect an entrance.

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"Vel, dot looks like ash uff nopody vas to home," he muttered. "I'll try der upstairs part, und if I don'd haff no better success, I vil stay out mit der hall."

He accordingly ascended the hall staircase, and proceeded to take a tour of the upper part of the rambling old structure.

Here the doors were all locked, with one exception, and this had evidently been left as locked, the bolt being turned, but the door not having been tightly closed, the bolt failed to enter the socket.

Opening this door, Fritz entered, and found himself in a large furnished apartment, there being a carpet, old and moth-eaten, upon the floor; several pieces of stuffed furniture, which had also been victims of moth and worm, and a large round oaken table in the center of the room.

And over this, suspended by a cord, which was fastened to the ceiling, was an object which caused Fritz to utter a grunt of startled alarm.

It was a man's head, cut from the body at the throat, and held in suspension by a cord fastened to the long hair.

The head had probably hung there for a year or so, for the flesh had dried down upon the bones. The eyes, however, retained their glassy stare, the teeth showed to ghastly advantage, and the heavy black mustache and goatee bristled ferociously.

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Fritz gave a startled cry, and his hair fairly raised on end, as he beheld the strange spectacle, but the longer he stared at it, the less his alarm, and he finally advanced into the room.

"By shimminy—I vas skeardt like ash der duyfel at first, put now I don'd vas a bit afraid. Somepody hang dot up there yoost for a scare-crow. Uff der ghosts vas to see it, I'll bet a half-dollar dey vould run."

Just then there was a flash of lightning and a heavy roll of thunder, which caused Fritz to start, and give a nervous glance at the swinging head.

"I don'd quite vas like id here," he muttered, uneasily. "I'd makes a veller t'ink he's goin' der get smashed up effery minute. I vonder vot dey keep up there?" and his eyes rested upon an aperture in the ceiling, such as is often provided in houses as a means of reaching the roof. A stout rope hung down through this opening to the floor of the room, and had evidently been used to climb up into the attic.

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Fritz was just contemplating it, when a sound of footsteps in the hall outside aroused him to quicker thoughts.

"I'll bet a half-dollar it's a ghost comin'," he gasped, the tendency of his hair being again decidedly upward. "But, it was a cold day ven dey scalb me mit der tommyhawk, ash long ash I can climb."

Accordingly, up the rope he went, hand-over-hand, with the agility of a monkey, and soon gained

the attic immediately above the chamber.

It was a dark, ill-smelling place, and so far as Fritz could see, used for no particular purpose whatever.

Ensconcing himself directly beside the aperture through which he had come up, Fritz prepared to await developments.

He was not a little anxious to know who the new-comer was—whether a human or spiritual being, for if the latter, he had a curiosity to inspect it.

In a few moments the door opened and a strapping Irishman stalked into the chamber, a lank, lean specimen of humanity, with a Killkenny face, red hair, a fringe of reddish beard under his lower jaw, extending to his ears, and attired in brogans, short pantaloons, and a blue soldier coat, with a grimy clay pipe in his mouth, and battered plug hat on his head. Of the "rale old" race of Irishmen, he was certainly a good specimen. [44]

"Arrah! sure it's divil one room but they have locked, an' a sorry place it is, too, for a dacent Irish gintlemon—an the son of a duke at that! Bad 'cess to sich a counthry, onny-how. It's wurruk like the divil for a bit of grub, and when a mon gits out ov wurruk sure stomick has to pay for it. If yez ax a mon will he be afther givin' yez a nip off bread, he tell yez, 'Arrah! off wid ye, ye murdtherin' tromp, or I'll sick tha purrup on yez!' bedad."

"I'll yoost pet half-dollar der Irishman vas pin stoppin' mit Samples!" Fritz muttered, with a grin, taking a peep at the son of Erin. "He vas hungry like as vot I vas. Vonder off he haff discovered der skelegon, yet avile."

The Hibernian had not, evidently, for he was perched composedly beneath the suspended head.

"Sorry a place this is for the son of a duke," he went on muttering. "Sure, it looks as if the ould divil himself had been here. Guess this property would be sellin' moighty cheap, tha while. Ugh!" as a heavy clap of thunder caused the house to shake from stem to stern, "a sorry wild night it's a-goin' to be, an' it's meself that's wishin' I was back forninst the furdther side av the big puddle." [45]

"Ha! ha!" laughed Fritz, throwing his voice to the farther side of the room.

"Yis, ha! ha! bad 'cess to the loikes av yez, whoever ye may be!" the Irishman cried, fiercely, gazing in vain around the apartment, in search of the author of the laugh.

"Ho! ho! itchy, dirdty Irish!" Fritz caused a different voice to say, in a still opposite part of the room.

"No, I'm divil a wan av the likes!" the son of Erin cried, getting angry. "Bad luck to yez! ef I gits me hands on yez, it's a divil's own trouncin' you'll get, ontirely. I'll have yez know my name is Patrick Grogan, an' it's the dacent, gintlemonly son av a duke and a duchess I am, bedad."

"A son off a gun, more likely. Look out, you bloody Irish, or I vil spit on you!" Fritz caused the suspended head to say, in a hoarse, gurgling voice.

"Aha! it's spittin' on me yez'll be, eh?" the Hibernian cried, leaping from his seat, his walking-stick in hand—a formidable piece of real thorn. "Oh! you black-livered omadhaun, if I catch yez, *won't* I tache yez to be dacent and civil to a gintlemon!" [46]

Then, chancing to glance upward, he saw for the first the swinging head, and in utter horror dropped upon his knees and raised his hands upward in supplication.

"Oh, holy Virgin Mary, protect me!" he howled, his terrified gaze glued upon the unsightly object. "Oh, murdtherin Maria! och, bad luck! fot have I done, Mr. Divil? shure it's nary a thing wrong I've did, nor sthalin' I've never been guilty of!"

"You vas von son-off-a-sea-cook!" came from the head.

"Yis—och, sure I'se anything yez wants, Mr. Divil! only don't be afther hurtin' the loikes av me!"

"Then arise, dirdty Irish, and climb into the attic, before the spirits come to wrap their icy clutches around you!"

"Sure, I'll be afther goin'," Pat cried, and he did go—not up the rope, but out of the room, as fast as he could go.

Nor did he pause until outside of the house, as Fritz could tell by the sound of his rapidly retreating footsteps. [47]

"Vel, dot vas purdy goot fun," Fritz muttered with a grin. "I dink I vil wait dil some vone else comes."

He had not long to wait before footsteps sounded once more, coming up the stairs, just as the storm broke loose outside, and torrents of rain poured down upon the roof, while the thunder rumbled ominously.

Presently two men entered, one carrying a lantern, for it was now quite dark.

Both were roughly dressed and brutal-looking fellows, wearing heavy black beards.

"Humph!" was Fritz's mental comment, as he beheld them. "I'll bet a half-dollar I smells von mice. Uff I haff not made a big mistake, I dinks I haff stumbled right inder the smugglers' den vot I am looking for."

It was only a sudden suspicion, to be sure; nevertheless it struck him very forcibly.

One of the men set the lantern upon the table, and then perched himself beside it, while the other sat down upon a chair and gazed speculatively at the ghastly object which hung suspended from the ceiling.

"I wonder how long afore the rest o' ther boys will be here," he growled.

"Dunno," the other fellow replied. "Hope they'll come afore long and settle the matter, so that [48]

we'll know what we've got to do."

"How d'ye think it's going?"

"Dunno. Reckon the majority'll be ag'in' the poor cuss."

"I'm thinkin' that way, too. I kinder hope not, though, for I don't fancy the job."

"Pshaw! you're chicken-hearted, without cause. He's never made love to you."

"Darn it, no; but he's too fine a specimen of manhood to feed to the sharks."

"Pooh! Many's the one better'n he wot's enriched the bottom o' the sea. I wonder who the Irishman was, we met at the front?"

"Some tramp, I allow, who'd sought a night's shelter here, and got skeered at our friend Bill," and he glanced at the swinging head with a laugh. "Hello! I say, Bill, how are you getting along in your new place o' residence?"

"First-rate!" apparently answered the grinning head, followed by a ghostly sort of a gurgling laugh.

"Jehosaphat!" cried the questioner, leaping to his feet. "Thunder and lightning! Did ye hear that, Hand?"

"Waal, I should murmur," Hank grunted, leaving the table with a spring, and landing near the door. "What the devil's the matter?"

"Cussed ef the cadaver o' Bill Budge didn't speak," the first man cried.

"Git out! Budge has bin dead over a year; how in thunder could he speak?"

"Mebbe his spirit hes come back inter his head."

"Pooh! impossible! It was our fancy; we didn't hear nothin'," Hank growled, edging a little nearer to the door.

"You're a liar!" thundered a voice, seeming to come directly from between the pearly teeth of the suspended head, and to make matters worse, the head began to swing slowly to and fro.

With howls and curses, the two masked men made the hastiest kind of an exit from the room and down the stairs, while Fritz in the attic was convulsed with laughter.

"Dot was better as half-a-dozen suppers, py shimminy!" he snorted, holding his sides.

All was now quiet for some time, except for the howling of the storm without.

But, finally, footsteps were again heard, and eight men, all masked but one, filed into the room.

The eighth man was a young man, of prepossessing appearance, unmasked, and had his hands bound behind his back.

He was better dressed than his grim captors, and there was a fearless, cool expression upon his face, that at once won Fritz's admiration.

"Ha! Hank and Jim have been here already, and gone!" a tall, broad-shouldered member of the party said. "They'll be back directly, no doubt. And now, Hal Hartly, we will proceed to review your case, and dispose of it according to the decision of the majority."

"Go ahead, captain!" the prisoner replied, calmly. "I am as well prepared now, as I shall be."

CHAPTER V.

BILL BUDGE'S CONVERSATION.

To Fritz, the scene below of course began to grow more interesting.

"Dot veller vas goin' to pe tried for somedings," he muttered, "und vot ish more, uff der verdict don't vas in his favor, he vas goin' der git sp'iled."

Young Hartly if his thoughts were in the same channel as those of the watcher, didn't appear very much troubled about the matter, for he perched himself upon the table, while the six jurors sat in a semicircle facing him, and the captain a little to one side.

"Well, sir, what have you to say, Hartly, in regard to this suspicion which has arisen against you—that you are a traitor to our cause?"

"Nothing, sir, except that whoever started the suspicion, is a liar and a coward!" was the retort.

"Then, you deny that you have ever betrayed the existence of this band, outside of its own membership?"

"I do most emphatically. What assurance have you, that any one has betrayed you?"

"Is it not ample proof, when strange men haunt this vicinity, and haunt the members to their very doors? These law-sharks, or detectives, only wait for some disclosure, to spring their traps on me and my faithful followers."

"I am not to blame. Though forced into service against my will, and made to swear the oath of allegiance, rather than lose my life, I have kept such secrets as came into my possession. I

believe I know who has excited the suspicious feeling against me."

"Well, sir, who?"

"Your rascally son, for one—your jealous daughter, for another," Hartly replied, shrugging his shoulders with a contemptuous laugh.

"How dare you term my son rascally, sir, and accuse my child of jealousy?"

"Because the boy is as unprincipled a villain as yourself, and as for your daughter, when she found that I did not court her favor, she at once turned against me. I despise both your son and your daughter, Captain Gregg, and that is all I have to say, except that I am not guilty of the charge preferred against me."

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"That remains to be told by the jury. You see the head of Bill Budge, just above you, Hartly? He was caught in an intended act of treachery, and you see his end. If Bill could speak, he'd tell you that the fate of the traitor is hard."

"You're a cussed liar!" Budge's suspended remnant seemed to say, in a deep, hoarse voice.

The captain and the jury uttered each a startled oath, and gazed at the offending head in astonishment.

"Who called me a liar?" Gregg demanded, fiercely. "By the gods, I thought it was Budge's lips that uttered those words."

"So it was!" the head seemed to say; then there was a gurgling sort of laugh, and the head shook, perceptibly.

"Ten thousand furies!" Gregg yelled, and hastily wrenching open the door, he made a hasty exit from the room, followed by the jurors—nor did they stop, short of the bottom of the stairs.

Hartly did not leave the room, but dismounting from his perch upon the table, walked off a few paces to where he could get a good look at Budge's unfortunate pate.

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"Something deuced funny, here, I'm blowed if there ain't!" he soliloquized, apparently quite composed. "It's the first time I have ever heard dead men talk. I say, Budge, how's the temperature up your way?"

"Two t'ousand degrees above blood heat," seemed to issue from between the gleaming teeth.

"Humph! pretty warm, that, I must admit," Hartly said, looking still more puzzled.

Fritz, while perpetrating the ventriloquism, was also listening and planning.

"Dot veller Hartly is der very chap to helb me oud mit my scheme," he muttered, "und ve must escape from here, pefore der smugglers return."

Accordingly he slid down the rope into the room below.

Hartly looked surprised.

"Who the deuce are you?" he demanded, stepping back a pace.

"Fritz Snyder, detective," Fritz replied. "I come here on pizness—vot for, you can easily guess. I vant you to helb me oud mit it, und I vil see dot you haff your liberty."

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"Ha! ha! that's your game, is it? Well, my friend, I'd like to do it, first-rate, but I can not oblige you."

"Vy not?"

"Because I swore allegiance to the cause you would have me betray, and it never shall be said that Hal Hartly was not a man of his word!"

"But I heard you say dot you vas forced inder der pizness."

"So I was, against my will, but that does not lessen the obligations of my oath. While I live, I shall adhere to my sworn promise."

"You vas foolish—you don'd vil get any credit for your resolve. Yoost ash like ash not you will pe killed, on der suspicion dot's already against you."

"Perhaps. If so, I shall submit, knowing I have been innocent of breaking my word."

"Pshaw! dis vos all nonsense! You don'd vas vant to die no more ash any odder man. Let me cut der bonds vot fastens your arm, und ve vill climb up to der attic und escape vrom der roof to some place where we vil pe safe, undil we can make arrangements to break oop dis smugglers' league."

"Nothing would please me more, but owing to my oath, I must positively refuse to do anything of the kind," Hartly persisted, firmly. "I admire your proposed attempt, and while I shall do nothing to interrupt it, I can not conscientiously do anything to help it along. Can you enlighten me any as to the mystery of this head, which, though not possessed of life, yet uses its voice so naturally?"

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"I dells you noddings apoud it," Fritz replied, shaking his head. "Hark!"

"Yes! I hear it. It is Gregg and the boys coming back. Quick! or you will be seen!"

Fritz made haste to shin up the rope to the garret once more, and had barely succeeded in so doing when the smugglers, headed by Captain Gregg, once more entered the room.

They did not come boldly in, but thrust their heads in and took a look around first.

Seeing that no harm had come to Hartly, they then ventured in.

"Ha! ha! you're brave fellows, ain't you?" he laughed. "I didn't cut tail and run, although I have not even the use of my hands."

"You're cussed brave, all at once!" Gregg growled, evidently not liking the taunt. "Did that thing speak again?" with a wry glance at the guiltless pate of the departed Budge.

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"Of course. I've had quite a chat with William," Hartly replied. "He says he's in a very warm latitude at present, and so he's come back spiritually for a short cooling off!"

Gregg uttered an oath.

"Pooh! I don't believe such bosh."

"But it's a fact, nevertheless. Budge says they've got a little corner left up in his country for you, too, when you get ready to emigrate, which will be mighty soon, judging by the active preparations that are being made to receive you, such as gathering kindling wood, making matches, and the like."

"Curse you, they'll git you first!" the smuggler said, with vicious emphasis. "Go ahead, boys, an' tell him the decision you've made."

"Well, we've concluded that Hal Hartly is a traitor to our cause, and for the sake of protection it will be necessary to feed him to the fishes!" one of the jurors said. "Eh, ain't that the ticket, boys!"

A grunt of assent from the others was the answer.

"Then it shall be so," Captain Gregg ordered. "I am sorry for you, Hartly, but treachery merits death, as you were informed when you joined. As an organization which must exist in secrecy, we are forced to adopt harsh rules. Your companions have carefully weighed all the evidence, and have decided that the safety of the organization demands your death. As you have sown, so shall you reap."

"Do you mean this, Captain Gregg?"

"I do, sir, emphatically."

"Then you shall live to repent ever having pronounced my doom. Henceforth I shall not consider my oath of allegiance obligatory, as I have hitherto done. I'll show you what harm I can do your vile organization."

"But you shall have no chance. Jim Hovel and his brother have already consented to sink you to the bottom of the Atlantic for a stated sum, and thus rid us of you effectually. They are waiting below for you, as it is a safe night for such work. If you have any prayers to make, you had better make the best use of your time."

"I'll suit myself about that, you villain!"

"Numbers two and three, take the prisoner down-stairs!" the captain ordered.

Two of the smugglers seized hold of poor Hartly, and led him from the room.

Up in the attic. Fritz was in a predicament. The majority of the smugglers yet remained in the room below, and he could not get out of the house in that way, as was his desire, to make an attempt if possible to rescue Hal Hartly.

The only course left for him was to escape through a trap-door onto the roof, and trust to luck in getting to the ground from there.

"Dot veller vas von big fool for not acceptin' my advice," he mused, as he fumbled cautiously around in the darkness. "Yoost like ash not dey vil pe gone off mit him, ven I git down dere, und den he vil pe a goner, sure ash der dickens."

It required several minutes to find the trap in the roof, and it was no slight job to displace it.

When he had accomplished this much, however, it was but a moment's work to clamber out upon the roof in the pouring rain and replace the door.

"Py shimminy, dot vas a hard storm," he soliloquized. "Der ocean grunts as uff she vas got der dispeppersy. Now der next t'ing ish somedings else. Der roof vas slippery ash von soap ladle, und first I know der vil pe a dead Dutchmon spilled someveres over t'e ground."

That portion of the main roof of the building was quite steep, and the eaves were at least twenty-five feet from the ground.

Not fancying the idea of a drop of that distance, the young detective crawled to the ridge, to reconnoiter.

On the other side of the ridge, the roof sloped down to meet a gable, from where the gable's roof took another descent, so as to bring the eaves about seven feet nearer to the ground.

Aside from this there was no possible way of reaching *terra firma*.

"Eighteen feet! I don'd know vedda I can stand dot or no. I must try it, however, or Hal Hartly vas a dead codfish sure."

Using extreme caution, he slid from one ridge to the other, and then from that to the eaves, from where he was to drop.

"Vel, here's der blace vere I don'd vas so much tickled. But pizness vas pizness, und a veller don'd vas can rise in der vorld vidout dropping sometimes; so here goes!" he muttered.

And clinging to the eaves for a second, he let himself drop.

Down—down he went, with great velocity, and finally struck upon something softer than mother earth, from which he tumbled end over end to the ground.

The following instant a wild, unearthly howl rent the night.

"Och! murther—murther!" shrieked a man's voice; "I'm kilt! I'm kilt! Och! Holy Vargin Mary save me!"

It was the Irishman's voice. It was upon him that Fritz had first alighted, and he was probably badly jarred up, for he continued to hop around and yell at the top of his voice.

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To make matters worse, the door of the house opened, and Gregg and his followers came pouring out.

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CHAPTER VI.

ON THE SCENT.

Fritz had been stunned a little, even after tumbling off from the yelping Irishman; still, he had sense enough to struggle to his feet on seeing the smugglers rush from the building.

"Shut oop!" he cried, addressing Grogan. "The smugglers are upon us! Draw your wippons, if you have any, and fire!"

"Dom tha wippons!" Grogan howled, refusing to hear to reason. "Och! holy Vargin! it's kilt sure I am ontirely!"

"Helloo! what the devil is the matter here?" the captain shouted, waving his lantern on high. "Who is it that's making all this noise?"

"Spies—detectives!" suggested one of his companions. "Shoot 'em down!"

"Hurrah! Death to the spy!" cried a third, and then they made a rush forward and seized upon Pat, despite his lively use of his "bit o' buckthorn" on the defensive.

Perceiving that he was not seen, Fritz crawled softly away to a safe distance, and then paused to gaze back.

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The yelling had ceased in the vicinity of the house, and the lantern light had disappeared from view, leaving naught but blank darkness and the pouring rain, which came down monotonously but heavily.

"I'll bet a half-dollar dot they've choked der life oud off dot duke's son-off-a-gun," Fritz muttered, creeping under the cover of a dense tree. "I vonder off I proke any of his pones ven I lit on him. By shimminy! he must haff a gonstitution like a mule, or I'd 'a' smashed him all to sausage meat."

Evidently something was to pay, for, except the sound of the storm and the dashing of the ocean against the bluff, all was quiet. The smugglers had either killed Grogan on the spot or taken him back into the house with them.

And poor Hartly—what had become of him?

That was the question which troubled Fritz far more than the fate of the lean man from Kilkenny.

"He vas a gone-up goose now anyhow, und I don'd suppose id vil do some great deal off good to vorry apoud him, only I vish I could haff saved him," he mused.

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It was a wild night at the best, and Fritz heartily wished that he was back in Philadelphia, sitting in the old pawnbroker-shop, beside his girl, Rebecca.

Still, he would not willingly have given up what he had learned in reference to the smugglers' league for a good deal, and he was resolved to hang to the matter attentively, until he should be able to trip and trap the rogues and break up their existence as an organization.

Knowing of no other available shelter in the vicinity, he resolved to linger under the tree until the smugglers should leave the building, when he would once more take possession.

The night was well advanced, however, when he heard them leave in a body, and start off down the lonely road.

On first thought, he was tempted to follow them, but a cold blast of wind from off the ocean warned him that he was wet to the skin, and the best thing he could do would be to get under roof and dry off.

He accordingly went back into the deserted house, and sat down in the lower hall. Though not cowardly, he had no desire to keep further company with the grinning skull of the late lamented Budge, whoever he may have been.

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Rolling up one end of the old carpet he converted it into a sort of pillow, and lay down, out of the draft.

Sleep soon came to his relief, and he slept soundly until morning, when he was awakened by the sun shining in his face, through a rear hall window.

Rising, he went out-of-doors to reconnoiter, and consider what was best to do next.

It was a clear, glorious morning after the storm; the sun shone brightly, and a soft salt breeze blew off from the ocean, which was at once refreshing and invigorating.

But it was not this sort of refreshment that Fritz now yearned for. He had had nothing to eat since the previous morning, and was decidedly hungry and faint.

"Dose fellers don'd vas can live a good vays from here, vot I saw, last night," he mused, "but, ten to one uff I ask 'em for somedings to eat, dey bounce me oud."

He advanced to the northern edge of the bluff, and took a look in that direction.

To his surprise he saw, not more than a half mile away, a little village, nestling near the beach.

This village, for charity's sake, we will call Millburg, as that name will answer quite us well as any other.

There might have been a hundred buildings, all told, and it was evidently a fishing hamlet, as a number of small boats, and smacks, were drawn up along the beach.

Just outside the breakers, an ocean steamship, of small size and trim build, was anchored. Upon her sides was painted in large letters the word, "Countess."

"I don'd know petter I go down there, or not," Fritz muttered, gazing down upon the village. "I don'd vas know, neider, vich job I better look to, first—der smuggler pizness, or der girl pizness. For der latter I haff der bromise of five t'ousand dollars—for der former, I like ash not get paid off mit a proken head. Still I don'd vant to leave dis blace ondil I trip und trap der game, und turn id over to der law, for dis is der whole game, sure!"

After some deliberation he decided to go down to the village. The people would not offer him any molestation, probably, unless he gave them cause to suspect him, and he resolved to be constantly upon his guard.

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Descending from the bluff, he walked along the beach, and finally entered the little burg.

It was rather a rough-looking place, built up of weather-worn wooden shanties, a few stores, and a sort of tavern.

There were, however, two imposing residences, on opposite sides of the only street, which were built of stone, and set down in large shaded lawns.

Passing up the street, Fritz was the target for many curious glances of rough-looking men, who sat in their doorways, but, paying no attention to them, he entered the tavern and purchased his breakfast, to which he was able to do full justice.

Afterward he came out in the bar-room and sat down.

A half a dozen rough-looking fellows were lounging about, who, to judge from their looks, were in the habit of ingulfing more grog than was good for them.

Then the landlord, who kept a close watch over them, was the fattest specimen of manhood Fritz had seen; his girth was something enormous. He was not a villainous-looking man, like the rest, and this fact impressed Fritz more favorably than anything else he saw about the premises.

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During the forenoon a well-dressed, fine-looking man, with iron-gray hair and mustache, galloped up to the tavern on horseback. He looked as if he had been reared in luxury, for there was that haughtiness of mien that betokened the arrogant aristocrat.

"Good-morning, John," he said, as the tavern-keeper waddled to the door. "Will you send up a basket of champagne during the day, and a barrel of good ale—the champy for her ladyship, the countess, you know, and the ale for the villagers. Going to have a sort of a jollification at the lawn to-night, you know, in honor of the arrival of the countess, and want you all to turn out."

Then he galloped on, quite as airily as he had come.

"Who vas dot big-feelin' rooster?" Fritz asked, when John re-entered the tavern.

"That? Why, that's Honorable Granby Greyville," the fat man replied—"the rich haristocrat who owns most of the land hereabouts. A right big-feeling man, too, as you say."

"Granby Greyville, eh?" Fritz commented, under his breath. "Vel, dot ish funny. I thought sure dot was Captain Gregg, der smuggler, und I don'd vas so much foolished apoud it yet. I'll pet a half-dollar I find oud somedings pefore I leave der blace."

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Resolved to remain a few days in the village for the purpose of prospecting, Fritz made himself at home about the hotel.

One suspicion after another was gradually occurring to him, and he was not slow to give them a thorough consideration prior to putting them to test.

Of all things, he was desirous of attending the "jollification," as the horseman had termed it, with a view of seeing the countess, who, he learned, had lately arrived from England, in her own steamship, for a few weeks' stay upon the Atlantic coast, and a visit to her prospective husband, Greyville.

During the afternoon a man entered the tavern, who evidently had "blood in his eye." His whole appearance seemed to indicate that he was anxious to have a fight with some one, and was not particular who it was.

He was a large, raw-boned fellow, with great muscular development; his face was large, with a bristling stubble of black beard upon the lower portion; his eyes were dark and wild, his hair silvered with broad streaks of white, and worn in a shaggy, unkempt mass.

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His mouth was large, and his teeth projected beyond his lips, in a horrible manner.

His attire, too, was ragged and greasy, with clumsy, stogy boots upon his feet, and a dilapidated hat upon his head.

On entering the room, he paused and glared around him, as if in search of some one on whom to vent his wrath.

"Well, Bully Jake, what'll ye have!" the tavern-keeper demanded, with a frown, for the ruffian was evidently an unwelcome intruder.

"Waal, I don't keer ef I do take a drap o' likker!" the man growled, glaring around.

"You to blazes! I mean, what d'ye want here?" Fat John grunted.

"A fureigner—a fureigner! Ye know I'm death on 'em, an' thar can't none o' 'em can stay around

hyar, while I hev things *my way*."

"What foreigner is there here, now?"

"A Dutch cuss, blarst his eyes! Thar he sets," and he indicated Fritz who was tipped back in one corner. "Oh! but I'll go through him, though! I'll pulverize and sow him to the seven winds of the earth."

Then, with a tragic stride, he made for Fritz, pausing but a few paces away from him, and shaking his fist fairly in his face.

"You, look!" the ruffian cried. "D'ye know who I am?"

"Vel, I dinks I don'd vas haff made your acquaintance!" Fritz replied, retaining his seat, but on guard for an attack, if one was made.

"Ho! ho! I reckon not, an' ye'll wish ye never had, afore I git through with yer!" Bully Jake declared. "Behold in me, my furin rooster, Jake Jogagog, commonly known as Bully Jake, the Terror o' ther Coast. I'm a cyclone, I am. Then, I'm prime minister ter his honor, Granby Greyville, an' from him I hev orders to demolish every furin craft wot sots anchor in his domains. Therefore, ef ye wanter escape teetotal annihilation, I'd advise ye ter *git!* Ef ye ain't seen goin' in less'n two seconds, I'll stamp ye out o' existence."

"Vel, when I gits ready to go, den I vil go, und not pefore!" Fritz retorted. "Uff you makes me any droubles, I plack your eye for you!"

"Oh! ye wull, hey? Oh! snortin' walrusses an' white-haired whales!" roared the bully, and sprung savagely upon the young detective, as if bent on his certain destruction, Fritz clinched with him.

It was to be a struggle of brute strength now.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE STRUGGLE.

Both were strong, active men, Fritz in particular being well supplied with all the necessary muscle and agility of the prize-fighter, although he by no means looked as if he was an "ugly customer" to handle.

After clinching the two men soon tripped and fell to the floor, where the struggle literally began in all its meaning.

"Oh! I'll show ye how ther howlin' porpoise fights!" Bully Jake roared, endeavoring to get a bite at Fritz's nose. "I'll chaw ye all up like a dish o' hash!"

"Vil, you, dough!" Fritz cried, finally getting his hands free, and clinching them around the bully's throat tightly. "I'll pet yoost a half-dollar you von't do noddings off der kind," and now getting the ruffian under him he gradually shut off his wind.

"Hold on! hold on! no chokin'!—no chokin', I say; it's ag'in' ther moral rules o' fightin'!"

"I don'd vas see id dot vay," Fritz said. "Eider you vas got to ax my parding for assaulting me, or I vil choke off your breathe so you vil haff none to use."

"No choke, I say! Let me up, an' I'll fight ye accordin' ter book."

"Not a let oop!" was the young detective's reply. "Ven you come foolin' around mit der Dutchman you pet your life you get left. Apologize, I dells you, or I turns de throttle, und shuts der sdeam off your logermotiff. I mean pizness—no 'pology, no breathe. Vas you understand?"

The man began to wince as Fritz closed his terrible gripe.

"Oh, let me up, an' we'll call et squar'," the man gurgled.

"Ven you dells me 'I ax your humble parding'—den I let you up!"

"But I won't!"

"Den I vil squeeze your windpipe, so!"

"I ask your pardon. Oh! yes, I do. Thar, now, let me up!"

Fritz obeyed, and let the ruffian rise from the floor, but just as soon as he was on his feet Bully Jake drew a long knife.

"Oho! I didn't say what I'd do next!" he howled, brandishing the blade, threateningly. "I'll cut your cussed heart out now."

"Vil you, dough? Vel, I'll pet you yoost apout a half-dollar, on dot, I vil!" Fritz cried, drawing and cocking his revolver. "Now, you coome on, uff you vant to get der whole dop off your head plowed off. I can do der job vid greatest of pleasure."

The sight of the revolver caused the big loafer to pause.

"Ye wouldn't shoot, when I'm only in fun, would you?" he asked, incredulously.

"Well, just try me and see, dot's all," was the retort. "Your funniness vas entirely too t'in, mine

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friendt; I don'd vas like it. So I'll giff you one minnit der git oud. If you don'd vas gone py dot time, I vil shoot you so quicker ash I vould von leedle cat. One! Got ready, all der vile! Swi! High time you vas skinnin' oud! Three! Ven I hollers dot, if you don'd vas gone I spot you!"

"Then, tearfully and sadly, I must tear myself away from you," the ruffian declared, with a grimace, as he stalked toward the door, "I'll allow ye hold ther grip now, but thet ain't sayin' ye'll allus hold it."

Then he took his leave.

Fritz was not sorry. He did not want to hurt any one unless forced to, and yet was bound to defend himself.

Toward evening the loungers, one by one, quitted the tavern, until Fritz and Fat John were the only ones in the bar-room.

Then it was that the latter spoke.

"I say, young feller," he said, "you're a hextrordinary chap, and if it wouldn't be haskin' too much, I'd like to inquire what brings you here?"

"Vel, pizness, I dinks," Fritz replied, "und judgin' py der latest demonstrations, I vil haff lots off id."

"You had better look out sharp for Number One, I tell you, for though this ain't counted no hard town, they generally pitch onto a stranger and try to bulldoze him into leavin' by settin' Bully Jake onto him."

"I vas tumbled to dot already," Fritz replied; "but der virst one vot attempted it didn't make so much success."

"No; but that ain't saying you'll have as big luck next time. You see, his honor, Mr. Greyville, owns most of the property hereabouts, an' he's as big feeling as a duke, and won't allow no one around 'cept what bows to his will."

"Vel, ve vil see apoud dot," Fritz muttered. "I dinks dey don'd vas make mooch bulldozing me. I vant to ask you von question—don'd this man Greyville be Captain Gregg, der smuggler?"

The fat host of the Lion's Paw gave a start. The question was evidently something of a surprise to him.

"Why, no, of course not! What ever put such an idea into your head, young man? Gregg the smuggler is said to be one of the worst characters along the Atlantic coast, and at the same time, the most successful in his line of business. Greyville is a man who would scorn to stoop to *such* work; and, moreover, he is said to be immensely rich in ready cash, though his landed property is mortgaged for its full value."

Fritz accepted this explanation without reply, but his mind was but little changed in the matter.

"I dinks Gregg und Greyville vas one und der same parties," he muttered, "und shall not giff up dot opinion until I can haff furder proof von vay or der odder."

As soon as the gloaming of evening began to settle over the quiet little hamlet, he left the tavern, and sauntered down the street toward the Honorable Granby Greyville's residence, whither most of the villagers had already wended their way.

On arriving at the front of the handsome lawn, with its winding walks, large shade trees, beds of flowers, and attractive residence, Fritz paused to survey the scene that was spread out before him.

Here and there dotted about among the shade trees were tables spread with tempting viands, to which the villagers were freely helping themselves, and to the flowing pitchers of ale that were passed around by several of the village maidens.

A couple of Italians were making music upon violin and harp, which sounded weird and enchanting; children were playing and romping about the grounds; Chinese lanterns were strung about among the lower branches of the trees, and altogether it was a festive and attractive scene.

From his position outside the fence Fritz could see nothing of either Greyville or the alleged countess, and he resolved to enter the grounds for that purpose, which he accordingly did, and sauntered about leisurely, as if he had a perfect right there by invitation.

Although many curious glances were leveled at him, he paid no attention to them, and after walking around awhile, he leaned up against a tree and looked on, studying every face within the reach of his gaze.

Presently there was a shout among the assembled villagers, and upon this, the door of the mansion opened, and Mr. Greyville came forth upon the grounds, with the countess leaning upon his arm.

His honor, was attired in a suit of immaculate white duck, with a massive gold chain strung across his vest and a superb diamond pin upon his shirt front.

The countess was a Frenchwoman, of some three-and-thirty years, with a thin, angular face, bead-like black eyes, and hair to match, and a thin compressed mouth, which when she laughed showed two rows of pearly teeth. She also wore an abundance of paint and powder upon her face, and what with her rich attire of silk, lace, and diamonds, was a striking and peculiar-looking personage—a woman who looked crafty, and capable of mischief.

As soon as she and the Honorable Greyville advanced upon the lawn, the villagers arose from the tables, and the women courtesied low, while the men swung their hats and sent up a rousing cheer.

The countess and her escort then moved about here and there, with a pleasant word for all, and a

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bidding for them to continue their feast.

As they passed near where Fritz stood leaning against the tree, Greyville gave him a sharp, stern glance, and said:

"Ah! who are you, and what do you want here, sir?"

"Nothing in particular," Fritz replied, returning his stare, calmly. "I only see vot you vas haff a pic-nig, und I come in to look on."

"Then begone, sir, at once! I allow no loafers around here. Go, I say!" and then they passed on.

Fritz did not go, however, but retained his position, in defiance.

"Shorge Vashington made dis a free coundry, und I von'd go dil I gits ready," he muttered.

It was not long, however, before he was hastily approached by a man, and that man no less a person than the same flashily attired individual who had taken the young woman, Madge, away from the hotel, at Atlantic City!

"Hello! get out of this, you loafer!" he cried seizing Fritz by the shoulder, roughly. "How many times do you have to be told to go? The guv'nor said go—now, if you don't light out, I'll make your heels break your neck."

"Vil you, dough!" Fritz grinned, wrenching loose, and standing on the defensive. "Yoost you keep your hands off vrom me, Griffith Gregg, or I vil knock der whole top off your nose off."

"What! you vagabond! you compare me with the smuggler's son? I'll thump your skull for that piece of impudence."

And he was as good as his word, for, raising a stout cane he carried, he brought it heavily down upon the young detective's head.

For a moment Fritz was nearly stunned, but he quickly recovered, and sprung at his assailant, pluckily.

"Oh! you snoozer!" he cried, "I vil plack your eye mit plue, for dot."

And he did deal the honorable's son two severe whacks between the eyes, in rapid succession, which had the effect to land him on his back on the ground.

"Thump me on der head, vil you?" Fritz cried, standing over him, ready to give him another rap, if he attempted to rise. "I'll pet you a half-dollar you vil got left, on dot."

"Let me up, you dastardly loafer!" young Greyville raved, not daring to rise under the existing circumstances. "I'll murder you, for this, I—I'll—"

"Got your head proke, off you come mit your foolishness around me!" Fritz cried. "I'll let you oop, dough, ash I must go!"

He saw a half a dozen of the village roughs coming toward the spot, and knew he was ill-prepared to battle with all of them. So with a few dextrous bounds he leaped away out of the yard, and ran swiftly down to the beach.

Finding that they did not follow him, he soon after made his way up the street again, to the tavern, and went to the room which had been assigned him.

"I'll pet der vil pe some droubles before I got t'rough mit dis pizness," he muttered, "but I vas der man who vil come oud der winner."

He was soon off in a sound sleep, from which he, hours later, awakened, with a violent start.

The scene was changed.

He was not in the tavern, on the bed, but instead, was bound hand and foot, and lying in the bottom of a boat!

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CHAPTER VIII.

ADRIFT.

At first Fritz had no idea of what could have happened, but it did not take him long to come to one conclusion on the matter, that he had been captured at night, thrust into the frail boat, and sent adrift on the ocean. Who had been the authors of the job? There could be no doubt in his mind about that.

The Greyvilles—or the Greggs, as he believed they were—were anxious to have him leave the neighborhood, and had probably, through their agents, caused his removal in this very promiscuous manner.

By an effort he sat up in the little boat and gazed around him. He was now some distance from the beach, beyond the white-capped breakers, and, as the tide was receding, the frail craft was of course drifting farther and farther from land each moment, a reflection that might have caused any one a start, while to Fritz, bound and helpless, it was the next thing to being alarming.

"Vel, py shimminy dunder!" was his exclamation, as he gazed dolefully around him. "Off I don'd

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vas in a duyfel off a fix, den I don'd vant a cent. They've come von cute game ofer me, und I'll bet a half-dollar I go down der same throat vot Jonah did—der w'ale's. Vonder vich von off dem vellers put up der shob on me? I'd like to punch his nose. Reckon id vas dot veller whose eyes I placked mit Jersey plue up at der pig-nic. I vonder vot der plazes a veller can do, anyhow?"

There was a sorry prospect for his being able to do anything much toward helping himself from the unenviable situation in which he had been placed. He was unable to use his hands or feet, and was, therefore, helpless and at the mercy of the wild waters over which he was drifting.

Did he have the use of hands and feet he was not yet out of danger, for the boat was without oars and the distance to the land was so great as to make it a daring attempt to breast the outgoing tide in a struggle to reach the shore by swimming.

Still, it seemed the only hope for him, if by any way he could free himself of the straps which bound him, and he was not the one to despair without first proving to his satisfaction that it was the only thing left for him to do.

Therefore he set to work industriously in an attempt to loosen the bonds from his hands. Luckily they were not bound behind his back, which was one advantage, as he could use his teeth upon them.

But, being leather straps, he made slow headway, nibbling at the strap around his hand; but little by little it yielded, so that after awhile a violent wrench broke it asunder, and his hands were free.

"Py shimminy, dot ish goot, anyhow," he muttered, making haste to unloosen his feet. "Now, der next t'ings is somedings else. How ish I going to got pack mit der shore?"

It was an all-important question.

The boat was perhaps a mile farther from shore than when he first had estimated the distance.

"I don'd know vedder I can swum dot furder or not," he muttered, doubtfully. "But subbosin' der whale, or der duyfel-fish, catch 'old mit mine pootleg, und suck me in under der vater. Vot a duyfel o' a fix I'd be in den. Off I only had some paddles, I would haff no droubles getting to shore vid der poat."

He was in the midst of these reflections when he heard a shout farther out at sea, and for the first time beheld dimly a dusky object floating in the water not far ahead of him.

"Hello! who you vas, und vot you vant?" Fritz shouted, in answer.

"I am a poor devil more or less drowned, and can't hang on to this barrel much longer. Be you man or devil, for Heaven's sake hurry along with your boat."

"All righd. I vil pe dere in der sweedness py-und-py. Keep a stiff upper lip, und I'll got you soon," the young detective replied, heartily. "Dere's nodding like hang-on at der critical minute."

Kneeling, and leaning over the front part of the boat, he used his hands as propellers, and in this way was able to improve the slow progress of his light craft to some extent, and in a few moments was alongside the barrel, on top of which a drenched human was balancing himself.

At a glance Fritz perceived who it was.

"Hartly!" he exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes, what's left of me," the sentenced smuggler replied, clambering into the boat. "Thank Heaven you came along just as you did, for my gripe wouldn't hold out much longer."

"Vel, I should dink not. I'd giffen you up ash dead. How ish it dot you don'd vas kilt by der smugglers?"

"It is no fault of theirs," Hartly replied, grimly. "They chucked me under night afore last, miles out at sea, supposing my hands and feet were bound, and a heavy stone tied to my head. But while they were rowing me out, I contrived to loosen up matters, so that I was really free the minute I struck water. But I went under all the same to deceive them. When they headed for shore I arose to the surface, and after swimming about until nearly exhausted, I caught onto this empty cask, which has in one sense been my salvation. By the tides I have been carried quite near to the shore, but my lower limbs being numb by remaining so long in the water, I dared not attempt to swim ashore, and the outgoing tide has carried me out again—not so far as it would, however, if I had not struggled shoreward constantly. But how come you out here, in this frail shell, without even oars?"

Fritz explained as far as he had known, and Hartly scowled.

"There'll be a reckoning for some one," he said, "if I ever succeed in getting ashore. But there's not much prospect of that, unless we can get some oars, or something to pull ashore with. The tide will begin to ebb in before a great while, too."

"I haff von idea," Fritz said. "Uff ve can got der parrel apart, we might do somedings vid der staves—vot you t'ink apoud *dot*?"

"Good idea. We can easily get the staves."

Hartly drew the barrel up alongside the boat, and soon had it knocked to pieces, and four of the staves secured.

"Now, then, for shore," he cried. "When we get there, I will leave you, on business, for a few hours, after which I will join you, and we will work together against the Gregg gang. We will paddle to land on the lower side of the bluff, as it wouldn't be particularly healthy for me to land in front of the village. You can, and in fact, had better keep shady, in the vicinity of the old rookery on the bluff, and I will join you, as soon as possible."

Accordingly they paddled as rapidly toward the beach as their strength would permit. By the time

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it was daybreak they had landed below the bluff.

Here they drew the light boat up on the beach, and Hartly said:

"I'll leave you now, but will return, in the course of a few hours."

"All righd. I vil remain in der neighborhood," Fritz replied, and then the young smuggler clambered up the side of the bluff, and was soon gone from view.

"I vonder vot dot veller ish oop to, now," Fritz muttered, after he had gone. "Der is somet'ing he vas goin' to do, vot he ain'd putricular apoud my knowing somedings apoud. I have haff a notion dot he ain'd vos so nice a veller vot I firsd t'ought, und I wouldn't pe much surprised if he vould give me avay off he got a chance. But, oh! I'll keep watch of him! I've got der smugglers und der kidnapper spotted, und I'll bet a half-dollar id don'd vas be some centuries till I get 'em trapped. In der meantime, der is somet'ing I vant to investigate."

This was something he had noticed as he and Hartly had paddled in to the shore from the ocean.

In about the center of the bluff, at the water's edge, as it faced the open Atlantic, was a dark hole of considerable size, which looked as if it might lead to a cavern in the hill.

[89]

If Hartly knew of its existence, he had kept it a secret, but our German detective had noticed it, and resolved to see where the aperture led to.

Under any other circumstances he would not have given it a second thought, but the fact that the smugglers held out in this vicinity—of which he now had no doubt—gave that hole in the bluff more than ordinary significance.

Jumping into the boat he paddled off once more into the water, and headed toward the front of the bluff.

Not knowing what danger he might unexpectedly run into, he had drawn his revolver, which, strangely enough his captors had not taken from him, and placed it on the stern seat beside him.

Working silently but steadily along the face of the bluff, which was quite perpendicular, he soon came before the aperture, and headed his boat into it.

Mr.—or, as he styled himself, Honorable—Granby Greyville sat in his private study this same morning, engaged in smoking a cigar, as he rocked in an easy-chair and gazed out through an open glass door upon the pretty lawn.

[90]

That his thoughts were of an unpleasant nature was evident by a frown which disfigured his florid countenance.

And this frown did not lessen, but rather increased as there suddenly appeared in the doorway no less a wild-looking personage than Silly Sue, whom Fritz had encountered upon the beach.

She made a grimace and sort of a jerky bow as she saw his honor, and then stood staring at him in a strange manner.

"Well!" he growled, angrily, "what brings you here?"

"What allus brings me?" she replied, with a chuckle. "I want to come back and play up high-cockolorum, like my big-feelin' sister. S'pose that's silly, too, ain't it, daddy?"

"No more so than your accursed obstinacy, you fool!" was the severe reply. "You well know the only terms that can ever restore you as a member of my family."

"But I won't accept 'em!"

"Then clear out. You shall never be anything to me till you surrender the stolen money."

[91]

"Bah! it ain't yours! You're a bad, wicked man, and you got it wickedly, and get all your wealth wickedly, and the more you get the wickedder you get. Get out! I'd cut my head off, silly's I am, before I'd give you up the money."

"Curses on your mulishness!"

"Ha! ha! I know you cherish the most fatherly regard for me. If it wasn't for the hope that I will some day restore you your lost ten thousand you'd had me drowned months ago. By the way, old man, what have you done with my feller?"

"Your fellow?"

"Yes—Hal Hartly."

"How should I know anything about him?"

"Who should know better? Oh! you wicked monster!"

"Take care, girl!"

"No, I won't take care!" and her eyes flashed in defiance of his anger. "I ain't a bit afraid of you, because I can outrun any dog in the town. I know what's become of Hal. Your tools took him out and chucked him under. But, ha! ha! he's all right!"

Greyville started a little.

"What foolishness is this of yours?"

[92]

"Oh! only silliness, of course," and she laughed loudly. "But Hal's all right, and, now that his scruples have had a pickle, I allow he'll come around to my cherished plan, and we'll make it warm for you!"

"What! you dare to threaten *me*?"

"Didn't I tell you I'd go for you if you didn't reform? Well, I must be off. How's my stately sister?"

How's the countess? Ha! ha! ha! shoot her. She's an old hag, with a glass eye and false teeth. The future Mrs. G! Bah! and such a model private excursion steamer, too! Still, it serves its purpose. I'm off now—just come up to spice your breakfast. Better mend your ways. The way of the transgressor is hard. By-by! Yours, truly, Silly Sue!"

And then, with a wild laugh, she vanished.

[93]

CHAPTER IX.

FRITZ'S DISCOVERY.

Let us return to our ventriloquist detective and his venturesome expedition.

In heading the boat into the opening in the bluff, he had no idea how his venture would terminate, but was urged on by a great curiosity to explore the spot, feeling sure that it had some connection with the smugglers' league.

The height of the aperture was insufficient to admit the passage of the boat with him sitting up; so putting the boat under headway he lay down and thus glided in.

In high tide, this opening, he concluded, was covered by water, while in extreme low water the beach must be bare in front of the bluff, as the water at this juncture now was quite shallow.

He almost immediately emerged into a cave in the heart of the bluff.

It was as large as a couple of good-sized rooms, and looked as if the waters of many years had eaten it out.

[94]

The work of man, however, was seen in the planks overhead, which, resting on wooden supports, held the roof in place.

The water reached about midway into the chamber, and from its edge the pebbly ground ascended to the farther side of the cave, where a narrow aperture branched off—evidently cut as a passageway by the hand of man.

Grounding his boat, Fritz stepped out and took a survey of his surroundings.

"Dis don'd look ash if id vas a healthy blace at high tide, but I reckon dot id vas der blace vere dey run in smuggled goods," he mused. "Dot passage probably leads to a higher und dryer place."

Holding his revolver ready for use in case of emergency, he stole softly toward the subterranean passage, with a view to exploring it.

It was a dark, uninviting tunnel, of just sufficient width and height to admit of a person's passage, and looked as if it might have no connection with any other chamber, as he could see no light to indicate its terminus.

Nothing daunted, however, he entered it and walked along softly, ready for any surprise.

A score of steps he went, and then emerged into what he concluded was another large subterranean chamber, but where all was of Stygian darkness.

[95]

Luckily he had a close metal pocket-box of matches with him, and lighting one after another he discovered a half dozen lamps in brackets around the chamber side.

One of them he soon lit, when he proceeded to inspect his situation.

As before stated, the sides of the cavern were walled up like a cellar; and in size it was a hundred and fifty feet square, by ten or twelve in height.

The ceiling overhead was planked, and these supported by rude pillars resting upon the ground floor, as in the outer cave.

Here and there, scattered about, were heaps of straw, pieces of wooden boxes and canvas, and occasionally a bottle, or a piece of damaged silk or lace.

At the opposite side of this chamber was a round hole in the ceiling, similar to a well, down through which hung a rope ladder to the floor.

This seemed to indicate that either there was another chamber, overhead, or else this was a means of access to the open air.

[96]

In the stone wall, at either side of the room, were doorways supplied with strong, grated iron doors, which were fastened with padlocks and chains.

"Vel, I be jiggered off dis don'd vas yoost like a regular brizon," Fritz ejaculated; "und dis pe der blace vere der smugglers unpack deir goods. I t'ought I vould discoffer somet'ings, off I come here. Vonder uff dey haff got somepody shut up mit dem cells? Dot wouldn't pe so much off a 'sell,' neider, off I am any shudge."

Taking down the lamp, he proceeded to inspect the matter. Approaching the right-hand dungeon, he peered in.

The place, evidently, was empty.

Crossing the cavern to the door of the other, to his surprise he saw that this dungeon was

occupied.

Upon a rude cot bed, a woman was stretched, apparently fast asleep.

As her face was turned from his view, he could not tell whether she was young or old, pretty or ugly, but he was strangely impressed. Her size—form—clothing, all aroused his suspicions that it really was the Leadville man's runaway daughter—Madge Thornton, or Thurston, as she had called herself. He was staggered a moment by the very thought. [97]

"Hello! vake oop—who you vas?" he shouted, rattling the door.

The woman gave a violent start, and sat up on her cot, with a gasp: it was indeed the speculator's lost daughter!

"Goot! dot vas a nest egg for me!" was the thought that flashed through his mind, as he remembered the offered reward.

"Who are you?—what do you want?" the bride of Major Atkins demanded, eagerly, as she arose from her bed, and stepped falteringly toward the door.

"Vel, I am Fritz! You remember der chap Fritz, don'd you?"

"Oh! yes! yes! You are a friend to me—oh! say that you are, and that you have come to rescue me and take me back to papa!"

"Vel, I should snicker dot dot vas apoud der size off der circumstance," the young detective grinned. "You don'd vas like dis hotel, den?"

"Oh! no! no! I shall die if I remain here. Open the door—take me from this terrible place! Oh! please do this, sir, and I will always love you." [98]

"Nixy! You mustn't do dot," Fritz replied, with a serious expression, "or you vil haff mine gal, Rebecca, in your vool. She's shealous, is Rebecca, and id makes her madder ash a hornet bee, uff I even looks sweed at a potato pug—dot ish a fact. But I vil get you oud all der same, if I can, vich I don'd know so much apoud, ash der door vas fastened tighter ash a brick. You see, your old dad he vas send me down dis vay to look vor you, und I dells him I find you, yoost like a pook. I vas a reg'lar snoozer at findin' dings vot don'd pelong to me."

"My father sent you? Oh! joyful news! Tell me—tell me, where is my father?" and she clasped her hands, her face and eyes aglow with eagerness.

There was evidently nothing dazed or somnambulistic about her now.

"Vel, der last I see'd your old man, he vas at der blace vere you got married. But he left for Long Branch to rustygate und keep a vedder eye out for you, vile I took der rear trail, und skeer'd up der game. You see der old man dells me off I vind you und der money vot you stole vrom him, he vould giff me five t'ousand dollars. How vas dot? He vas yoost der man I haff pen vantin' to meed, vor a long vile. But, how apoud der money?" [99]

"It is where no earthly hands but mine can find it, except I give the directions!" the girl replied, with evident enthusiasm over the fact. "When I left home, to come East and marry Major Atkins, I was in a state of half insanity, or somnambulism, they called it, and took the money, and when I came to my senses found it in my possession. It seems, as I have learned since, that before his leaving for the East, and at the same time when I was in my dazed state Atkins said that he had a large roll of money in my father's safe, and that when I came, I should bring it. And to my surprise, I have also since learned that it was not the first somnambulistic theft I have been guilty of. Upon discovering the large sum upon my person, I put it in a place where it would be safe, and came on to marry Major Atkins, whom I imagined myself to be in love with. We met—it was he who took me away from the hotel—and we were married, as I supposed, at the time, but it has since been proved a base deception. Almost immediately after your departure he demanded the money of me."

"Vel, you guff it oop to him, I subbose?" [100]

"No, I did not," she replied, with an exhibition of spirit. "I told him I didn't have it—which was true—but he wouldn't believe that, saying that he had learned I had the money in my possession on leaving home. Then I got angry and told him I wouldn't give it to him, if I did have it. This in turn enraged him, and he declared the marriage to be a sham, and that if I didn't surrender the money he would kill me. I defied him, and dared him to do it, whereupon he and the bogus minister seized upon me, and searched me, but failed to find the money. The monster, Atkins, then knocked me down, and I became insensible. When I awoke, it was in this terrible underground place. He has been here several times, and threatened me, and alternated the matter by promising to make me his wife in reality, and the mistress of a princely home if I would give up the money. But, having found out what a villain he is, I have firmly refused."

"Dot vas right! Ve will giff him der duyfel von off dese days—or, at least, I vil, for smuggling. I don'd know vedder I can got you oud off here or not! I ought der haff some tools, as id don'd vas some leedle shob preakin' iron mit a veller's hands." [101]

"Oh! do try and release me, in some way—I do so want to get free!"

"Und I know dot. But, you see, id vas harder ash breakin' der consditution to preak dis chain."

It was no easy job, indeed.

The chain was several feet in length, and made of short, stout welded links. The padlock, too, was a formidable affair, such as could not easily be broken, and Fritz did not have any keys with him.

He was stuck for once, in not knowing how to proceed, and was just cogitating over what was best to do, when he noticed something that caused him to start.

On glancing toward the rope-ladder, he perceived that it was moving!

Some one was descending it!

Did he remain here, discovery was inevitable, and discovery would probably destroy all possibility of rescuing Madge.

These thoughts occurred to him like a flash.

"Sh! some one is coming, and I must hide!" he said to Madge, in a whisper; then he hurried softly across the chamber, into the dark passage, where he paused at a point where he could see without being seen.

[102]

"I'll bet dot id vas der veller whose eye I blacked," he muttered.

And, sure enough, he was right.

A moment later, Major Atkins, *alias* young Greyville, *alias* Griffith Gregg, came down the ladder into the cavern, his eyes yet showing unmistakable evidence of the power of Fritz's shoulder-hits.

"What the devil's all the noise down here?" he demanded, approaching the door of Madge's dungeon. "I thought I heard voices conversing."

"You probably heard me singing, Sir Monster!" Madge retorted, sarcastically. "You know I am in good humor for vocalism."

"The devil take you! It wasn't singing—it was talking I heard."

"Ah! perhaps you heard me saying over threats of what I'll do, when I get free!"

"Now, what will you do?"

"I'll claw your eyes out—then I'll tie you and give you a thrashing with a bull-whip."

"Bah! threaten what you like. I'll guarantee you'll remain here until I get your amiable dad's swag."

"But you will never get it!"

"Won't I? When you begin to rot in your dungeon, and your tongue hangs out of your mouth for want of food and water, I fancy you'll come to terms."

[103]

"But I won't, though!"

"Oh! we shall see. I won't argue with you. At the present moment I want to find out who it was I heard you conversing with!"

And to her horror he made for the dark passage.

Fritz, too, was considerably concerned, and began to make a rapid and stealthy retreat to the other chamber.

On arriving there, another thing startled him.

The tide had set in, and the hole in the face of the bluff was so nearly filled as to make escape with the boat impossible.

[104]

CHAPTER X.

A DIVE FOR LIFE.

There was but one choice left for Fritz—that of standing his ground and meeting young Greyville boldly; for there was apparently no avenue of escape for him now.

Consequently, with his revolver drawn, ready for use, he positioned himself at the water's edge, facing the aperture, and waited.

He had not long to wait.

In a few seconds Griffith Gregg—as we shall henceforth call him—came striding into the chamber, and uttered a violent oath at sight of Fritz.

"Hello! by the Satanic I thought I was not mistaken. The Dutchman we left adrift, for sure!"

Fritz did not speak, or allow himself to move a particle, but stood glaring at his enemy like one turned to stone.

"Hello! why the devil don't you answer?" Gregg demanded; apparently not feeling positive that Fritz was in the flesh. "If you don't answer, I'm hanged if I don't drown ye."

[105]

No answer from Fritz.

But from directly over the villain's head seemed to come the words, in a hoarse voice:

"Villain, behold the reflection of your crime!"

"Bah!" Gregg cried, with a start, glaring about him. "You can't play any tricks on me, you Dutch blunderbuss! In some way you've escaped the trap, and now I'll pay you a grudge I've got against you."

And with a long knife in hand which he had drawn from his belt, he dashed fiercely at Fritz, regardless of the drawn revolver.

Leveling his pistol at his opponent's breast, the young detective pulled the trigger.

The weapon missed fire.

Gregg was almost upon him now.

There was but a moment to act, and yet, in that time, Fritz hurled the weapon with great velocity at the villain's head, and somersaulted backward into the water, the toe of one of his boots catching Gregg in under the lower jaw.

This, with the stinging blow of the pistol, dropped him like a log to the ground, where he lay for an instant, howling with pain and rage.

[106]

Fritz, landing in the water, swam through the almost submerged entrance, and soon was outside the cavern, at the edge of the bluff.

To swim around to the southern side was the work of but a few moments, and he was once more on *terra firma*, at his starting-point.

Here he sat down upon the beach to collect his thoughts.

So strange had been his experience within the last few hours that he was really more confused than he had yet been since entering upon his profession as a detective.

"Now den, let me see apoud somet'ings," he muttered. "In der virst blace, dis be a reg'lar ruffian soddlement, vere id don'd vas healthy vor such ash I, und id would puzzle me to do der shob all alone. I must haff some help. Off der ish a delegraph office near here, den I must find id, und delegraph to Philadelf vor assistance. Der ish no doubt but I haff discovered der smugglers, und der next t'ing is to cabture dem. Und I don'd dink id vas healthy for me to go down mit der cave again, undil dis matter keeps shady. I vonder vot haff pecome off der gal vot called herself Silly Sue?"

"Here she is—what do you want of her?" a merry voice cried, and the elfin danced, laughing, out from behind a huge bowlder at Fritz's rear, where she had been concealed, evidently playing the spy. "What do you want of Silly Sue, Irishman?"

[107]

"I vas no Irishman!" Fritz retorted. "I am a Dutchman."

"Get out! You're pure Irish. But that ain't the point. What do you want of me?"

"I wanted to inquire how far it ish to der nearest delegraph station?"

"Oh! a good ways inland. The road you see in front of the old house on the bluff leads direct to it. If you want to send a message, I'll send it for you."

"You vil?"

"Yes. I'll hook one o' dad's horses from the pasture, and ride to town. Guess I know what ye propose doing."

"Vot?"

"You are a detective, and you have discovered that my dad and his smugglers live around here, and you want to send for help to arrest them!"

"How vos you know all dot?"

"Oh, I'm silly enough to guess it, and I hope you'll do it. They're a hard gang, and a wicked gang, and they hate me worse than poison, because I'm honest, unlike the rest of them."

[108]

"Captain Gregg und Honorable Granby Greyville are der same persons, not?"

"Yes. You're mighty cute to find that out, when some o' the villagers don't even suspect it. I'm *his* gal."

"Ish *dot* a fact?"

"Yes, but he don't own me, because I denounce his dishonesty. Ha! ha! an old man was found dead on the beach once. The next day my papa had a big sum of money in his possession. I smelled foul play. I stole the money from him and burned it up. Ha! ha! Then he whipped me unmercifully, and turned me adrift. But, pooh! I don't care! I get along famous, and I'll make fun for the smugglers yet. So if you want me to go to the telegraph station for you, and will give me a few shillings, I'm ready."

"I'll giff you five dollars!" Fritz assured.

"Bully!" the girl assented. "Now, just tell me what you want, and I'm yours."

"Vel, I vant you to go to der delegraph office und send a message to Tony Fox, care of Police Headquarters, Philadelphia, telling him to fetch a half-dozen men der dis village at once. Can you remember dot?"

[109]

"Well, you bet I can! I don't forget things easily. Give us your money, and I'm off for a wild horseback ride."

Fritz accordingly gave her a V-note, and then, after again instructing her what to do, she took her departure by clambering up the bluff.

Fritz then lay down upon the sand in the warm sunlight, little dreaming that his plans had been overheard.

The Irishman, Pat Grogan, had been concealed behind another bowlder, and had over heard every word of Fritz's conversation with Silly Sue.

Shortly after her departure, and when sure Fritz was not watching, he stole softly from his place of concealment and up the side of the bluff.

Once on top of the bluff, he quickened his pace, descended the opposite side, and hurried toward the village. At the residence of Granville Greyville he paused, and entered the spacious lawn.

His honor and the countess were seated upon the lawn in front of the house, enjoying the shade of a great tree, and Grogan tipped his hat as he approached them.

[110]

"Sure, sur, it's mesilf as has made a discovery, sur," he said, with a huge grin of satisfaction.

"Ah! indeed! I thought you might be of some use!" his honor replied, complacently. "What is the nature of your discovery, Grogan?"

"Sure, sur, it's consarnin' the girl you set me to watchin'."

"As I expected—curse her! What new devilment has she been up to?"

"Sure I did kape a civil eye on her, as yez told me to, and a bit ago she met a Dutchman on the beach, an' it's a grand plot tha be afther organizin'. The loikes av the Dutchman he ha wanted to ba sindin' a tiligraph missage to Philadelphia for tha detectives, an tha gal she did till him for a V she would stale a horse forninst your pasture an' be carryin' the missage for him hersilf, whereat he forked over the cash, and she skipped, bedad!"

His honor listened, his face growing purple with passion.

"May all the furies seize that obstinate and meddlesome little wretch!" he hissed. "She seems determined to ruin me. No amount of whippings have ever served to make her like other girls. Why didn't you stop her, Pat?"

[111]

"Sure, it was yersilf as told me to be doin' naught else but watchin' her."

"True, I had forgotten. She has probably gone so far that it would be next to useless to attempt to overhaul her now. Do you think you could mount a horse and overtake her, Pat?"

"Bedad, no. It's sorry a horse I can ride, yer honor."

"Then ascertain from the ostler the location of the pasture, and when she returns capture her. I'll give you ten dollars for the job."

"Bad 'cess to me if I don't do it. An' what shall I be doin' to her after I cotch 'er?"

"Then take her to the old mansion on the bluff and wait until I come."

"Och! howly murther, I'll not go in where the skelegon is—nary a time!"

"Nor need you. What time intervenes between your arrival and mine you can spend outside. But look sharp she don't escape you."

"Sure, it's mesilf as will ba doin' that same!"

Then Grogan executed a grotesque bow and took his departure toward the stable, while Greyville turned toward the countess.

"The devil will be to pay now. As I suspected, that Dutchman is a spy, and having suspicioned or ferreted out some knowledge concerning the league, has sent for his fellow watch-dogs. In less than two days we shall be in the clutches of the law, unless we make a break for liberty at once."

[112]

"Oh! there is no particular reason for hurry. When we find there is danger, we can easily escape," the countess said, calmly.

"How? If we wait until their arrival, it will be too late."

"By no means. My steamboat lies out but a short distance, and we can board it and sail for *la belle France*, in defiance."

"What! without unloading?"

"Bah! what are a few thousand dollars to life? Besides, the goods will sell again, for full value, at Havre."

[113]

CHAPTER XI.

A FATHER'S BRUTALITY.

After the departure of Silly Sue, Fritz sunned himself until his garments were dried; then rising, he began to cast about him for something to eat.

"I don'd know better I go back mit der tavern, or not!" he mused. "I dinks dot vas an onhealthy blace, und yet I vould like somedings to ead, very bad."

Climbing to the top of the bluff, he passed the old mansion, and followed the country road for some distance, in hopes of finding an orchard or watermelon patch. And he was successful.

About a mile distant he came to a good-sized orchard, near no human habitation, and hastily made a raid on it, with the result of discovering all the luscious eating harvest apples he could carry.

Filling his pockets he made his way back to the old rookery, and sat down upon the front step to finish his meal.

[114]

"I vonder vot's pecome of der villain I kicked mit der under jaw?" he muttered.

"I t'ink I must haff dislocated 'im or I should 'a' seed him. I vonder vere der mouth off der well is,

anyhow, vot dey come up t'rough. Id must pe somevere's vere der house stands, und probably hidden."

After he finished his meal on apples, he entered the old dwelling, with a view to giving it another exploration.

Passing through the lower hall, he tried each door opening off from it, but found them all locked, as before.

What they contained he could therefore not learn, except by bursting them open or unlocking them, which he had no way of doing.

Finding no success, down-stairs, he went upstairs, remembering that he had only tried the doors of part of the upper rooms, on his previous visit, the second one being the assembly chamber containing the swinging head of ill-fated Bill Budge.

He shunned this apartment now, and passed on along the corridor.

The first and second doors he tried were locked, like those below. The third door, however, was unfastened, and opening it he entered a large unfurnished apartment, containing but one window, which looked out upon the ocean. [115]

Noticing a card tacked upon the wall, opposite the door, Fritz advanced to read what was written upon it.

But, that, he was destined never to do. Halfway across the room he got—then the floor sunk quickly beneath him, and he went down! down! down!

He had stepped upon a trap, which had evidently been prepared for occasional stragglers, and he was the unsuspecting victim, until too late to save himself.

Down! down! he went into empty space, until he struck heavily upon a hard floor, and lay for a moment in a heap, his senses partly leaving him. When he recovered consciousness, he arose to his feet. He was in utter darkness, and in a place where the air was close and stifling. What kind of a den he had fallen into he could not ascertain by looking, at least.

Later that day Mr. Granby Greyville left his handsome residence, and made his way to the bluff, accompanied by her ladyship, the countess. [116]

There was a terrible expression of stern resolve upon his countenance, and in his grasp he carried an ugly-looking cart-whip, which looked as if it were capable of inflicting dire pain in the hands of a human brute.

Arriving at the top of the bluff, they found Grogan, the Irish delegate, seated upon the doorstep of the old house, while, lying upon the ground, in front of him, was the girl, Sue, bound, hand and foot, but none the less defiant for that fact, as was evident by the contemptuous curl of her lip, and the indignant, wicked flash of her eyes.

A little shiver went over her, though, when she saw the countess, the man she knew as her father, and the whip he carried.

"Sure, it's mesilf as cotched her," Grogan cried, as Greyville approached. "But it's the devil's own time I had at it, bedad, an' if yez don't b'lave it ye kin look at me face. Begorra! she scratched an' bit an' fit loike tha very devil's imp she is!" and the Hibernian rubbed his torn and bruised visage dolefully.

"So you're caged, are you, my young tigress?" the smuggler captain demanded, gazing down at the girl, wrathfully. "I'll see that you never break loose hereafter!" [117]

"Ba-aa!" the girl retorted, in contempt. "I'm not afraid of you, you ruffianly wretch, if you do carry a whip. You can whip me, pound me, stamp me into the earth, but you can't intimidate me. I'll despise and defy you to the longest day I live!"

"We shall see. I've made up my mind to cease dealing mildly with you, and instead, treat you to the harshness your foolishness demands. It's time you were broken in, and I'm going to compel you to submission to my will, and to obedience, or I'm going to kill you."

"Kill, if you like—I'll still defy you. You can not make me obey a monster like you, even though you are my father! I despise you, hate you, you inhuman wretch!"

"A good flogging will bring back your affection. By the way, I understand that by way of amusing yourself you have become the consort of a Dutch detective, and by way of furthering his game, have just been to telegraph for an additional force of the devils. Now do you know what I am going to do?"

"Any one might guess; brutal cowards always carry whips!" [118]

"Yes, I'm going to whip you within an inch of your life. Then, if you promise me to ever after obey me, and tell me where to find the money you stole from me, I will let you go. If you refuse I'll kill you, and end the trouble! Grogan, lash her securely to yonder post!"

The Irishman obeyed by raising her and roping her to a post which had been used for a hitching-post, at some remote period.

Sue's face was very pale now, and she trembled in dread of the cruel lash.

It was not the first time she had been whipped by him, and she well knew what a merciless wretch he was.

Greyville threw off his coat now, and seized the heavy whip firmly, not a tithe of pity expressed in his stern, cruel face.

"Beg, now!" he cried. "Tell me where the money is, and promise future obedience and proper conduct, or I'll give it to you!"

"Never! I'll die first!" Sue gasped.

The next instant the wretch struck her with all his might, following one blow with another, until he had struck her twenty, the last one being upon the top of the head, with the butt of the whip. [119]

White as death was Sue, but her eyes flashed bravely, her face was defiant—but she never uttered a moan or cry of pain.

"Now—*now* maybe you'll come to time!" the smuggler roared, more like some enraged wild beast than a human being, in his demoniac fury. "Now, will you tell and promise?"

"Never, monster!" was the low, piteous gasp, then the eyes of the poor outcast closed; she had fainted, unable longer to endure the agony. [120]

CHAPTER XII.

A PITIFUL END.

The situation of Fritz was to him a decidedly gloomy one, as, owing to the impenetrable darkness his eyesight was of no use whatever. He did not know either, if it was safe to stir, as there might be another trap which he would fall into, and go headlong down into some other pit.

But he resolved to test the matter, and feel out the boundaries of his new prison at once.

Groping about, inch by inch, and trying the floor in front of him before trusting the weight of his body upon it, he soon came to a plastered wall, and concluded by that, that he still remained in the building, having probably only fallen to the first floor.

"Vel, dot don'd vas so pad ash I first expected," he muttered, feeling a little more assured. "I t'ought I vas goin' vay down to der blace vere dey manufacture fire-crackers. Der next question, ish der any outlet to dis brison, I vonder?" [121]

Keeping his hands upon the wall, he walked several times around the dark apartment without pausing.

"Der ish not von door or vinder, nor hole of any kind!" he finally muttered. "I would not haff such a house for a gift."

The room indeed appeared to be barren of those accessories, as far as he was able to learn by the sense of feeling, and it would seem that it was thus purposely prepared for a prison.

"Vel, I guess I might as vel prepare to imitate der example off Doctor Tanner, und go vidout somedings to eat for forty years or so!" Fritz muttered, feeling of his stomach dolefully, for the apples had far from satisfied his appetite. "But, if possible, I must get oud off here, somehow, before Fox und der boys get here."

Just how he was to do it furnished him a serious subject to ponder on.

"Curse the girl! she's fainted!" the smuggler chief cried, pausing in his horrible work.

"Perhaps she is playing off, to escape punishment," the countess suggested, with a malicious smile. "The American mademoiselle is very deceitful!" [122]

"Faint or no faint, she shall get all that her stubborn resistance demands!" Greyville growled, mercilessly, and he raised the whip and struck her another stinging blow.

"Stop! Strike that girl again and I'll kill you!" a voice cried, not far in their rear, and turning, they beheld a stranger rushing up, a pair of cocked revolvers in hand.

"Furies!" Greyville gasped, turning pale.

"*Mon Dieu!* what's to pay? Let's fly!" from the countess.

"No! we will stand our ground!" the smuggler hissed.

The new-comer soon stood before them, with stern, accusing gaze, and a face flushed from his run.

"Devils!" he cried, "what is the meaning of this brutal scene? Explain instantly."

It was the Leadville speculator, Thornton, who spoke, and there was grim business expressed in his tone.

"What right have you to intrude in what is none of your business?" Greyville demanded, sourly.

"Eh! I'll show you, you brutal puppy! Don't give me any of your lip, or I'll blow your brains out. Why, cuss my boots, you're as bad as the Dog Injuns on the frontier!" [123]

"I presume I've a right to chastise my own child, sir, when her conduct deserves it!"

"That's not your child, Garry Gregg! I know you. You are the wretch I have been longing to meet these ten years!"

"You know me?" the smuggler cried, in amazement.

"Ay! I know you!" the Westerner cried. "You are the worthless devil who trapped Minnie Gray into a secret marriage years ago, and after living with her a couple of years, and abusing her, left her in poverty, to live with a woman you had previously married."

"And incurred your enmity by winning your sweetheart away from you!" Gregg sneered, mockingly.

"Be that as it may, you are responsible for a good woman's death, and you shall answer for it. Tell me, sir—is this poor child you have been beating, the daughter of Minnie Gray?"

"If you like, yes."

"Then, curse you, leave this spot at once, if you don't want me to shoot you down. I'll take care you never strike her again! Go! I say, or I'll kill you without hesitation!"

There was a stern glare in the speculator's eyes that betokened danger, and, accompanied by the countess and Grogan, the smuggler chief hurried away. [124]

As soon as they had gone, Mr. Thornton cut the bonds that held Silly Sue to the post, and laid her tenderly down upon the soft grass.

Hurrying down to the beach, he procured some water in his hat, and returning, dashed it in her face.

But although he did this, and chafed her hands and wrists, she did not open her eyes. Her breath came in stifled gasps, and her heart beat slowly.

"By Heaven! I believe they have killed her!" Mr. Thornton muttered, feelings of terrible rage swelling within him. "The equal of this brutality is seldom, even among the red devils on the frontier. Ah! Garry Gregg, if this poor child dies, you shall pay bitterly for her life, or my name is not Thornton!"

He continued faithfully in his endeavors to bring her back to consciousness, but all to no avail.

While he was thus engaged there came sounds of rapid footsteps, and Hal Hartly dashed up, flushed and excited.

"Great Heaven! what is the matter with Susie?" he demanded, on seeing her lying on the ground, so cold and white. [125]

"I fear she is dying, young man," Mr. Thornton replied, solemnly. "I can not restore her to consciousness. Was she anything to you, sir?"

"Indeed, yes; she was all the world to me, poor child, and we were to be married, one of these days!" Hartly replied, kneeling beside her, with tears in his eyes. "Susie! oh! Susie, my little waif, can't you look up and speak to me?"

The girl slowly opened her eyes, and gazed up at him, with a loving smile.

"Yes, Hal, I know. I am dying, Hal. Where is Fritz?"

"I don't know, darling. I have not seen him since morning."

"Well, when you see him, tell him I sent the message, and got an answer that the detectives would come."

"The detectives?"

"Yes. I went for him, to telegraph for them, and he gave me five dollars. It is in my pocket, Hal—you can have it, to get me a little, plain stone for my grave."

"But, Susie, you can't be dying—tell me what is the matter?" [126]

"She has been cruelly beaten. I came here a few moments ago and drove off the devils, but I fear I came too late!" Mr. Thornton explained, sadly.

"It was papa, you know!" Sue added, as Hartly uttered a cry of astonishment. "He discovered the errand I had done, and had a big Irishman capture me and bring me here. Then he and the countess came, and I was tied to a stake and whipped till I fainted. They have killed me, I guess. I feel as if I am filling up inside, and something tells me I shall soon die. I hate to leave you, Hal, but I am not afraid to die. I have always said my prayers, loved the Lord, and been honest, and I know He will receive me."

The girl's childish faith and simplicity touched Mr. Thornton as well as young Hartly, and tears flowed freely.

The little outcast soon closed her eyes again, her arms about Hartly's neck, as she rested in his embrace, and a peaceful expression of contentment upon her face.

About sunset she spoke, without opening her eyes.

"Hal!" she said, softly.

"Yes, Susie," he replied; "what do you wish?" [127]

"Not much. After I am gone burn the old house yonder, and break up the smugglers."

"Yes, Susie."

"And you'll be a good man, Hal, all your life, so you will join me in heaven?"

"I will try, dearest."

"Then kiss me good-by."

Convulsed with sobs, the grief-stricken lover obeyed, and, just as the last rays of sunset began to

fade, Susie breathed her last, expiring without the least appearance of pain, and a faint, peaceful smile upon her lips.

For some moments after her death neither Hartly nor Mr. Thornton spoke, but finally the latter said:

"She has gone where she will know no more suffering or sorrow and it is perhaps better so. Is your home near by?"

"I live in a sort of hut back in the woods, and if you will lend a hand we will take her there."

The speculator assented, and Hartly procured a wide board, and laid the limp form upon it. Then raising the primitive litter between them, they left the bluff and took to the lonely country road, which they followed until they came to a rude shanty, standing in the edge of the woods. They bore their burden into the only room and deposited it upon a couple of stools. [128]

Hartly then turned to Mr. Thornton.

"You are a stranger to us, sir," he said, "but would you kindly remain here until I can go to a neighboring town and make arrangements for her burial?"

"Certainly, my boy."

"Then I will go and send the undertakers at once to take charge of the remains. If I do not return with the undertakers, let them remove the body, and I will see you later, perhaps."

He then kissed the lips and forehead of the dead girl, and took his departure.

Once outside, his whole demeanor underwent a change.

His face became stern and hard in its expression, and his eyes gleamed with a wild light that could hardly have been pronounced sane.

"First the house!" he muttered, between his clinched teeth; "then I will see to the burial. After that revenge!"—words uttered with a power of feeling, which bespoke grim resolution. [129]

Hurrying back to the bluff he entered the building, and from the pantry brought an oil-can and poured oil about in a number of different places, applying a lighted match to each.

As a result, bright sheets of flame sprung up, and, in less time almost than it takes to tell it, the interior of the old rookery was on fire in several places.

Then, with a wild laugh, he turned and fled from the building, and disappeared from the vicinity of the bluff.

The old house was doomed.

And in the doorless, windowless trap-room, where he had so unexpectedly become imprisoned, was Fritz, in the most unenviable situation one could well conceive.

Captain Gregg, as we shall henceforth call him, learned of Silly Sue's death shortly after it occurred through the Irishman, who, while pretending to leave the spot, had scouted around, and lurked in the vicinity until Hartly and Mr. Thornton had departed with the body.

Gregg was both alarmed and surprised when he heard the news, and immediately sought the countess for consultation.

He had no idea he had done the girl any fatal bodily injury. If she was dead, and the cause of her death came to be known, he well knew that he would be called upon to answer to the law. [130]

The countess listened to his recital of Grogan's report, the lines in her thin face growing even harder than were their wont.

"I feared zis," she said. "You were ver' mooch savage!"

"What do you advise?"

"Zat we remain where we be for ze present. You say zis stranger be an old enemy of yours?"

"Yes. Doubly so now, from a fact that he is the father of Grif's prisoner, that's locked up in the dungeon."

"Humph! zis is bad! Vare be ze Dutchman?"

"There is no telling. Perhaps Griffith will know when he comes."

But Griffith did not come.

It was nearly dark in the outer world when he recovered from the terrible blow he had got from Fritz's pistol in the cave, and staggered to the inner cavern.

The moment he entered it a smell of burning timbers greeted his nostrils. [131]

"By Heaven! the house above is burning up, I believe!" he cried, rushing to the rope ladder and beginning to climb it rapidly.

But he had only got a few feet up when it gave way, and he fell to the ground, considerably bruised.

"The devil's to pay now!" he muttered, angrily. "A fellow will smother down here."

For a moment the young villain stood irresolute—then he approached the door of Madge Thornton's cell.

"Madge!" he called.

There was no answer.

"Madge!" he shouted, in a louder tone, at the same time rattling the door, savagely.

"Well, what do you want?" she demanded, rising from her cot.

"I want to know if you want to escape from this place alive?"

"Why, what is the matter?"

"Matter enough! The old house above is burning down, and if you don't want to suffocate you must leave this place at once, with me."

"Well, why don't you open the door, then?"

He was unlocking the great padlock even as he spoke.

[132]

"I am perfectly willing to do so, and when you reveal to me the hiding-place of your father's money, which you had, when you left Leadville, you are free to go," he said, standing the doorway.

"Are you foolish enough to suppose for one moment, that I will reveal that?"

"If you don't do it, curse you, I will leave you here to suffocate!"

"Do so! I would cheerfully pay that penalty of my folly in ever having anything to do with you, a hundred times, rather than submit to your demands."

"Then—but no! I'll release you if you'll give me half of the sum."

"Not a cent, you detestable wretch."

"Curses on your obstinacy! You have refused to do what is right, and you shall take the the consequences."

Stepping back he reclosed the door angrily, and hastily relocked the padlock; then he left the main chamber, for the outer one, and jumped into the boat.

The tide was now on the ebb, and the water was now down so that he could row out of the hole into the ocean.

As soon as he got out a grand sight met his gaze.

[133]

The old house on top of the bluff was in a sheet of lurid flame, lighting up the early evening, which otherwise was quite dark.

Showers of sparks ascended toward the heavens, and the crackling of the dancing blaze made weird music.

Pulling in to shore, Griffith Gregg leaped from the boat, and clambered up the side of the bluff.

The first man he met was Thornton of Leadville, who had fastened up the hut, and hurried to the scene of the conflagration, as soon as he had discovered the light.

The recognition was mutual, and each uttered a cry.

"At last!" the speculator cried, and he bounded forward, and seized his enemy by the throat. Gregg clinched with him, and the two men rolled to the ground, in a fierce struggle, the lurid light of the burning building lighting up the scene like unto the colored fire to some wild exciting drama.

[134]

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

The struggle was short and decisive.

Supple though the younger Gregg was, he was no match for the man from Leadville, and it was not long ere Mr. Thornton had his man pinned firmly beneath him, so that he could not move.

By this time the villagers had arrived upon the scene, in numbers, and stood contemplating the scene, in wonder.

"What is the matter here?" one of them demanded, stepping forward. "Who set fire to this building?"

"That I am not prepared to say, as I just came," Mr. Thornton replied, "but I know that I have captured one of the worst villains living. Is there an officer of the law among you? If so, I want him to take this devil into immediate custody, and watch well that he don't escape."

"I am a constable, but I must first know what charge you have against this young man of highly respected family," another villager said.

[135]

"Charges enough to hang him higher than Haman, if you like," the speculator cried. "He has my daughter imprisoned somewhere, in hopes of extorting money from me; he is wanted in Leadville, Colorado, for no less than three cold-blooded murders, and also for horse-theft, and I've got papers to show for it!"

"It's a lie! It's a mistake! This man is crazy!" young Gregg shouted. "I appeal to you for protection, gentlemen!"

"Protection you shall have, sir, by law, if you deserve it!" the constable replied, slipping a pair of

hand-cuffs upon the young man's wrists.

"Now, sir"—to Mr. Thornton—"permit me to examine your papers."

The speculator drew a package of documents from an inside coat-pocket, and the officer gave them a critical examination.

"They are all right," he said, returning them.

"For the present, I will leave the scoundrel in your charge—until I recover my lost daughter!" Mr. Thornton said.

"That you will never do, curse you!" Griffith Gregg hissed, savagely. "You've sealed her doom, in tackling me, and you may as well put a mourning band around your hat." [136]

"What! do you dare to tell me my daughter is in peril, sir?"

"Well, that remains to be told. It is according to whether I am released or not. If not, most assuredly you will never see her or the money she stole, for if I am to answer for all the charges you have preferred against me, I can just as well add a few more, without any inconvenience."

"We shall see about that. I think a rigid search will find her. Officer, remove him to a place of safety, until I determine upon a future course of action."

The constable accordingly took his departure, marching the younger Gregg with him.

The fire had by this time gained great headway.

It leaped in great crackling volumes from the roof, and burst through the sides in fiery forks. The whole interior was a seething furnace of lurid flame, and timbers were already beginning to fall in.

"Where is Silly Sue?" some one cried, and the question went from mouth to mouth. "She sometimes sleeps in the old house." [137]

"Silly Sue, as you call her, is dead," Mr. Thornton announced.

"Dead!" the villagers exclaimed, gathering around him—"Silly Sue dead?"

"Yes, dead, and lies in the shanty down the road, belonging to Hal Hartly, who has gone to some neighboring town to arrange for her burial!" the speculator said. Then he related what he knew concerning the brutal whipping she had had, at the hands of Gregg senior.

A murmur of indignation ran through the crowd as he spoke, and though some of the men did not cry out against the guilty man, the majority were greatly excited.

"Do you swear this is true?" one of the villagers cried, angrily.

"Ay—swear it a hundred times, if you like. If you have any doubts on the matter, it will take but a few moments to examine the poor child's form, upon which welts and bloody cuts yet remain to be seen."

"Then, I for one propose we give Greyville as good as he meted out!" the man cried, whose name was Tompkins. "I always had a private idea that he was a villain, and now I need no further proof to confirm it. All in favor of hauling him out and lynching him, make manifest by saying 'I.'" [138]

There was a decisive shout among all but about ten of the men, who maintained a grim silence.

"Lynching is a crime, gentlemen," Mr. Thornton said, "in the East, which would render you liable. It can do no harm to give the human monster a taste of the whip, however, and then turn him over to the rigor of the law."

"Perhaps you are right," Tompkins agreed. "Come along, boys! We'll teach the wretch that he must be civilized, if he will live in a civilized country!"

And the sturdy villager led off, the whole crowd following in his rear with indignant faces.

There was indeed a dark look-out for Captain Gregg.

From his library window in the village mansion he was watching the fire, and saw the crowd march in a funeral-like procession down from the bluff along the beach toward the village.

The countess saw, too, and compressed her lips tightly.

"Ze crisis is coming!" she hissed, sharply—so sharply that he started violently. "Ze crowd has heard of ze girl's death, and are coming for you." [139]

He turned deathly pale; they would show him no mercy, as he had shown none to Susie, he well knew.

"We must escape from here, somehow!" he cried. "To submit to arrest means death—for you as well as myself."

"How so?"

"Did you not witness the whipping without attempting to interfere?" he sneered. "They'd string you up as quick as I—especially when investigation came to prove you to be Madame Lisset, the notorious French smuggler."

The woman's turn it was to whiten now, and a suppressed curse escaped from between her clinched teeth.

"I vas one big fool for evaire anchoring here, or having you for me agent," she replied. "Somesing must be done, and zat vera quick. What s'all it be?"

"There is but one course—flight. Go to my room and get all the money and jewels there. When you come back, I will be ready."

She obeyed, and in a very short space of time returned, dressed ready for escape.

Leaving the house by the rear door, they skulked hurriedly along a narrow lane. [140]

This soon brought them out into the country, and into an orchard.

Without pausing, the chief of smugglers made a wide *detour*, which finally brought them out upon the beach, half a mile north of the village, and directly opposite the steamer "Countess," which lay a good two miles out at sea, at anchor.

A light row-boat was drawn upon the beach. This Gregg pushed off into the water, and sprung in, the countess following him. Then, seizing the oars, he pulled with all his skill and strength toward the steamer.

At the same time, a boat manned by half a dozen men, pulled out from the beach in front of the village, and this, too, was headed toward the steamer.

"Ha! they've suspected our dodge!" Gregg growled, on discovering the pursuit. "Curse them! I did not think discovery of our flight would be made so quickly."

"Will zey reach ze boat first?"

"By no means. I've got the start, and the steamer is a good half a mile farther from them than us, if not more!"

Let us look after Fritz.

[141]

The roof of the old rookery on the bluff has just fallen in, and millions of sparks go up toward the cloudy sky.

Is the young detective still within that old building?

He had heard Hartly, when he ran through the house, setting fire to it, and had yelled at the top of his voice for assistance.

But, either Hartly had not heard or did not heed his cries, for no assistance came.

Out in the hall, which adjoined the doorless room, the flames soon began to crackle ominously, and the pungent smell of smoke crept through the wall to his nostrils.

For a few moments Fritz stood transfixed with horror, as the peril of his situation began to dawn upon him.

He knew by the smell that the house was on fire; he knew that if he did not make a hasty escape he would be consumed in the merciless flames.

What was he to do?

Really, what was there he *could* do?

He rushed about, scarcely aware what he was doing.

Suddenly his foot caught upon something, and he fell violently to the floor.

[142]

In all his after life he could look back with gladness upon that mishap, as it was the means of saving him from an awful death.

Quickly scrambling to his feet, he searched the floor; a moment later his hand came in contact with an iron ring. Pulling upon it, he raised a trap in the floor, disclosing a large aperture leading down into another pit below, which he concluded was a cellar.

Without pausing to consider what he was doing, he dropped down through the hole.

Anything was preferable to the horrible danger above.

He landed upon his feet upon a hard bottom of the cellar into which he had leaped.

In a moment thereafter there was a crash, and a portion of the rear roof over the cellar fell in.

The light of the burning timbers now gave him a view of his situation.

The cellar ran in under the whole of the house, and was nearly filled with boxes. The only stairway had been covered by the caving in of the floor, thus closing this avenue of escape.

The caving in, in turn, had been mainly caused by the falling of a heavy girder, from the second floor.

[143]

Directly in front of where Fritz had landed was a large well-like hole in the ground, that looked as if it might be very deep, and his only wonder was that he had not stepped off into it, in the darkness that had prevailed immediately after he had struck into the cellar.

"I vonder off dot vas a well, or ish der hole vot leads down into der cavern," he muttered, peering over the edge. "If der latter vos der case, I'm all righd, providin' I can git down. But off id vos a well, den I vos a gone sucker sure. I don'd see anydings off der rope-ladder."

Looking above his head, he however, discovered where a staple had been recently drawn out of a joist, and this satisfied him that it had been where the ladder had been fastened to, and that the hole was the same that penetrated into the cavern in the bluff.

"Der next t'ing vas to get down dere," he muttered. "If I jump, like ash not I preak mine neck, und den I pe ash pad off ash before, of not vorse."

There seemed no other way of getting down, however, and he resolved to take his chances, rather than remain in the cellar and become a target for the fallen fiery timbers.

[144]

With a prayer for safety he made the uncertain leap.

Down—down—down he went with a velocity that took his breath, and he knew no more, except being conscious of striking the earth with a heavy jar.

When he recovered his senses he was in the outer cave, and Madge Thornton was kneeling over

him, chafing his hands.

The cavern was dense with smoke, and breathing was difficult.

Fritz comprehended the situation at once and sat up.

"I vas come down like a t'ousand of bricks, eh?" he smiled, feeling of his limbs to learn if any of them were seriously damaged. "I forgot all apoud vere I vas going all at vonce. How you got oud off der dungeon?"

"Good luck would have it that Griffith, in his passion should have thrown the bolt of the padlock when the catch was not in, so I easily reached out my hand, drew the padlock off, and got out into the chamber," Madge replied. "What is the matter? Is the old house burning?"

"Yes. We must get oud off here or ve shoke to death. Off it gets too deep, I vil swim mit you t'rough dot hole."

[145]

He accordingly arose to his feet, and raising her in his arms, he waded toward the aperture, and outside of the cavern, around to the southern beach, the water in the deepest place but reaching to his throat.

"By shimminy dunder, I feel yoost like ash if I vas tickled to death, t'ings haff turned oud so vell," Fritz cried, as he placed Madge on her feet. "A vile ago I vas ash goot ash guff up for a roasted Dutchman; now I vas oud, und so vas you, und I feel better ash a spring lamb."

"Are you sure we are out of danger?"

"Vel, no, not eggsactly sure, but I t'ink ve pe all righd now. Yoost you sday here in der shadow off yer pluff, vile I skirmish aroundt und see vot's to pay."

She accordingly did as directed, while he clambered up the side of the bluff, bent on reconnoissance.

The first man and only man he met was Mr. Thornton, who had hurried back from the village to the bluff as soon as Captain Gregg was discovered missing, to keep watch in the vicinity.

He uttered a cry of joy as he saw Fritz.

"Why, bless you, boy, I never expected to see you again!" he cried, shaking the young detective by the hand.

[146]

"Und you come purdy near id, too, you can bet a half-dollar, Mr. Thornton, for I yoost got oud off der building here in time to save mine vool. But I haff got your daughter, und der monish vas safe!"

"What! you do not tell me this for a fact, Fritz?"

"Vel, off I don'd misdake, it vas. Yoost vait here, und I pring you der girl. Ash to der money, she vas no fool, und put it avay vere she can get it again."

He vanished, only to reappear a few minutes later, accompanied by Madge.

Then followed a touching scene. The speculator received his lost daughter with open arms; there were explanations, and kisses, and tears, and laughs, and the reunion was now complete.

Leaving them to their joy, let us take a concluding glance at the ocean race, which was in the meantime transpiring.

The pursuers saw Gregg pull out from the shore as soon as he saw them; and they tugged at their oars with a will.

"Pull, boys!" Tompkins cried, from his position at the steering-oar. "See! the woman is waving her handkerchief! That is a signal to the crew on board to fire up, ready to be off. Pull—pull for your worth! We must intercept them, if possible, before they board!"

[147]

The villagers did pull, with a will, and their boat fairly leaped over the water.

Tompkins had guessed the truth. The countess's signal did result in the crew's raising anchor, and in unbanking the slumbering fires, for huge volumes of smoke almost immediately began to roll from the smokestacks.

But, pull though they did, with almost super-human efforts, the pursuers were destined not to win.

Gregg's boat reached the steamer while the villagers were yet eight minutes distant, and he and the countess clambered aboard. Then the steamer's whistle gave a defiant shriek, and the craft began to move away.

As she did so, the pursuers saw a man suddenly leap overboard into the water.

Pulling on, they came to him, just as he was sinking for the last time.

It was Hal Hartly, and he was mortally wounded.

He only spoke once after they pulled him aboard; it was to gasp out faintly:

"She's doomed! I've scuttled her!"

Then the blood spurted from his mouth, and he expired, while the "Countess" steamed away to sea, and was lost from view, and Captain Gregg the smuggler was lost from the clutches of the law.

[148]

What was the fate of the "Countess" is not definitely known, but she never again entered the port of Havre, nor was a soul on board of her ever afterward seen.

The Philadelphia detectives who arrived the next day found no one to arrest, as those on whom

suspicion could justly rest, had fled, during the night.

Susie and Hal Hartly received a respectable burial, at the expense of Mr. Thornton; then, after paying Fritz as promised, the sum of five thousand dollars, the speculator set out for his Western home, accompanied by his daughter, and by Griffith Gregg, who was to go back to the scene of his crimes, for trial.

With his reward money, Fritz immediately returned to Philadelphia, and soon after purchased an interest in a paying established business, where he may be seen 'most any day, when not on detective duty, or if he is out, his pretty wife Rebecca will represent him.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRITZ TO THE FRONT, OR, THE
VENTRILOQUIST SCAMP-HUNTER ***

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