UNDER A CLOUD.

A THRILLING TALE OF HUMAN LIFE.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

RUN TO EARTH.

"What the dickens does it all mean?" thought Guest wonderingly, as he followed into Stratton's chambers, with a strange feeling of expectancy exciting him. Something was going to happen, he felt sure, and that something would be connected with his friend. And now he began to regret bitterly having urged on the quest. It had had the effect of rousing Stratton for the moment, but he looked horrible now, and Guest asked himself again, what did it mean?

The sergeant looked sharply round Stratton's room, and noted where the chamber lay; but his attention was at once riveted upon the fireplace with its two doors, and he walked to the one on the right, seized the handle, and found it fast.

"Yes," he said, "been open once, but closed, I should say, for many years."

"Want it opened, pardner?" said his companion.

"Not that one," said the sergeant meaningly; and he went to the door on the left, Stratton watching him fixedly the while, and Guest, in turn, watching his friend, with a sense of some great trouble looming over him, as he wondered what was about to happen.

"Hah! yes," said the sergeant, who began to show no little excitement now; "fellow door sealed up, too."

Guest started and glanced quickly at his friend, who remained drawn up, silent and stern, as a man would look who was submitting to a scrutiny to which he has objected.

The sergeant shook the door, but it was perfectly fast, and the handle immovable.

"Some time since there was a way through here," he said confidently; and, as he spoke, Guest again gazed at Stratton, and thought of how short a time it was since he had been in the habit of going to that closet to fetch out soda water, spirits, and cigars.

What did it mean? What could it mean, and why did not Strattton speak out and say: "The closet belongs to this side of the suite."

But no; he was silent and rigid, while the sense of a coming calamity loomed broader to mingle with a cloud of regrets.

He was trying to think out some means of retiring from the scrutiny, as the sergeant turned to his companion and said a few words in a low tone—words which Guest felt certain meant orders to force open the closet door, which, for some reason, Stratton had fastened up when the sergeant spoke out:

"Now, gentlemen, please, we'll go back the other chambers.

Guest drew a deep breath, full of relief, for the tension was, for the moment, at an end.

He followed with Stratton, whose eyes now met his; and there was such a look of helplessness and despair in the gaze that Guest caught his friend's arm.

"What is it, old fellow?" he whispered; but there was no reply, and, after closing the door, they followed into Brettison's room, where the sergeant stood ready for them with his companion.

As they entered, the man closed the door and said sharply:

"You're right, gentlemen; there has been foul play."

A cold sweat burst out over Guest's brow, and his hair began to cling to his temples. He once more glanced at Stratton, but he did not move a muscle; merely stood listening, as if surprised at the man's assertion.

"There have always been two cupboards here, made out of these two old passages, and this one has been lately fastened up."

"No, no," said Stratton, in a low, deep tone.

"What, sir! Look here," cried the man, and he shook one of the great panels low down in the door, and the other higher. "What do you say to that? Both those have been out quite lately."

Stratton bent forward, looking startled, and then stepped close up to the door, to see for himself if the man was correct.

The lower panel was certainly loose, and could be shaken about a quarter of an inch each way, but that seemed to be all; and looking relieved he drew back.

"Nonsense!" he said. "Absurd!"

Guest looked at him sharply, for the voice seemed to be that of a stranger.

"Not very absurd, sir," replied the sergeant. "This door was made two or three hundred years ago, I should say, and the old oak is shrunken and worm-eaten. I could easily shove that panel out, but there's no need. Here, Jem, try and open the lock the regular way."

Stratton's lips parted, but he said no word; and, as the second man strode up to the door with his tools, the sergeant went on:

"I thought it was a mare's nest, sir, and even now I don't like to speak too fast; but it looks to me as if the poor gentleman had been robbed and murdered, and whoever did it has hidden the body in here."

A curious cry escaped from Stratton's lips, and he gazed fiercely at the officer.

"That's it, sir," said the man. "It's a startler for you, I know, living so close, but I'm afraid it's true. Well, Jem, what do you make of it?"

Guest looked as if he had received a mental blow, as idea after idea flashed through his mind. Stratton's manner suggested it—his acts of late, the disappearance of Brettison on the wedding day, the large sum of money on the table, the mad horror and despair of the man ever since—it must be so; and he felt that here was the real key to all his friend's strange behavior.

He wiped the cold moisture from his brow, and stared at Stratton, but his friend was standing rigid and determined, watching the actions of the two men, and Guest had hard work to suppress a groan, as he felt that his companion would owe to him the discovery and the punishment that would follow.

Just then Stratton turned and saw that he was being watched; but, as if all attempts at concealment were hopeless, he smiled faintly at his friend and then turned away.

The workman had not made any reply, and the sergeant spoke again as a large picklock was thrust into the keyhole again and again.

"Rusted up?"

"Ay, and eaten away; there hasn't been a key used in that lock in our time, pardner. But stop a minute; more ways of killing a cat than hanging of her. Let's have a look."

He began to examine the edge of the door, and then turned sharply round.

"Look here," he said; and then taking hold of the antique door knob, he lifted it and the whole of the front bar of rail came away—a piece of narrow wood six feet long.

"Split away from the tenons," he said; and the sergeant uttered an ejaculation, full of eager satisfaction.

"There, gentleman," he said, pointing. "One—two—three—four bright new screws. What do you say now?"

There they were plain enough, close to the door frame, and Guest uttered a low sigh as he supported himself by the back of a chair.

"Out with 'em, Jem," cried the sergeant excitedly, and, a large screw-driver being produced from the tool bag, the screws were attacked, and turned easily, the man rapidly withdrawing them and laying them one by one on the mantel shelf.

"They haven't been in very long," he muttered, raising one to his nose. "Been rubbed in paraffin candle, I should say."

He began turning another, while the sergeant gave Guest the lantern to hold while he went and picked up the piece of candle they had found at first.

"Not all teeth marks, gentlemen," he said; "the candle was used to ease those screws."

There was a pause then, for the man was at work on the last screw, and as he turned, Guest arrived at the course he should pursue. Stratton was ignoring the fact that the closet belonged to his room; he must, for his own sake, do the same. He could not give evidence against his friend; for there it was plain enough now, and if Stratton had been guilty of Brettison's death, he was being bitterly punished for his crime.

The last screw fell on the floor, and was picked up and placed with the others. Then the man stood with his screw-driver in his hand.

"Prize it open?" he said. The sergeant nodded, and on forcing the edge of the screw-driver in the crack between the inner half of the bar and the jamb, it acted as a lever, and the door gave with a faint creak but as soon as it was a couple of inches open the man drew back.

"Your job now," he said.

The sergeant stepped forward; Stratton stood firm, as if carved in stone, and Guest closed his eyes, feeling sick, and as if the room was turning round, till a sharp ejaculation made him open his eyes again to see that the sergeant had entered with his lantern, and was making it play over the panels of the inner side of the farther door.

"That's the old door leading into the place, I suppose, sir?" he said.

"Yes."

Guest started again, the voice sounded so strange, but he was gaining courage, for there was the familiar dark bathroom, viewed from the other end, with the cigar box on the shelf close to the door in company with the spirit stand. Beneath the shelf there were three large four-gallon tins, which were unfamiliar, and suggested petroleum or crystal oil; there was a mackintosh hung on a peg, looking very suggestive; an alpenstock in a corner, with a salmon and trout rod. Guest saw all this at a glance, and his spirits rose, for there was no ghastly scene upon which to gaze.

Then his spirits sank to zero again, for there was the oblong of the inclosed bath occupying the left of the long, narrow place, and only just leaving room for anyone to pass.

He shuddered, and at that moment the sergeant took hold of the edge of the mahogany lid to raise it, but without success.

"Fast," muttered the latter; and he held the light to the glistening French-polished mahogany cover, looking from place to place. "Here you are, Jem," he said, in a low tone; "four more screws, and only just put in."

The other man uttered a low growl, and entered with his screw-driver; moistened his hands and the tool creaked on the top of a screw, and then entered the cross slit with a loud snap. The next minute the first screw was being withdrawn.

"Pretty badly put in," said the man. "Didn't have a carpenter here."

He worked away, making the old place vibrate a little with his efforts, and to Guest the whole business was horribly suggestive of taking off the lid from a coffin; but he was firmer now, as he stood behind Stratton, who drew a deep breath, now and then like a heavy sigh, but neither stirred from his position by the door they had entered, nor spoke.

All at once there was a sharp rap on the lid of the bath, which acted like a sounding-board, and the man at work started back in alarm.

"All right, Jem," said the sergeant; "you jarred it down from the shelf."

As he spoke he snatched up what he evidently looked upon as evidence; for it was a large gimlet, evidently quite new, and its long spiral glistened in the light of the lantern.

"Thought somebody throwed it," growled the man, as he resumed his task of withdrawing the screws till the last was out, and placed close to the bath, on the floor.

"Sure that's all?" said the sergeant.

The man ran his fingers along the edge of the bath lid, uttered a grunt, and drew back towards the door by which he had entered.

"Lift up the lid, man—lift up the lid," said the sergeant, directing the lantern so that the grain of the new-looking wood glistened and seemed full of golden and ruddy brown depths of shadow, among which the light seemed to play.

"Do you hear?" he said. "Lift up the lid."

The man made no answer, but ran his hand over his moist forehead, and still backed towards the door, where Stratton and Guest were standing. Then, as they drew aside to let him pass:

"Precious hot in there," he growled.

"Look here, Jem," said the sergeant; "don't leave a fellow in the lurch. Come on."

Thus adjured the man turned back and held out his hand.

"It ain't my work," he said in a hoarse whisper; "I've done my bit. But I'll hold the light for you, if you like."

The sergeant passed the lantern to his companion, who took it, and so reversed its position, the rays from the bull's-eye being directed toward the sergeant, and, consequently, Stratton and Guest were in the shadow, out of which the latter peered forward with his heart beating violently, and as he leaned forward he touched Stratton's arm.

He shuddered and shrank back, being conscious that Stratton grasped the reason, for a low sigh escaped him; but he did not stir, and, in spite of his feeling of repulsion, Guest felt compelled to press forward again to witness the horror about to be unveiled.

"Turn the light more down," whispered the sergeant; and, in spite of the low tone in which they were uttered, the words sounded loudly in Guest's ears.

"Now for it," muttered the officer; and as if forcing himself to act, he flung up the bath lid so that it struck against the panelled side of the place with a sharp rap, and set free a quantity of loose plaster and brickwork to fall behind the wainscot with a peculiar, rustling sound that sent a shudder through the lookers on.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BLIND LEAD.

As that horrible, rustling sound behind the wainscot was heard, the two hardened men in the old passage shrank away to door and end, while a cold sweat bedewed Guest's face, and his breath felt labored. Then there was a reaction. Old memories flashed through his brain, and he seized Stratton's arm.

"Old friends," he muttered. "I can't forsake him now."

The arm he gripped felt rigid and cold, but Stratton made no movement, no sign, and that moment they saw the sergeant flash the light down into the sarcophagus-like receptacle; for thanks to the manufacturers, our baths are made as suggestive of a man's last resting-place as they can be designed.

There was utter silence then for a moment. Then the sergeant uttered a low whistle and exclaimed:

"Well, I am blessed!"

"Aint he there?" said the workman, from the door.

"Come and look, Jem."

Jem went in slowly, looked down in the bath, which was lit up by the rays from the lantern, and then uttered a low, chuckling sound, while Guest tried to make out the meaning of the strange expression, dimly seen, on his friend's face.

For Stratton's eyes showed white circles about the irises, as he now leaned forward to gaze into the bath.

Guest was the last to look into the white enameled vessel, one third full of what seemed to be water, but from the peculiar odor which rose from the surface, evidently was not.

Stratton was silent; and in the strange exultation he felt on seeing that all the horrors he had imagined were vain and empty, Guest shouted:

"Bah! What cock-and-bull stories you policemen hatch!"

The sergeant, who had been regularly taken aback, recovered himself at this.

"Come, sir," he cried; "I like that. You come to us and say your friend's missing, and you think that he is lying dead in his chambers."

"Well," said Guest, with a forced laugh, as he glanced uneasily at Stratton; "it did look suspicious, and you worked it all up so theatrically that I was a little impressed."

"Theatrical! Impressed, sir! Why, it was all as real to me; and I say again your friend ought to be lying there. What do you say, Jem?"

"Cert'nly."

"But he is not," said Guest sharply; "and it has all been a false alarm, you see, and I'm very, very glad."

"That's sperrits, sure enough, sir," said the man, dipping his finger in the bath again. "Open that there lantern, pardner."

The sergeant obeyed, and his companion thrust in his finger, for it to be enveloped directly with a bluish flame.

"Mind what you're doing," said the sergeant hastily, "or we shall have the whole place a-fire."

"All right, pardner. Sperrits it is, and, I should say, come in them cans."

He gave one of the great tins a tap with his toe, and it sent forth a dull, metallic sound.

"Very likely," said Guest. "Our friend is a naturalist, and uses spirits to preserve things in."

"Look ye here," said the workman oracularly, and he worked one hand about as he spoke. "I don't purfess to know no more than what's my trade, which is locks and odd jobs o' that sort. My pardner here'll tell you, gents, that I'll face anything from a tup'ny padlock up to a strong room or a patent safe; but I've got a thought here as may be a bright, un, or only a bit of a man's nat'ral fog. You want to find this gent don't you?"

"Yes," said Guest; and the tone of that "yes" suggested plainly enough, "no."

"What have you got in that wooden head of yours now, Jem?" growled the sergeant.

"Wait a minute, my lad, and you'll hear."

"There's no occasion for us to stop here," said Guest hurriedly.

"On'y a minute, sir, and then I'll screw down the lid. What I wanted to say, gents, is; haven't we found the party after all?"

"What!" cried Guest. "Where?"

"Here, sir. I don't understand sperrits—beer's my line; but what I say is: mayn't the gent be in there, after all, in slooshun—melted away in the sperrits, like a lump o' sugar in a man's tea?"

"No, he mayn't," said the sergeant, closing the lid with a bang. "Don't you take no notice of him, gentlemen; he's handled screws till he's a reg'lar screw himself."

"But what I say is——"

"Hold your row, and don't make a fool of yourself, mate. Get your work done, and then go home and try experiments with a pint o' paraffin and a rat."

The man utterd a growl, and attacked the bath lid angrily, screwing it down as the light was held for him, and then going with the others into the sitting room, where he soon restored the old door to its former state, there being no sign, when he had finished, of its having been touched.

Then, after a glance round, with Brettison's portrait still seeming to watch them intently, the outer door was closed, and the little party returned to Stratton's chambers, where certain coins were passed from hand to hand, evidently to the great satisfaction of the two men, for Jem began to chuckle and shake his head.

"Well" said the sergeant; "what now?"

"I was thinking, pardner, about baths."

"Yes, sir, I'm going; but there's your gents as goes and breaks the ice in the Serpentine, and them as goes to be cooked in a hoven, and shambooed; and you pull your strings and has it in showers, and your hot waters and cold waters; but this gent seems to have liked his stronger than anyone I ever knowed afore. I say pardner that's having your lotion, and no sham."

"Pooh!" said the sergeant.

"Look here," said Guest quickly, and he slipped another sovereign into the sergeant's hand, "this has all been a foolish mistake. I was too hasty."

"Only did your duty, sir," replied the man. "It was quite right, and I'm glad, for all concerned, that it was a mistake."

"You understand, then; we don't want it to be talked about in the inn, or—or—anywhere, in fact."

"Don't you be afraid about that, sir," said the man quietly. "I don't wonder at you. It did look suspicious, but that's all right, sir. Good night, gentlemen both.

And he closed both doors; and then, with a peculiar sensation of shrinking, turned to face Stratton where he stood by the fireplace.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THEY GET OFF EASY.

Fourteen Years is What Two Chicago Policemen Get For Killing an Escaping Prisoner.

Thomas J. Morgan and Micheal J. Healy, two Chicago policemen, were found guilty the other day of manslaughter and each sentenced to 14 years in the penitentiary. The crime for which the two men, who, when members of the police force, were convicted, was the killing of Swan Nelson early on the morning of Christmas Day, 1893. Nelson had just been celebrating the coming holiday, or the greater portion of the preceding Christmas, and when he started for his home he met Officers Moran and Healy, and with them entered a saloon for the purpose of getting a drink.

The three men had several drinks, and one of the officers insisted that Nelson buy more. He refused and was placed under arrest by one of the officers, both of whom were under the influence of liquor. Nelson broke away and ran toward his home followed by both officers, firing at him. One of the bullets wounded him fatally and he crawled under a house, from where he was dragged out by Officer Healy. Nelson died in the patrol wagon while being conveyed to the County Hospital.

The matter was brought before the grand jury of January, 1894, but "no bill" was returned. This angered the Scandinavian element, and a determined effort was made to bring the case to trial. The second time an indictment was returned, and the Scandinavian societies spent much time and money in working up evidence against the two officers, who had, they declared, murdered Nelson. The case has been on trial in the Criminal Court for several weeks, and has been bitterly fought on both sides.

Pitifully Humorous.

Some men's wives are too much like slaves, beings whose duty it is to be contented with plenty of hard work and something less than a plenty of board and clothes. Such a case seems to have been brought to light in southern Indiana, under circumstances half-pathetic, half-humorous.

An aged couple who had lived snugly for many years, sold their farm for sixteen thousand dollars. In due course the purchaser called with a notary to close up the business. The notary had prepared a deed, which the farmer signed, and passed to his wife, whose signature also was necessary.

To the surprise of all concerned, the woman refused to put her name to the document.

"I have lived on this farm for fifty years," she said, "and I'm not going to sign away my rights unless I get something out of it that I can call my own."

The husband reasoned with her; the notary did likewise. She was immovable. The purchaser grew nervous. There was no telling how unreasonable her demands might be, and he was eager to get the farm.

"How much will you take to sign the deed?" he inquired. The woman hesitated. Finally she said:

"Well, I think I ought to have two dollars."

The man handed her the amount, and she signed the papers. Then she turned the silver dollars over and over, jingling one against the other, and chuckling over her good fortune.

"Well, well," she said, "this is the first money I ever had in my life to spend to suit myself."

Eminently Satisfactory.

Medical Examiner—Suppose you should have a patient with some disease which you knew nothing about. What would you do?

Student—Charge him five dollars for the examination, and then send him to you.

YOUNG FOLKS.

"Ana, Mana, Mona, Mike."

In an empty room we three
Play the games we always like,
And count to see who "it" shall be—
Ana, mana, mona, mike.

Round and round the rhyme will go
Ere the final word shall strike,
Counting fast or counting slow—
Barcelona, bona, strike.

What it all means no one knows,
Mixed up like a peddlar's pack,
As from door to door he goes—
Hare, ware, frow, frack.

Now we guess and now we doubt,
Words enough or words we lack,
Till the rhyming brings about
Welcomed with a farewell shout—
Hallico, ballico, we-wi-wo-wack, You are out.

Apron and Necktie Party.

We want to tell our young readers about an "apron and necktie party" that was held a short time ago. The party was for young folks from twelve to eighteen years old. All were requested to bring aprons and ties to match.

At the door stood a young man with a basket in his hand, and as each lady and girl entered she dropped a package containing a necktie into the basket.

As the boys entered they were each handed a card with a number on it. The girls remained in the dressing-room until all had arrived and were ready to go together into the hall.

It was amusing to see so many girls—there were about fifty—come marching into the hall, each wearing a gay apron. They seated themselves at one end of the platform. The boys took the opposite side of the hall. The spectators were the parents, older brothers and sisters, and a few friends of the children. There were about one hundred and fifty in all.

After all were seated and prepared to listen, a young boy sixteen years old played a pretty piece on the piano; other pieces on the piano and two songs followed. Then the young man with the basket in which were the neckties, stepped on the platform and said he was ready to call the numbers.

Each boy on getting his tie was given time to fasten it at his neck and find the apron to match it, before another was called. This was done so as to give each necktie and apron a chance to be seen.

No. 1 was called, and a bashful boy of thirteen walked up and took a package out of the basket; he opened it, and out came a tie of red, white and blue stripes. There was enough material in it to make a good sized flag. He found the apron to match worn by a girl of seventeen. They took their place on the floor amid roars of laughter.

No. 2 was called; he got a long white tie with loops long enough to reach to each shoulder, and ends down to his knees. Another got a bright red, and the apron to match had such large strings that they would have made a table-spread.

One couple had tie and apron made of black cloth thickly covered with red stars. The stars were the size of a silver dollar, made of red flannel and sewed on the black. The tie was very large.

The last one drawn was gay calico. It was bright blue ground covered with gay colored flowers, roses, pinks, tulips, and green leaves; the flowers were as large as a sauce dish. The tie was large enough to reach to each shoulder and the ends to the waist; the apron was big enough for a couch cover.

The ties we have mentioned caused more laughter and amusements than the others, although they were all comical and worth describing, if we had the space.

When the boys were all decked with their gay ties and with their partners in line around the hall, a lively march was played on the piano. They went around the hall a number of times and then marched to the supper room. There were three long tables with white table cloths, white dishes, paper napkins and a very large bowl of lovely flowers on the centre of each table. Coffee, biscuits, and cold boiled ham, were served first; then ice cream, cocoanut, chocolate, and sponge cake.

After the young folks had their supper the older ones gathered around the tables and while we were eating, the boys and girls were playing games: "the miller," "drop the handkerchief," and "rope." At the last they all formed in line and marched to the dressing-room, where each boy said good-night to his partner.

The party broke up at half past ten o'clock, and a jolly time they had, and such laughing as the boys buttoned their overcoats, to hide their gay neckties. They said they were going to keep them it remembrance of the party.

How Big Was Adam?

There are hardly any truthful records of the giants of the past, though literature is full of wondrous tales about them. A French Academician, M. Henrion, once estimated the height of Adam to be 123 feet, and that of Eve, 118, proportions that must have appeared most formidable to the serpent, and made the proposition for apples seem a somewhat trivial thing. The same authority brings Abraham down to twenty-eight feet, and makes Moses only thirteen. Goliath's recorded height is, however, only nine feet nine inches, which is within the bounds of possibility. Pliny speaks of seeing a giantess ten feet two inches in height, and a skeleton seventy feet long. There are weird stories of the Emperor Maximilian, who was reputed to be nine feet high, and to have eaten forty pounds of meat a day.

One Way.

Do you have much trouble with your help, Mrs. Penguin? asked Mrs. Waglum.

Not a bit, said Mrs. Penguin.

Why, how do you avoid it? said Mrs. Waglum, in astonishment.

I don't keep any," said Mrs. Penguin.