Husband and Wife.

Husband loquitur:

It's the strangest thing that ever I knew,
And the most provoking, 'twix me and you,
For a woman who's got a man like me,
A good provider, and steady and free.
With all her folks with funds salted down,
And as fine a house as any in town,
To be lamenting 'cause one child in ten
Ain't quite so good as he might have been.

"It's a pretty good showing, it seems to me,
That only a tenth of the lot should be
A little off color, and that's what I say
To their mother twenty times in a day,
But I can't make her see it in that light,
And she listens and waits night after night
For the sound of his step, till I grow so wild
That I almost curse both mother and child.

"She ought to live for the others, you know,
And let the tormenting vagabond go
And follow his ways and take the pain—
But I turn him out and she calls him again,
This makes a hardness between her and me,
And the worst of it is, the children agree
That I'm in the right. You'd pity her then,
Such times I think I'm the meanest of men.

"I've argued and scolded and coaxed without end;
Her answer is always: 'My boy has one friend
As long as I live, and your charge is untrue
That my heart holds not equal love for you
And all the rest. But the one gone astray
Needs me the most, and you'll find 'tis the way
Of all mothers to hold close to the one
Who hurts her the most. So love's work is done.'

"Now what can I say to such words as those?
I'm not convinced, as the history shows,
But I often wonder which one is right,
As I hear her light step night after night,
Here and there, to the window and door,
As she waits with a heart that is heavy and sore.'
I wish the boy dead, while she gives her life
To save him from sin. There's husband and wife."

—*Youth's Companion.*

PAULINE.

Presently a sudden, fierce longing to be out of doors came over me. It was night—very few people would be about. There was a broad pavement in front of the row of houses in one of which I lodged. Up and down this I might walk in perfect safety. Even if I only sat on the doorstep it would be better than lying in this close, hot room, tossing from side to side unable to sleep.

The desire took full possession of me that I was on the point of calling old Priscilla and making her aware of it; but knowing she was sleeping soundly, I hesitated. I had been unusually restless, cross and exacting during the day, and my old nurse—Heaven reward her!—was serving me for love, not for money. Why should I disturb her? Let me begin to learn to help myself like others in my wretched plight. I had already acquired th much, to dress without assistance. If I could now do this and leave the room unheard, I could, I felt sure, grope my way to the front door, let myself out, and, whenever I chose, return by the aid of the latch-key. The thought of even a temporary independence was attractive, and my spirits rose as I resolved to make the attempt.

I crept softly from my bed and slowly, but easily dressed myself, hearing all the while the sleeper's regular breathing. Then, cautious as a thief, I stole to the door which led from my bed-room to the landing. I opened it without noise and stood on the thick carpet outside, smiling as I thought of the sleeper's dismay if she awoke and discovered my absence. I closed the door, then, guiding myself by the balustrade, passed lightly down the stairs and reached the street door without accident.

There were other lodgers in the house, among them young men who came in at all hours, so, the door being always left on the latch, I had no bolts to contend with. In a moment I was on the doorstep, with the door behind me closed.

I stood for a short time irresolute, almost trembling at my temerity. This was the first time I had ventured beyond the house without a guiding hand to trust to. Yet I knew there was nothing to fear. The street—a quiet one—was deserted. The pavement was broad, I could walk up and down without let or hindrance, guiding myself, after the manner of other blind persons, by tapping my stick against the curbstone or the railings. Still I must take a few precautions to enable me to ascertain my latitude and longitude at will.

I came down the four steps which led from the front door, turned myself to the right, and, by aid of the line of railings, set my face toward the end of the street. There I began to walk and to count my steps, sixty-two of which brought my right foot on to a road, which told me I had reached my limit. I turned, counted back the sixty-two paces, and then sixty-five more in the same direction before I found myself again off the pavement. My calculations were verified by my knowing that my house was very near the centre of the row. I was now quite at my ease; I had determined the length of my tether; I could walk up and down the deserted street, yet, at any time I wished to do so, could by counting from either end, arrest my steps in front of my abode.

So, mightily proud of my success, for a while I went up and down—up and down. I heard one or two cabs pass me, and also one or two persons afoot. As these latter seemed to pay no attention to me, I felt glad to think that my appearance and gait were not such as to attract notice. Most men like to conceal their infirmities.

The night excursion did me a great deal of good. Perhaps it was finding that I was not altogether so helpless and dependent that changed in a few minutes my whole frame of mind. The mental rebound took place. I went from despondency to hope—extravagant hope—even to certainty. Like a revelation it came to me that my malady was curable; that, in spite of my presentiment, what friends had been assuring me would prove to be the truth. So elated I grew that I threw my head back and walked with a firm, quick step, almost forgetting that I was sightless. I began to think of many things, and my thoughts were happier ones than I had known for months. I gave up counting my paces, I walked on and on, planning what I should do; where I should go when my darkness was removed. I do not know whether I may have at times guided myself by the wall or the pavement edge; but if so I did it mechanically and instinctively, without noticing the action or remembering it afterward.

I cannot say whether it may be possible for a blind man, who can divest himself of the fear of encountering unseen obstacles, to walk as straightly and accurately as one who can see. I only know that, in my preoccupied and elevated state of mind, I must have done so. Intoxicated and carried away by the return of hope, I may have walked as a somnambulist or as one in a trance. Any way, forgetful of all save my brighter thoughts, I went on and on, heedless of the missing sense, until coming full against a person walking in the opposite direction recalled me from my visions and brought me back to my misery. I felt the man I had encountered shake himself free; I heard him mutter "Stupid fool!" and go swiftly on his way, leaving me motionless on the spot where the collision had occurred, wondering where I was and what I should do.

It was no use attempting to find my way back unaided. Not having brought my repeater with me I could not even say how long I had been walking. It might have been ten minutes, it might have been an hour since I gave up counting my steps. Judging by the number of things I had thought of since that rapturous exaltation of mind commenced it seemed more likely to be the latter. Now that I had come back to the earth I must be content to remain on this particular spot of it until I heard the step of a policeman or some one else who might happen to be abroad at this unusual hour—unusual, at least in this quiet part of London. I leaned my back against the wall and waited patiently.

I soon heard an approaching step; but such a staggering, uncertain, lurching kind of step, that from the sound of the feet alone I was able to determine the condition of their owner, and I was obliged to decide that he was not the man I wanted. I must let him pass and wait for another. But the feet staggered up to me and stopped near me, whilst a voice, jolly, but like the feet unsteady, cried—

"'Nother feller worsh than me! Can't get on at all—eh, old chap? Comfort t' think some one's head'll ache worsh than mine to-morrow!"

"Can you tell me the way to Walpole street?" I asked, standing erect to show him I was sober.

"Walpole street—course I can—closh by—third to left I think."

"If you are going that way would you lead me to the corner of it. Unhappily I am blind and have lost my way."

"Blind, poor beggar—not screwed then. Guess I'm in a nice state to lead any one. Blind leading blind—both tumble into ditch. I shay, though," he added with drunken gravity, "make a bargain—I lend you eyes, you lend me legsh. Good idea. Come 'long."

He took my arm and we went yawning up the street. Presently he stopped.

"Walpole street," he hiccoughed. "Shall I take you to your house!"

"No thank you. Please put my hand on the railing of the corner house. I shall be all right then."

"Wish I were right. Wish I could borrow your legs to take me home," said my bibulistic conductor. "Good night—Blesh you."

I heard him tack away, then turned to complete my journey.

I was not quite certain as to which end of Walpole street I was starting from; that mattered little. Either sixty-two or sixty-five paces would leave me in front of my door. I counted sixty-two, and then felt for the entrance between the railings; not finding it, I went on a step or two until I came to it. I was glad to have reached home without accident, and, to tell the truth, was beginning to feel a little ashamed of my escapade. I hoped that Priscilla had not discovered my absence and alarmed the house, and I trusted I should be able to regain my room as quietly as I had quitted it. With all my elaborate calculations, I was not quite sure that I had hit upon the right house; but if they were incorrect I could only be a door or two away from it, and the key in my hand would be a certain test.

I went up the doorsteps—was it four or five I had counted as I came out?—I fumbled for the keyhole and inserted the latch-key. It turned easily and the door opened. I had not made a mistake. I felt an inward glow of satisfaction at having hit upon the house at the first attempt. "It must have been a blind man who first discovered that necessity is the mother of invention," I said, as I softly closed the door behind me and prepared to creep up to my own room.

I wondered what the time was. All I knew was that it must be still night, for I was able to distinguish light from darkness. As I had found myself so close to Walpole street I could not have walked for any length of time in my ecstatic state, so I fancied it must be somewhere about 2 o'clock.

Even more anxious than when I started to make no noise which might awaken people, I found the bottom of the staircase and began my stealthy ascent.

Somehow, blind as I was, the place seemed unfamiliar to me. The balustrade I was touching did not seem the same. The very texture of the carpet under my feet seemed different. Could it be possible that I had entered the wrong house? There are plenty of instances on record of a key having opened a strange lock. Could I, through such a circumstance, have strayed into a neighbor's house? I paused; the perspiration rising on my brow as I thought of the awkward situation in which I should be placed if it were so. For a moment I resolved to retrace my steps and try the next house; but I could not be quite sure I was wrong. Then I remembered that in my own house a bracket, with a plaster figure upon it, hung near the top of the stairs. I knew the exact place, having been cautioned many times to keep my head from knocking against it. I could settle all my doubts by going on and feeling for this landmark; so on I went.

I ran my fingers softly along the wall, but no bracket could I find. My hand touched the lintel of a door instead. Then I knew, for certain, I was in the wrong house. The only thing to be done was to creep out as quietly as I had entered and try my luck next door.

As I turned to grope my way back I heard the murmur of voices—late as it was, there were people talking in the room, the door of which my fingers had so lightly touched.

I could not distinguish words, but I was sure the voices were those of men. I stood irresolute. Would it not be better to knock at the door and throw myself upon the mercy of the inmates of the room? I could apologize and explain. My blindness would account for the mistake. Some one would, no doubt, be kind enough to put me on the right road home. Yes, this was the best to do. I could not go on creeping into strange houses like a midnight thief. Perhaps each house in the row had an equally common lock and my key might open all. If so, the end would be that some alarmed householder would put a bullet into me before I had time to assert my innocence.

Just as I raised my fingers to tap at the door I heard another voice—a woman's voice. It seemed to come from the back room and was singing to an accompaniment played softly on the piano. I paused and listened—

I have been so occupied with complaining of the hardships of my lot I have not told you I had one solace to my misery; that merciful gift, so often bestowed on the blind, music. Had it not been for this I believe those weeks of darkness and uncertainty would have driven me mad. Had it not been that I could pass many weary hours away playing to myself, that I could be taken to concerts and hear others play and sing, my days would be unbearable, and I shudder to think of what aid I might have called in to render them less burdensome—

I waited and listened to the song. It was taken from an opera recently produced on the continent, an opera not yet popularly known in England, and the song was one that few amateurs would dare to attempt. The singer, whoever she might be, sang it softly and under her voice, as though fearing to throw it out with full force. The lateness of the hour might well account for this restraint. Nevertheless, any one capable of judgment must have known he was listening to no ordinary singer. It was easy to recognize the trained skill and dormant power, and imagine what, under favorable circumstances, that voice might accomplish. I was enchanted. My idea was that I had stumbled into a nest of professionals—people whose duties ended so late, that to enjoy any evening at all, night must be greatly encroached upon. All the better for me! Bohemians themselves, my unexpected nocturnal intrusion might not frighten them out of their wits.

The singer had now commenced the second verse. I placed my ear close to the door to catch every note. I was curious to know what she would make of the effective but trying finale, when—oh horrible contrast to the soft sweet liquid notes and subdued words of passionate love!—I heard a gasp, a spasmodic, fearful gasp, that could convey but one meaning. I heard it succeeded by a long deep groan, which terminated in a gurgling sound which froze my blood. I heard the music stop suddenly, and the cry, the piercing cry of a woman ring out like a frightful change from melody to discord, and then I heard a dull, heavy thud on the floor!

I waited to hear no more. I knew that some dreadful deed had been perpetrated within a few feet of where I stood. My heart beat wildly and fiercely. In the excitement of the moment I forgot that I was not like others—forgot that strength and courage could avail me nothing—forgot everything save a desire to prevent the accomplishment of crime—the wish to do a man's duty in saving life and succoring the ones in peril. I threw open the door and rushed headlong into the room. Then, as I became aware of the presence of strong light, but light which revealed nothing to me, the folly and rashness of my proceedings came fully home to me, and like a flash it crossed my mind that unarmed, blind and helpless, I had rushed into that room to meet my death.

I heard an oath—an exclamation of surprise. In the distance I heard the cry of the woman, but it sounded muffled and faint; it seemed to me that a struggle was going on in that part of the room. Powerless though I was to aid, I turned impulsively and took a couple of steps in the direction whence the cry came; my foot caught in something and I fell prostrate on the body of a man. Even in the midst of the horror that awaited me I shuddered as I felt my hand, lying on the fallen man, grow wet with some warm fluid which slowly trickled over it.

Before I could rise strong muscular living hands were upon my throat, holding me down, while a short distance off I heard the sharp click of a pistol lock. Oh, for a light for a second! If only to see those who were about to take my life, if only—strange fancy—to know in what part of me to expect the fatal bullet. And I, who some hour or two ago lay and dared to wish for death, felt at this moment that life, even my darkened life, was as dear to me as to any creature under the sun. So I cried aloud, and my voice sounded to me like the voice of a stranger:

"Spare me! I am blind! blind! blind!"

CHAPTER II.

DRUNK OR DREAMING!

The hands pinning me down did not for an instant relax their grasp; yet they might safely have done so. Situated as I was I felt that my only chance of life was to lie still and convince, if I could, the persons in the room of the truth of my assertion. Nothing could be gained, but everything would be lost by resistance. I was strong, but, even if all the senses had been mine, I doubt if I could compete with the man who held me down. I could feel the nervous power of his hands and arms. Certainly, now that I was blind and helpless, the struggle would be a short one. Besides he had companions, how many I knew not, ready to help him. The first movement I made would be the end of everything so far as I was concerned.

I made no further attempt to rise, but lay as still and unresisting as the prostrate form across which I had fallen. Every moment seemed an hour!

Think of my situation. A blind man in a strange room in a strange house—held down on the body of a man whose last groan he had just heard—held down and at the mercy of those who it was certain had just taken part in a black and cowardly crime! Unable to look into the faces of the murderers around him and learn whether their looks meant life or death to him! Expecting every moment to feel the sharp stab of a knife or the fiery sting of a bullet! Seeing nothing and feeling nothing save the hands upon his throat and the dead body beneath him! Even hearing nothing save that stifled moaning in the distance! Can the wildest flights of fiction show a parallel to my case?

Since that night I have quite disbelieved in the possibility of people's hair turning suddenly gray. If such a thing can be I must have left that room with the locks of an old man.

I can only say that even now as, after the lapse of years, I write this; even as I see everything around me safe, still and at peace; even though I know the ones I love are close at hand, my pen trembles, my blood feels chilled and a faintness steals over me as the recollection of the most terrible moments in my life comes to me with a vividness I cannot describe.

It was well for me that I could keep still and cry again and again, "I am blind—look and see!" My quiescence, the tone of my voice, may have turned the balance on which my life hung—may have carried conviction to my hearers. Presently the strong light of a lamp was perceptible to my obscured vision; a lamp placed so close to me that I could feel its hot glow upon my face; and I was aware that some one was stooping or kneeling down and peering into my eyes. His breath struck against my cheek; a short, quick, excited breath—how could it be otherwise after the deed in which he had just taken part?

At last he rose; a moment afterwards the restraining hands moved from me, and then, for the first time, I began to hope that my life might be spared.

As yet none of those around me had spoken. Now I heard voices; but whispering so softly that even my sharpened ears could not catch the purport of a single word, although I could gather that three persons at least were engaged in that hushed consultation.

All the while, like a dreary and fitting accompaniment, I could hear that stifled moaning—a woman's moaning. I would have given all I possessed—all save life in exchange for a minute's sight, that I might have been able to comprehend what had passed and what was passing around me.

Still the whispers continued. They came thick and fast, running into and interrupting each other, as from men in hot but guarded discussion. It needed little intelligence to guess the subject of that debate! Presently they died away altogether, and, for a time, the only sound I heard was that terrible, muffled moan—continued with a dreary monotony.

A foot touched me. "You may stand up," I heard some one say. When I burst so recklessly into the room I fancied the exclamation with which I was greeted came from foreign lips, but the man who now addressed me spoke in pure English. By this time I was beginning to recover self-possession and was able to make a mental note of these facts.

Thankful for being allowed to quit my ghastly couch, I rose. As I could think of nothing better to do I stood motionless.

"Walk this way—straight on—four paces," said the voice. I obeyed. The third step brought me in collision with the wall. No doubt this was an extra test as to the truth of my statement.

A hand was placed upon my shoulder and I was guided to a chair. "Now, sir," said the speaker who had before addressed me, "tell us, in as few words as possible, who you are—how and why you came here. Be quick, we have no time to spare."

I well knew they had no time to spare. They had much to do—much to hide. Oh, for the gift of sight for one moment! I would purchase it even if the price were years of darkness!

Shortly and simply as I could, I told them what had brought me into such straits. The only thing I concealed was my true name. Why should these assassins know it? If I revealed it they might set a watch upon me and at any moment their safety demanded it I might share the fate of him who lay within a few feet of my chair. So I gave a fictitious name, but everything else I told them was true.

All the while I was speaking I heard that distressing sound at the other end of the room. It drove me nearly mad. I believe could I have made sure of reaching through my darkness and catching one of those men by the throat, with the certainty of crushing life out of him, I should have done so, even had such an act sealed my own fate.

When my explanation was over another whispered consultation took place. Then the spokesman demanded the key which had so nearly cost me my life. I suppose they tried it and found it acted as I said. It was not returned to me, but I heard the voice once more.

"Fortunately for you we have decided to believe your tale. Stand up." I did so and was led to another part of the room and again placed in a chair. As, after the manner of the blind, I stretched out my hands, I found I was in a corner of the room, my face turned to the angle of the walls.

"If you move or look around," said the voice, "our belief in your blindness will vanish."

It was impossible to misunderstand the grim threat conveyed by the last words. I could only sit quiet and listen with all my ears.

Yes, they had much to do. They moved about busily and rapidly. I heard cupboards and drawers opened. I detected the sound of papers being torn and the smell of papers burning. I heard them raise some dead weight from the floor—heard a sound as of rent cloth and linen—heard the jingle of money, even the tick of a watch as it was drawn from somewhere and laid on the table near me. Then I felt a breath of air and knew that the door had been opened. I heard heavy footsteps on the stairs—the steps of men bearing a weighty burden, and I shuddered as I thought what that burden must be.

Before the last task was completed the woman's moan had ceased. For some time it had been growing fainter and only sounding at recurring intervals. Now I heard it no longer. This cessation was a great relief to my overwrought nerves, but my heart grew sick as I thought it may be there were two victims instead of one.

Although at least two men must have borne that weight away, I knew I was not left alone. I heard some one throw himself into a chair with a half weary sigh and guessed he had been left to guard me. I was longing to make my escape—longing to wake and find I had been dreaming. The suspense or the nightmare was growing unbearable. I said, without turning my head:

"How long am I to be kept amid these horrors?"

I heard the man move in his chair, but he made no answer. "May I not go?" I pleaded, "I have seen nothing put me out into the street—any where. I shall go mad if I stay here longer."

Still no answer. I said no more.

By-and-by the absent men returned to their companion. I heard the door close after them. Then came more whispers, and I heard the drawing of a cork and a jingle of glasses. They were refreshing themselves after the night's dark work.

Presently a curious odor—that of some drug was perceptible. A hand was laid on my shoulder and a glass full of some liquid was placed between my fingers.

"Drink," said the voice—the only voice I had heard.

"I will not," I cried, "it may be poison."

I heard a short harsh laugh and felt a cold metallic ring laid against my forehead.

"It is not poison; it is an opiate and will do you no harm. But this," and as he spoke I felt the pressure of a little iron circlet, "this is another affair. Choose!"

I drained the glass and was glad to feel the pistol moved from my head. "Now," said the spokesman, taking the empty glass from my hand, "if you are a wise man, when you awake to-morrow you will say, 'I have been drunk or dreaming.' You have heard us but not seen us, but remember we know you."

He left me, and in a short time, do what I would to struggle against it, heavy drowsiness came over me. Thoughts grew incoherent and reason seemed leaving me. My head fell first on one side, then on the other. The last thing I can remember is a strong arm encircling me and keeping me from tumbling out of my chair. Whatever the drug was, its action was strong and swift.

For hours and hours it held me senseless, and when at last its power faded and my mind, struggling back to a clouded sort of consciousness, made, after many attempts, the fact apparent to me that I was lying on a bed, and, moreover, as I found, by stretching out my arms and feeling around, my own bed, is it to be wondered at that I said to myself, "I have dreamed the most frightful dream that ever came to a tormented mind." After this effort of mind I sank back once more into a semi-conscious state, but fully persuaded I had never quitted my bed. My relief at this discovery was immense.

Yet if my mind grew easy, I cannot say the same for the body. My head seemed preparing to split in two, my tongue was dry and parched. These unpleasant facts became more and more noticeable as consciousness gradually returned. I sat up in bed and pressed my hands to my throbbing brows.

"Oh, dear heart!" I heard my old nurse say, "He is coming round at last." Then another voice—a man's voice, soft and bland.

"Yes, your master will soon be well again. Kindly let me feel your pulse, Mr. Vaughan."

A soft finger was laid upon my wrist.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"I am Doctor Deane, at your service," said the stranger.

"Have I been ill? How long? How many days?"

"A few hours only. There is nothing to be alarmed at. Lie down again and keep quiet for a while. Are you thirsty?"

"Yes, I am dying with thirst—give me water."

They did so. I drank greedily, and felt somewhat relieved.

"Now, nurse," I heard the doctor say, "make him some weak tea, and when he wants anything to eat, let him have it. I will look in again later on."

Doctor Deane was shown out, and old Priscilla returning to my bedside patted and punched the pillows to make me more comfortable. By this time I was wide awake, and the experiences of the night were coming back to me with a distinctness and detail far above those of a recalled dream.

"What is the time?" I asked.

"Nigh upon noon, Master Gilbert." Priscilla spoke in a sorrowful, injured manner.

"Noon! what has been the matter with me?"

The old servant was weeping. I could hear her. She made no answer, so I repeated my question.

"Oh, Master Gilbert!" she sobbed, "how could you do it? When I came into the room and saw the empty bed I thought I should have dropped."

When she saw the empty bed! I trembled. The horrors of the night were real!

"How could you do it, Master Gilbert?" continued Priscilla. "To go out without a word, and wander half over London, all alone and not able to see a thing!"

"Sit down and tell me what you mean—what has happened?"

She had not quite aired her grievance. "If you wanted to get tipsy or to take any of them stuffs to send you asleep and make you insensible, you might have done it at home, Master Gilbert. I shouldn't have minded it once in a way."

"You're a kind old fool, Priscilla. Tell me all about last night."

It was not until she saw I was getting quite angry that her tongue would consent to run pretty straight, and when I heard her account of what had occurred my head was whirling. This is what she told me:

It must have been about an hour after my stealthy exit that she awoke. She put her ear to the door to make certain that I was asleep and wanting nothing. Hearing no sound of life in my room she entered it, and found the bed untenanted and me gone. Probably she was even more frightened than she owned to being. She knew all about my despondency and complainings of the last few days, and I have no doubt but her first fear was that I had destroyed myself. She started in search of me, and at once recognizing the impossibility of finding me without assistance, turned to that first and last resource of an Englishwoman in such a difficulty—the police. Having told her tale at the nearest station, and by entreaties, and by enlarging on my infirmity, made known the urgency of the case, and secured sympathy, telegraphic messages were sent to other police stations asking if any one answering to my description had been found. Priscilla waited upon thorns until about 5 o'clock in the morning, when a reply came from the other end of the town. It stated that a young man who appeared to be blind, and who was certainly drunk and incapable, had just been brought in.

(To be continued.)

Mr. Gladstone returned to Hawarden on Saturday from his Scotch tour, which was a continous series of triumphs. He was fatigued yesterday, but expressed himself as delighted with his visit and as confident that the House of Lords would recede from its hostility to the Franchise Bill.