My Trouble, My Blessing.

A crack in the vase and the roses all scattered,
A guarl in the knitting, a hunt for the ball;
The ink-bottle shattered, the carpet bespattered,
Dirt pies in the hall.

The fruit on the table by tiny teeth bitten;
Wee prints of wet fingers on window and door;
Poor grandmamma's cap, as a frock for the kitten,
Dragged down on the floor.

Soft gurgles of laughter; a sunshiny glancing,
As somebody flits in and out like a bird;
Strange accidents chancing wherever the dancing
Small footsteps are heard.

"Come, Ethel, my baby, your grave eyes uplifting,
Stand here at my side. Do you know the wee sprite
Who into some ever new mischief is drifting
From morning till night?"

A smile like a surbeam, so coy and caressing—
She smiles in my face like the witch that she is,
No need of more guessing. "My trouble, my blessing,
Come, give me a kiss!"

—*The Nursery.*

PAULINE.

CHAPTER IX.

A BLACK LIE.

Having placed the poor girl in Priscilla's motherly hands, I fetched the best doctor I could think of, and efforts were at once made to restore consciousness. It was long before any sign of returning animation showed itself, but, at last, she awoke. Need I say what a supreme moment that was to me?

I need not give details of that return to life. After all, it was but a half return, and brought fresh terrors in its train. When morning dawned it found Pauline raving with what I prayed was but the delirium of fever.

The doctor told me her state was a most critical one. There was hope for her life, but no certainty of saving it. It was during those days of anxiety that I learned how much I loved my unhappy girl. How grateful I should be if she were given back to me, even as I had always known her.

Her wild fevered words cut me to the heart. Sometimes in English, sometimes in soft Italian, she called on some one; spoke words of deep love and sorrow; gave vent to the expressions of fond endearment. These were succeeded by cries of grief, and it seemed as if shudders of fear passed over her.

For me there was no word; no look of recognition. I, who would have given worlds to hear my name spoken once, during her delirium, with an expression of love, was but a stranger at her bedside.

Whom was it she called for and lamented? Who was the man she and I had seen slain? I soon learned—and if my informant spoke the truth, he had, in so doing, dealt me a blow from which I should never rally.

It was Macari who struck it. He called on me the day after Pauline and I had visited that house. I would not see him then. My plans were not formed. For the time I could think of nothing save my wife's danger. But two days afterward, when he again called, I gave orders for him to be admitted.

I shuddered as I took the hand I dared not yet refuse him, although in my own mind I was certain that a murderer's fingers were clasped round my own. Perhaps the very fingers which had once closed on my throat. Yet, with all I knew, I doubted, whether I could bring him to justice.

Unless Pauline recovered, the evidence I could bring would be of no weight. Even the victim's name was unknown to me. Before the accusation would lie, his remains must be found and identified. It was hopeless to think of punishing the murderer, now that more than three years had elapsed since the crime.

Besides—was he Pauline's brother?

Brother or not, I would unmask him. I would show him that the crime was no longer a secret; that an outsider knew every detail. I would tell him this in the hope that his future would be haunted with the dread of a just vengeance overtaking him.

I knew the name of the street to which Pauline had led me. I had noticed it as we drove from it a few nights ago, and the reason of my drunken guide's mistake was apparent. It was Horace street. My conductor had jumbled up Walpole and Horace in his drink muddled brain.

On what a slight thread the whole course of a life hangs!

Macari had heard of Pauline's illness and delirium. He was as tenderly solicitous in his inquiries as a brother should be. My replies were cold and brief. Brother or not he was answerable for everything.

Presently he changed the subject. "I scarcely like to trouble you at such a time, but I should be glad to know if you are willing to join me, as I suggested, in a memorial to Victor Emmanuel?"

"I am not. There are several things I must have explained first."

He bowed politely; but I saw his lips close tightly for a moment.

"I am quite at your service," he said.

"Very well. Before all I must be satisfied that you are my wife's brother."

He raised his thick dark eyebrows and tried to smile.

"That is easily done. Had poor Ceneri been with us he would have vouched for it."

"But he told me very differently."

"Ah, he had his reasons. No matter, I can bring plenty of other persons."

"Then, again," I said, looking him full in the face and speaking very slowly, "I must know why you murdered a man three years ago in a house in Horace street."

Whichever the fellow felt—fear or rage—the expression of his face was that of blank astonishment. Not, I knew, the surprince of innocence, but of wonder that the crime should be known. For a moment his jaw dropped and he gaped at me in silence.

Then he recovered. "Are you mad, Mr. Vaughan?" he cried.

"On the 20th of August, 186—, at No. — Horace street, you stabbed here, to the heart, a young man who was sitting at the table. Dr. Ceneri was in the room at the time, also another man with a scar on his face."

He attempted no evasion. He sprang to his feet with features convulsed with rage. He seized my arm. For a moment I thought he meant to attack me, but found he only wanted to scan my face attentively. I did not shrink from his inspection. I hardly thought he would recognize me; so great a change does blindness make in a face.

But he knew me. He dropped my arm and stamped his foot in fury.

"Fools! Idiots!" he hissed. "Why did they not let me do the work thoroughly?"

He walked once or twice up and down the room, and then with regained composure stood in front of me.

"You are a great actor, Mr. Vaughan," he said, with a coolness and cynicism which appalled me. "You deceived even me, and I am very suspicious."

"You do not even deny the crime, you villain?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Why should I, to an eye-witness? To others I will deny it fast enough. Besides, as you are interested in the matter, there is no occasion to do so."

"I am interested!"

"Certainly; as you married my sister. Now my fine fellow! my gay bridegroom! my dear brother-in-law! I will tell you why I killed that man, and what I meant by my words to you at Geneva."

His air of bitter, callous mockery, as he spoke these words, made me dread what was to come. My hands were tingling to throw him from the room.

"That man—I shall not for obvious reasons tell you his name—was Pauline's lover. Translate 'lover' into Italian—into what the word *drudo* signifies in that language—then you will understand my meaning. We, on our mother's side, have noble blood in our veins—blood which brooks no insult. He was Pauline's, your wife's lover, I say again. He had no wish to marry her, and so Ceneri and I killed him—killed him in London—even in her presence. As I told you once before, Mr. Vaughan, it is well to marry a woman who cannot recall the past."

I made no reply. So hideous a statement called for no comment. I simply rose and walked toward him. He saw my purpose written in my face. "Not here," he said hastily, and moving away from me; "what good can it do here—a vulgar scuffle between two gentlemen? No; on the Continent—any where, meet me, and I will show you how I hate you."

He spoke well, the self-possessed villain! What good could it do? An unseemly struggle, in which I could scarcely hope to kill him; and Pauline the while perhaps upon the point of death!

"Go," I cried, "murderer and coward! Every word you have ever spoken to me has been a lie, and because you hate me, you have to-day told me the greatest lie of all. Go; save yourself from the gallows by flight."

He gave me a look of malicious triumph and left me. The air of the room seemed purer now that he no longer breathed it.

Then I went to Pauline's room, and sitting by her bed heard her parched lips ever and ever calling in English or Italian on some one she loved. Heard them beseeching and warning, and knew that her wild words were addressed to the man whom Macari averred he had slain because he was the lover of his sister—my wife!

The villain lied! I knew he lied. Over and over again I told myself it was a black, slanderous lie—that Pauline was as pure as an angel. But, as I strove to comfort myself with these assertions, I knew that, lie as it was, until I could prove it such, it would rankle in my heart; would be ever with me; would grow until I mistook it for truth; would give me not a moment's rest or peace, until it made me curse the day when Kenyon led me inside that old church to see "the fairest sight of all."

How could I prove the untruth? There were but two other persons in the world who knew Pauline's history—Ceneri and old Teresa. Teresa had disappeared and Ceneri was in the Siberian mines or some other living grave. Even as I though, of the old Italian woman, Macari's slander began to throw forth its first poisonous shoots. Her mysterious words, "not for love or marriage," might bear another meaning, a dishonorable meaning. And other circumstances would come to me. Ceneri's haste to get his niece married—his wish to get rid of her. Thoughts of this sort would steal into my mind until they half maddened me.

I could bear to sit with Pauline no longer. I went out into the open air and wandered about aimlessly, until two ideas occurred to me. One was that I would go to the greatest authority on brain diseases, and consult him as to Pauline's hope of recovery—the other that I would go to Horace street and examine, by daylight, the house from top to bottom. I went first to the doctor's.

To him I told everthing, saving, of course, Macari's black lie. I could see no other way to explain the case without confiding fully. I most certainly succeeded in arousing his interest. He had already seen Pauline and knew exactly the state in which she has been. I think he believed, as many others will, all I told him except that one strange occurrence. Even this he did not scoff at, accustomed as he was to wild fancies and freaks of imagination. He attributed it to this cause; which was but natural—and now what comfort or hope could he give me?

"As I told you before, Mr. Vaughan," he said, "such a thing as losing the recollection of the past for a long while and then picking up the end of the thread where it fell is not altogether unprecedented. I will come and see your wife; but as the case now stands it seems to me it is an attack of brain fever, and as yet no specialist is needed. When that fever leaves her I should like to know, that I may see her. It will, I expect, leave her sane, but she will begin life again from the hour that her mind was first unhinged. You, her husband, may even be as a stranger to her. The case, I say again, is not unprecedented, but the circumstances which surround it are."

I left the doctor and walked to the agent's in whose hand the house in Horace street was placed. I obtained the keys and made some inquiries. I found at the time of the murder the house had been let furnished for a few weeks to an Italian gentleman whose name was forgotten. He had paid the rent in advance, so no inquiries had been made about him. The house had been vacant for a long time. There was nothing against it except that the owner would only let it at a certain rent, which most people appeared to consider too high.

I gave my name and address and took the keys. I spent the remainder of the afternoon in searching every nook and cranny in the house, but no discovery rewarded my labor. There was, I believe, no place in which the body of a victim could have been hid—there was no garden in which it might have been buried. I took back the keys and said the house did not suit me. Then I returned home, and brooded on my grief, while Macari's lie ate and ate its way to my heart.

And day by day it went on working and gnawing, corroding and warping, until I was told that the crisis was over; that Pauline was out of danger; that she was herself again.

Which self? The self I had only known, or the self before that fatal night? With a beating heart I drew near to her bedside. Weak, exhausted, without strength to move or speak she opened her eyes and looked at me. It was a look of wonder, of non-recognition, but it was the look of restored reason. She new me not.

It was as the doctor had predicted. I might have been a total stranger to those beautiful eyes as they opened, gazed at me, and then reclosed themselves wearily. I went from the room with tears running down my cheeks, and at my heart a feeling of mingled joy and sorrow, hope and fear, which words will not express.

Then Macari's black lie came out from its lurking place and seized me as it were by the throat—clung to me, wrestled with me—cried, "I am true! Push me away, I am still true. The lips of a villain spoke to me, but for once he spoke the truth. If not for this, why the crime? Men do not lightly commit murder." Even then, when the moment I had prayed and longed for had come—when sense, full sense, was given back to my poor love—I was invaded, conquered and crushed to the ground by the foul lie which might be truth.

"We are strangers—she knows me not," I cried. "Let me prove that this lie is a lie, or let us be strangers forever!"

How could I prove it? How could I ask Pauline? Or, asking her, how could I expect her to answer? Even if she did, would her word satisfy me? Oh that I could see Ceneri! Villain he might be, but I felt he was not such a double-dyed villain as Macari.

Thinking thus, I formed a desperate resolve. Men are urged to do strange and desperate things when life is at stake—with me it was more than life. It was the honor, the happiness—everything, of two people!

Yes, I would do it! Mad as the scheme seemed, I would go to Siberia, and if money, perseverance, favor, or craft could bring me face to face with Ceneri, I would wring the truth, the whole truth from his lips!

CHAPTER X.

IN SEARCH OF THE TRUTH.

Across Europe—half way across Asia—for the sake of an hour's interview with a Russian political prisoner! It was a wild scheme, but I was determined to carry it out. If my plan was a mad one, I would, at least, insure a chance of its success by putting all the method I could in my preparations. I would not rush wildly to my journey's end and find it rendered fruitless by the stupidity or suspicion of some one vested with brief authority. No; I must go armed with credentials which no one would dare to dispute. Money, one of the most important of all, I had plenty of, and was ready to use freely; but there were others which were indispensable; my first step would be to obtain these. I could go quietly and systematically to work, for it would be days before I could venture to leave Pauline. Only when all chance of danger was at an end could I begin my journey.

So during those days whilst the poor girl was gradually, but very, very slowly, regaining strength, I looked up what friends I possessed among the great people of the land, until I found one whose position was such that he could ask a favor of a far greater man than himself, and, moreover, expect that it should be granted without delay. He did this for my sake with such efficacy that I received a letter of introduction to the English embassador at St. Petersburg, and also a copy of a letter which had been forwarded him containing instructions in my behalf. Each of the letters bore an autograph which would insure every assistance being given to me. With these and the addition of a letter of credit for a large amount on a St. Petersburg bank, I was ready to start.

But before I left, Pauline's safety and well-being during these months of absence must be considered. The difficulties this presented almost made me abandon, or, at least, postpone, the execution of my plan. Yet I knew it must be carried out to the very letter, or Macari's lie would ever stand between my wife and myself. Better I should go at once, while we were strangers; better, if Ceneri by word or silence confirmed the shameful tale, that we should never meet again!

Pauline would be left in good hands. Priscilla would do my bidding faithfully and fully. The old woman was by this time quite aware that her charge had awakened to both memory and new forgetfulness. She knew the reason that for days and days I had not even entered the room. She knew that I considered Pauline, in her present state, no more my wife than when I first met her in Turin. She knew that some mystery was attached to our relations with each other, and that I was bound upon a long journey to clear this up. She was content with this knowledge or sought to obtain no more than I chose to give her.

My instructions were minute. As soon as she was well enough Pauline was to be taken to the seaside. Everything was to be done for her comfort and according to her wishes. If she grew curious she was to be told that some near relation, who was now journeying abroad, had placed her in Priscilla's hands, where she was to stay until his return. But, unless the recollection of the past few months came to her, she was to be told nothing as to her true position as my wife. Indeed, I doubted now if she was legally my wife—whether, if she wished, she might not annul the marriage by stating that at the time it took place she was not in her right mind. When I returned from my expedition—if things were right, as I told myself they must be, all would have to be begun again from the beginning.

I had ascertained that, since the departure of the fever, Pauline had said nothing about the terrible deed she had witnessed three years ago. I feared that when her health was re-established her first wish would be to make some stir in the matter. It was hard to see what she could possibly do. Macari, I learned, had left England the day after I had accused him of the crime; Ceneri was out of reach. I hoped that Pauline might be induced to remain quiet until my return; and I instructed Priscilla, that in the event of her recurring to the subject of a great crime committed by persons she knew, to inform her that all was being done to bring the guilty to their deserts. I trusted she would, with her usual docility, rest contented with this scarcely correct assertion.

Priscilla was to write to me—to St. Petersburg, Moscow, and other places I must stop at, going and returning. I left directed envelopes with her, and would send from St. Petersburg instructions as to the dates when the various letters should be posted. And then all I could think of was done.

All except one thing. To-morrow morning I must start. My passport is duly signed; my trunks are packed—everything ready. Once, once for a moment, I must see her before I sleep to-night—see her it may be for the last time. She was sleeping soundly—Priscilla told me so. Once more I must look upon that beautiful face that I may carry its exact image with me for thousand of miles!

I crept upstairs and entered her room. I stood by the bedside and gazed with eyes full of tears on my wife—yet not my wife. I felt like a criminal, a desecrator, so little right, I knew, I had to be in that room. Her pale pure face lay on the pillow—the fairest face in all the world to me. Her bosom rose and fell with her soft regular breathing. Fair and white as an angel she looked, and I swore as I gazed on her, that no word of man should make me doubt her innocence. Yet I would go to Siberia.

I would have given worlds for the right to lay my lips on hers! to have been able to wake her with a kiss, and see those long, dark lashes rise, and her eyes beam with love for me. Even as it was I could not refrain from kissing her gently on the temple, just where the soft thick hair began to grow. She stirred in her sleep, her eyelids quivered, and like one detected at the commencement of a crime, I fled.

The next day I was hundreds of miles away, and my mind was in a sterner frame. If when I reached, if ever I did reach Ceneri, I found that Macari had not lied—found that I had been fooled, cajoled, made a tool of, I should, at least, have the grim consolation of revenge. I should be able to gloat upon the misery of the man who had deceived me and used me for his own purposes. I should see him dragging out his wretched life in chains and degradation. I should see him a slave, beaten and ill-treated. If this was the only reward I should reap it would repay me for my long journey. Perhaps, considering all that had passed and my present anxiety and dread, this unchristian state of mind was not unnatural to an ordinary son of Adam.

St. Petersburg at last! The letter I bear, and the letter already received on my account, insure me a gracious reception from Her Majesty's noble representative in the Russian capital. My request is listened to attentively; not scouted as ridiculous. I am told it is unprecedented, but the words impossible to be granted are not used. There are difficulties, great difficulties, in the way, but, as my business is purely of a domestic nature, with no political tendency, and as the letters bear the magic autograph of a person whom the noble lord is eager to oblige, I am not told that the obstacles are insuperable. I must wait patiently for days, it may be weeks, but I can be sure that everything will be done that can be done. There is, at present, or so the newspapers say, little friction between the two Governments. Sometimes this is shown by requests more simple than mine being refused. Still, we shall see—

Meanwhile, who is the prisoner, and where is he?

Ah! that I cannot say. I only know him as a doctor named Ceneri—an Italian—an apostle of freedom—patriot—conspirator. I was not foolish enough to imagine he had been tried and sentenced under the name I knew him by. I supposed this to be a false one.

Lord —— was certain that no one of that name has been sentenced within the last few months. That mattered little. Permission accorded, with the data I had given, the man would at once be identified by the police. Now, good-morning—as soon as possible I should hear from the embassy.

"And one word of caution, Mr. Vaughan," said his lordship. "You are not in England. Remember that a hasty word, even a look; a casual remark to any stranger you sit next at dinner, may utterly defeat your ends. The system of government here is different from ours."

I thanked him for his advice, although I needed no warning. The truth is that an Englishman in Russia has an even exaggerated dread of spies and the consequences of a loose tongue. More of us are looked upon with suspicion from our taciturnity than from our garrulity. I was not likely to err on the latter point.

I went back to my hotel, and for the next few days whiled away the time as best I could. Not that, under ordinary circumstances, I should have found much difficulty in so doing. St. Petersburg was one of the places I had always wished to visit. Its sights were new and strange to me; its customs worth studying; but I took little interest in anything I saw. I was longing to be away in pursuit of Ceneri.

I was not foolish enough to pester the embassador and make myself a nuisance. Believing he would do all he could, I waited patiently and in silence until I received a letter asking me to call at the embassy. Lord —— received me kindly.

"It is all settled," he said. "You will go to Siberia armed with authority which the most ignorant jailer or soldier will recognize. Of course, I have pledged my honor that in no way will you connive at the convict's escape—that your business is purely private."

I expressed my thanks, and asked for instructions.

"First of all," he said," my instructions are to take you to the palace. The Czar desires to see the eccentric Englishman who wishes to make such a journey in order to ask a few questions."

I would right willingly have declined the honor, but as there was no chance of escaping from it, nerved myself to meet the autocrat as well as I could. The embassador's carriage was at the door, and in a few minutes we were driven to the Imperial Palace.

I retain a confused recollection of gigantic sentries, glittering officers, grave-looking ushers and other officials; noble staircases and halls, paintings, statues, tapestry and gilding; then following my conductor, I entered a large apartment, at one end of which stood a tall, noble-looking man in military attire; and I realized that I was in the presence of him whose nod could sway millions and millions of his fellow creatures—the Emperor of all the Russias—the White Czar Alexander II. The sovereign whose rule stretches from the highest civilization of Europe to the lowest barbarism of Asia.

Two years ago when the news of his cruel death reached England, I thought of him as I saw him that day—in the prime of life, tall, commanding and gracious—a man it does one good to look at. Whether—if the whole truth of his great ancestor Catherine the Second's frailties were known—the blood of a peasant or a king ran in his veins, he looked every inch a ruler of men, a splendid despot.

To me he was particularly kind and condescending. His manner set me as much at my ease as it is possible for a man to be in such august company. Lord —— presented me by name, and after a proper reverence I waited the Czar's commands.

He looked at me for a second from his towering height. Then he spoke to me in French, fluently and without much foreign accent:

"I am told you wish to go to Siberia?"

"With your majesty's gracious permission."

"To see a political prisoner. Is that so?"

I replied in the affirmative.

"It is a long journey for such a purpose."

"My business is of the most vital importance, your majesty."

"Private importance, I understand from Lord ——"

He spoke in a quick, stern way which showed that he admitted of no prevarication. I hastened to assure him of the purely private nature of my desired interview with the criminal.

"Is he a dear friend of yours?"

"Rather an enemy, your majesty; but my happiness and my wife's happiness are at stake."

He smiled at my explanation. "You English are good to your wives. Very well, Mr. Vaughan, it shall be as you wish. The Minister of the Interior will provide you with the fullest passports and authorities. *Bon voyage.*"

Thus dismissed, I bowed myself out, praying mentally that no red-tapism or bureaucracy might delay the transmission of the promised documents.

In three days I received them. The passport authorized me to travel to the end of the Czar's Asiatic dominions if I thought fit, and was worded in such a way that it obviated the necessity of obtaining a fresh passport whenever a fresh government district was to be traversed. It was not until I found the trouble, annoyance and delay I was saved by this magic strip of paper, that I fully realized how much favor had been shown me. Those few words of writing, unintelligible to me, were a magic spell, the potency of which none dared to resist.

But now, armed with power to travel, the question was where must I go? To ascertain this, I was taken to one of the heads of the police. To him I explained my case. I described Ceneri, gave him what I supposed was about the date of his crime and trial, and begged for information as to the best means to adopt to find him in the place of his banishment.

I was most civilly treated. Indeed, for courtesy commend me to the Russian official when you are properly and powerfully accredited. Ceneri was at once identified, and his right name and secret history given to me. I recognized the name at once.

There is no need to make it public. There are many men in Europe who believe in the disinterested character and noble aims of the unfortunate convict; men who mourn him as a martyr. Perhaps in the cause of liberty he was single-hearted and noble-minded. Why should I distress his followers by revealing any dark secrets of his private life? Let him, be so far as I am concerned, Dr. Ceneri to the end.

I learned from the suave, obliging Russian chief of police, that a few weeks after I had seen him in Geneva, Ceneri had been arrested in St. Petersburg. A deeply laid plot, involving the assassination of the Czar and several members of the Government, had been revealed through the treachery of a confederate. The police, fully cognizant of everything, had waited until the pear was nearly ripe, and then struck with dire results to the plotters. Scarcely one of the principals escaped, and Ceneri, one of the most deeply implicated, was shown scant mercy. He certainly had few claims on their consideration. He was no Russian groaning under oppression and despotic government. Although he called himself Italian, he was, in truth, cosmopolitan. One of those restless spirits who wish to overturn all forms of government, save that of republican. He had plotted and schemed—even fought like a man—for Italian freedom. He had been one of Garibaldi's most trusted workmen; but had turned fiercely against his master when he found Italy was to be a kingdom, not the ideal republic of his dreams. Latterly he had directed his attention to Russia, and the plot he was engaged in having been betrayed, his career, in all human probability, was ended. After lying many months in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, he was tried and condemned to twenty years' hard labor in Siberia. Some months ago he had been despatched to his destination, and, my informant added, was considered to have been dealt with most leniently.

Where was he now? That could not be said for certain. He might be at the Kara gold washings, at the Ustkutsk salt works, at Troitsk, at Nertschinsk. All convicts were first sent ro Tobolsk, which was a kind of general rendezvous; thence they were drafted off, at the pleasure of the Governor General, to various places and various occupations.

(To be continued.)

A clothes observer claims that women fall in love with policemen, soldiers and coachmen because they wear buttons.

Judge Blanford, of Georgia, regards speculation as worse than poker. He says he cannot see how any man could fool away months waiting to see stocks go up or down when he might fill a flush and rake in a jack-pot in thirty seconds.