

A Forced-Marriage Scheme Defeated

Goshen, Conn.—A Lady Stranger There—A Pilgrimage to Goshen Via the Far-Famed Mountain Town of Litchfield—The Beautiful Widow—An Unpleasant Reminiscence of Dr. Ives, Late Bishop of North Carolina—More About the Widow—She Leaves for New York—At the “Mansion House,” Litchfield—A Marked Character Encountered There—Mr. “C. B. Le Roy” Studied and Weighed—The Beautiful Widow and Le Roy Meet—Her Face Discloses Conflicting Emotions—Mr. Le Roy and the Beautiful Widow, Mrs. Stevens, Take a Walk Down South Street, in the “Paradise Of Loafers “—Sympathies Silently Exchanged—We All Start for the “Station”—The Stage-Coach “Turns Over”—The Affrighted Le Roy Reveals his Manners—A Peculiar Scene in the Cars—At Bridgeport I Present Myself to Mrs. Stevens—At New York Again a Tale of Complications Mrs. Stevens in Deep Trouble—A Friend of hers Seeks Me—Revelations—A Fearful Story—A Secret Marriage and Unhappy Consequences—The Wretch Le Roy Wants the Widow’s Money—A Trap Set for Le Roy—He Falls into It—The Wedding Scene Disarranged—The Widow Saved, and the Intended Forced Marriage Defeated

In the summer of 185-, I had occasion to visit my brother, who was a clerk in a wholesale grocery store of one Lyman, on Water Street, I think, and who, being consumptively inclined, had, at Mr. Lyman’s suggestion, and through his kindness, gone to the town of Goshen, Litchfield County, Connecticut, to spend a few weeks in the genial family of Mr. Lyman’s father, and taste the bracing air of the hills of Litchfield County, so far-famed. So delighted was my brother with his “country home,” as he called it, that he wrote me as often as once a week, and sometimes twice, varying his letters, in the enthusiasm with which they were filled over the mountain scenery, the fresh air, the excellent hunting, the rides and drives, with now and then a word about a beautiful, mysterious lady, supposed to be from New York, and by some supposed to be a widow,—a gentle, sweet, good woman,—who bore some grief or other in her soul, as was evident, he said, but who, with excellent good sense, kept her affairs to herself, and would not obligingly recite the history of her life to the gossiping villagers of that country town, who, like those of all other towns away from the centres of business, and not even on the line of any great thoroughfare, “must have something to busy themselves about,” and therefore mind each other’s business considerably.

Goshen is reached by stage, a common country mail stage only, of the cheapest pattern, running up from Litchfield, several miles north. Litchfield itself being four or five miles from the station on the Naugatuck Railroad, and reached only over a heavy and steep road, at points almost perpendicular to the horizon, and withal a dangerous ride, if the stage-horses are not kept perfectly in hand. I did not know of this road, and the jolting character of the stages from the station to Litchfield, and from Litchfield on to Goshen, or all the alluring words of my brother’s letters might not have seduced me into acceptance, finally, of his invitation. But I went up to Goshen, and once there, in the society of my brother, and some genial citizens to whom he presented me, passed four or five days of my stolen vacation most pleasantly.

The supposed widow—and who proved to be one in fact—had, at the time I arrived in Goshen, ceased to be talked about so generally as before, had won everybody’s respect and kindness, and had taught the villagers one good lesson—the value of little, rather than great curiosity, about

others and their business, by her impenetrable silence upon those matters about which they had no right to know anything.

In her daily promenades with her little bouncing girl, of about five years of age, she passed by the house where I stopped, and one day, when my brother and I were taking the air along the public street, we met her. My brother—who knew her, but not well enough to arrest her in her walk, and present me—bowed to her, and on her turning up her face to respond to his salute, I felt that I had never seen such chastened beauty before. There was a slight evidence of a present, or the mark of a former grief or suffering in that rich face, which only seemed, however, to add to its beauty, or rather the soul-beauty which beamed through it. I felt as if I would almost be glad if that woman were to suffer some dire calamity, if I could only have the privilege of relieving her from it.

Years before, I had heard the late Dr. Ives, formerly Episcopal Bishop of North Carolina, but who had then become a Roman Catholic, lecture one night in the old Tabernacle, on Broadway, New York. His discourse touched upon charity. He said, among other things, in substance, that God made some people miserable in order that others might cultivate the sweet grace of charity in their own hearts, by administering to their sufferings! I thought it a monstrous doctrine, and felt like throwing a book, which I chanced to have with me, at the doctor's head. But when I found myself imagining misery for that sweet woman, in order that I might abate it, the doctor's discourse came back to memory with a new meaning; and, in fact, I don't know but I could have seen a horse run over her, breaking an arm, *if* I could have been on the spot in time to so far save her as to prevent a probable imminent death.

The reader may well judge that my emotions were not of a faint nature, but such as it would be less improper for me to express here, perhaps, had I not at that time been a married man, with one of the best of soulful wives at home, longing for my return "from the country." But strange thoughts sometimes rise in the greedy souls of men, and we would love to possess, in order to make them happy, all the good beings of both sexes in the world.

Mrs. Stevens—for so we will call her for the sake of a name—announced to the family, with whom she was stopping a day or two before I was to leave, that she was necessitated to return to New York in a day or two. The family were astonished, because she had previously declared her intention to remain a month longer. Of course everybody in the village soon heard of her intended departure, and all begged her to stay. I was a little surprised; but I said to my brother, "Her leaving so suddenly has some connection with that grief which we remarked in her face. She'll probably go by the same stage with me, and I'll learn more of her."

The morning of my departure came, and brother said he would ride down to Litchfield with me, and we took the lumbering stage together, confident that we should "take up" Mrs. Stevens on our way; but the stage passed the house at which she boarded, without her! The driver said she had started out before him, in a private wagon, with a neighbor, who was going to Litchfield, and I felt easier; that I should, in short, still be able to keep my eye on her, and learn her evidently mysterious history, and possibly yet have the gratifying opportunity of being of service to her.

We rode on. Stage-drivers in the country, with their two-horse teams, have a peculiar pride in outriving the one-horse vehicles which they may come upon on the road, and our ordinarily slow old driver became quite a Jehu that morning, and drove past two or three teams which we overtook on the way, one of them being that which bore the beautiful widow and her no less beautiful child, and we arrived in Litchfield before them, alighting at the "Mansion House," the chief hotel of that centre of country aristocracy—a centre once of the best talent in the land, when Calhoun, and many other great men of the nation, were students there, under such other great men as Judges Reeve and Gould, of the once famous Law School.

Mrs. Stevens had received letters nearly every day, it was said, while in Goshen, and it had been remarked that she had had letters as often as every other day from somebody, evidently a man, who wrote a peculiar hand, as the superscriptions showed. This, the family with whom she boarded, and who brought the letters from the post office to her, had said. My brother had occasion to carry up the letters for that family once or twice, and had remarked the peculiar style of writing in the address of letters to Mrs. Stevens.

We naturally went into the office of the hotel, and brother, carelessly turning over the register, and noting the arrivals of the evening before, called to me: "See here—here's a 'mare's nest,' perhaps. I would swear that the man who writes so much to Mrs. Stevens wrote that name," said he, pointing to an inscription—"C. B. Le Roy, New York,"—made in a style which it would be almost impossible to successfully imitate; as markedly singular as a style of writing could well be. "I will swear it. What do you think?" asked my brother.

"Why, nothing, only that Mr. Le Roy is here, and that his coming accounts for the sudden departure of Mrs. Stevens. We must get a view of him," I said.

I had hardly uttered the words, before a man entered the room, and said to the young man behind the desk of the office,—

"Is not that Goshen stage behindhand this morning? I thought it was to arrive a half hour ago."

"Yes, sir, 'tis a little late this morning, but it has come," replied the young man.

"Come?" exclaimed the man; "and whom did it bring?"

"Those two men only," said the clerk. The man inquiring was a dark-complexioned, black-whiskered fellow, dressed a little *outré*, in a dandy-sort of style, had a half-professional look, but something very hard in the muscles of his cheek. He was evidently a little vexed at the stage's having brought no other freight, and a little nervous withal; and when in one of those spasms of nervousness in which men do this or that, or what not, without consciousness, he raised his hat from his head, I saw in him the imperious, heartless wretch, who could do anything which his baseness might chance to incline him to. He could play the merciless tyrant—if need were, cold-blooded, and without a pulse of sympathy for any suffering; and I saw more. That head was one never to be forgotten in its singular shape; a head that sends a thrill of disgust through one; and I at once saw that "C. B. Le Roy" (for I was sure the man before me was the man who had made the entry in the strange handwriting), was no other than a very wicked, low-lived lawyer, of

whom I had had occasion to know something; but the name Le Roy was assumed. At last the wagon came, and Mr. "Le Roy" was on the piazza in time, having been pacing the hall, evidently making up his mind to do something, he knew not what—something desperate, perhaps; and he bounded across the "walk" in front of the house, reached out his hand to Mrs. Stevens, caught the little girl in his arms first, and handed Mrs. Stevens to the ground.

I happened to be watching the scene. The lady's face, on which for a moment was a forced smile, betrayed terribly conflicting emotions in her soul, as she passed into the hotel parlor behind Le Roy, who led the little girl playfully by the hand.

"That Le Roy is a villain," said I to my brother; "and that woman is in some way in his power. There is no attraction between them. She hates him. But he has her in his grasp. If it were not that the Goshen people think they know she has not much money, I should believe that he either has funds of hers in his possession, or that he is doggedly persisting in wringing them from her."

"O, no, brother," replied my brother. "You detectives are always looking out for evil. I don't like that scamp's looks myself. I guess he's a bad fellow; but why not put the most natural construction upon the matter; that is, that the fellow is in love with that beautiful woman, as almost every other man in the world might be; for there isn't one in ten thousand like her; and that she, like thousands of other women, loves a scamp. They have met here evidently by appointment. He's going to take her home."

"But didn't you see how she looked?" I asked.

"Yes; but she's a prudent woman; wasn't going to exhibit her affection outdoors, where she might be discovered by a dozen; besides, that neighbor who brought her might have an unpleasant story to tell. I know him and he's as gossipy as an old woman; she knows him, too, of course."

"But my opinion is formed, brother," said I. "I shall keep an eye on them, and I'll let you know in time, all about it. I haven't told you yet that I know that scamp. I detest him. He is no less than—;" but my brother chanced not to have heard of him, and so the conversation dropped for the moment.

We were obliged to wait for the stage to the station for some two hours; and Mr. Le Roy and Mrs. Stevens sallied out with the little girl, to enjoy the fine air, perhaps, of the morning, and sauntered down "South Street," so I think it is called; a fine broad avenue, lined with beautiful elms, and on which are many of the residences of the principal "nabobs" of that old town of Litchfield, which somebody has facetiously termed "The Paradise of Loafers"—elegant ones. In summer, many people from cities, far and near; spend weeks and months at Litchfield; and my brother and I followed along after Le Roy and Mrs. Stevens, for I was bound to study him then and there as much as possible. We noticed that all of the promenaders who were coming in the opposite direction,—and there were several out that morning,—gazed upon Mrs. Stevens with expression of wonder at her beauty; and then seemed to look from her to her attendant with shrugs of the shoulders and a leer of the eyes, as they instinctively read his true character.

There is a magnetism about the coarser villains, a something indescribable and individual too, not of the same kind and degree in all, which discloses their real nature, however much they may try to hide it. As well might a short man hope to appear tall. But the great, successful villains, the keen men, who succeed by their genius, and not so much by force, constitute another class; genial, affable, often very delicate and refined in their appearance, attractive in short, especially to women. Indeed, they seem to work a spell over nearly every woman they meet. Le Roy was one of the coarser class, whose villainous natures the tailor's art cannot hide, however neatly they may be dressed,—and he was much adorned that day.

We followed on behind Le Roy and Mrs. Stevens at a respectful distance. Occasionally Le Roy cast a glance behind; but we were occupied with our own fun and laughter, or were busily engaged looking at this or that place, or distant scene, whenever he did so. The conversation between him and her was apparently one of an intense nature, he gesticulating considerably, in a forcible manner, and I noticed that when she turned up her face to look at him, as she did when evidently answering some question of his, there was visible a painful expression of fear of something, and I was sure it must be of him.

She kept a little space between herself and him, leading her child on the side nearer him or when the child at times ran on before, I observed that she “sidled” away from him, as if too near approach were pollution. I thought her manifestations unmistakable; and there was in his actions something which was as readily translatable, to the extent, at least, that he felt he had an important victim in his power; and so he had, as the sequel proved; but not so surely as he thought—the villain!

Le Roy and Mrs. Stevens continued their walk far down the street, and turned about to go back. I said to my brother, “Engage his eyes as we meet, and I will study her face.” Soon we met. Brother stared him so directly in the face as to secure his whole attention. He seemed to wince, my brother said; and I looked into the face of Mrs. Stevens,—how beautiful!—and I was conscious that I must have expressed a deep sympathy, for I felt it. Something told me that she felt it, too. There was a slight flush upon her cheek, and a kindly, prayerful look in her eye, like one needing sympathy, and we passed each other.

“You are right,” said my brother, as we got well past; “that man *is* a villain, without doubt. I don't think it is love, or even a desire to possess that woman for himself, which moves him; there's a ‘wheel within a wheel,’ here somewhere.”

I asked my brother to describe to me minutely then the looks of the villain as we passed him, for I had half a fear that he might suspect we were watching him. But from what my brother said, I concluded that the fellow was not suspicious of us. They returned to the hotel in due time. He dogged her every step, and she kept aloof from him as much as possible. Finally the time to depart came, and we took the stage together, my brother bidding me good by, shaking my hand with a firm grasp, just as the stage started, and saying,—

“I hope you will have the best success.”

There was a fervor in his tone, coming from his good heart, which strengthened me, and moved me to stronger resolves than ever to ferret out the iniquity which I knew Le Roy must be engaged in.

Mrs. Stevens took the back seat, with her child next to her, and Le Roy crowded in at the other end of it; and although there were only another man and myself as passengers besides, I took the front seat, facing them, in order to have opportunity to study them as quietly as possible.

Le Roy attempted conversation at various times. The lady answered him in monosyllables—not inclined at all to carry on the conversation. She seemed to me to be hopeless; looked like one who would rather not be than to be, and quite frequently looked down into her child's eyes with gleams of evident pity, and would then turn away her head, and express, what I took to be, despair.

An unfortunate circumstance took place just as we had passed a few rods down the ridge of the great hill, or mountain, which divides Litchfield from "Litchfield Station." There had been a terrible shower the day before,—one of those sudden rains, which come on, gathered up by a fierce wind, and pour down in torrents. The road was badly gullied, and men were there repairing it, having scraped great heaps of earth into the road, not yet spread.

"Can I get by?" asked the driver of the coach of some of them.

"Yes, go ahead; Seymour's team just went along."

The driver pushed on, not checking his horses sufficiently, and coming upon a heap in which was concealed a large stone, the stage toppled, trembled for a second, and we went over, amidst the screams of Mrs. Stevens and her child, and the afrightened groan, "O, O," in a mean, cowardly voice of Le Roy. There was a momentary plunging of the horses and dragging of the stage. The men on the road were at the coach in a moment. The stage had fallen over on the side on which Mrs. Stevens sat, and Le Roy was stepping on her in his attempt to get himself upright, without an apparent particle of consciousness of her presence. Being thrown on my knees, I pushed him upward with my hands, saying,—

"You'll kill this lady, and her child" (who, fortunately, was lying back of her mother, out of harm's way, however); "why don't you take care, sir, what you are doing?"

The brutal eyes of the man looked at me with wrath.

"I'll mind my own business, sir," said he, "without your interference!" I pushed him up still harder, and looked at the same instant into the beautiful suffering face of Mrs. Stevens. She gave me a knowing look, as her face was suffused with contempt for the brutal remark of Le Roy.

In aiding her to get out of her painful position, which I did as soon as Le Roy was out of the way, I saw that I had won her respect, and I thought, too, something of her confidence. The stage was uprighted, and went on to the station safely enough, where I, alighting first, gave her my hand to help her out, and took out her little girl; and at once, with a bow, and steady look in the face, of

that sympathy I felt, turned away, for I saw that Le Roy was angry, and I thought he would vent his anger upon her. I kept out of his sight till they had taken a car of the train which now came down the road, and going into the rear of the same car, and on the opposite side, where I could see her face to advantage, took my seat a little in the rear.

Much did Le Roy try to talk; but Mrs. Stevens was not to be provoked into much conversation. The little girl, who sat in the seat before them, and facing them,—her seat having been turned back,—was constantly looking at me; and at my distance I got up a childish “flirtation” with her, which seemed to annoy Le Roy. He looked back several times only to find me smiling, and tried to smile, or pretended to, himself; but such a man can never smile warmly. We arrived at Bridgeport, where we had to tarry but a short time,—half an hour, perhaps,—before taking the New York train.

I saw that Le Roy had gone out, probably to get a strong drink at some saloon, opposite the depot, there; and I entered the ladies’ room, and diverting the child for a moment, with some other children, so as to be able to speak a word to the mother, I said, “Madam, I am a detective police officer. I see that you are in deep trouble of some kind. I do not wish to know what, now; but here is my private card. That’s the number of my residence. If you ever need aid, come to my house, and if I am not at home, see my wife, and arrange with her as to where you can find me. I am not, madam, seeking business; I will gladly serve you without reward.”

“O, sir, I thank you; may be I *shall* want you,” was uttered in reply, in tones, accompanied by a look, too, which told the deep grief of her heart.

I had hardly time to get away when Le Roy came back. In choosing my car for the train to New York, I watched them again, and took the same car, but failed to secure so favorable a position, although I kept them in sight.

Having given my trunk into the hands of the solicitor for the express company, who passes through the cars when near New York, I took a carriage, and ordered the driver to follow the one taken by Le Roy and Mrs. Stevens, and to keep at a respectful distance. We followed on; at last they alighted, Le Roy resuming his carriage, and driving on.

Knowing now the lady’s residence, it was no trouble for me, in a few days’ time, to learn her history, so far as generally known to her friends. She was a teacher, formerly from Vermont, and had married a Mr. Stevens some years before,—a man supposed to be rich,—the son of a very wealthy man. During her husband’s life she had been well cared for. He had gone abroad for some reason, had died in Europe something like a year or so before, and she was, obviously, now comparatively poor. This was the substance of all I could learn. On my arrival home that day, I told my wife about Mrs. Stevens, what I had seen, etc. Her interest in her became as deep as mine, and often afterwards, for a long while, she would say, “I wonder what has become of that poor Mrs. Stevens!”

The duties of my calling constantly connecting me with other people’s miseries, had, after a lapse of a few months, quite driven Mrs. Stevens from my mind. As she had not sought me, I inferred that her troubles had been settled; and so she had vanished almost from memory, when,

one day, on returning home, I found that a lady had been to my house, told my wife of the sufferings of a Mrs. Stevens, who had my card, on which she had written "Detective officer." This woman knew that Mrs. Stevens was in great affliction; that she had been oppressed for months, by a wretched man by the name of Le Roy; that there was something wrong; that Mrs. Stevens was to soon marry this fellow, although the woman knew well enough that she could not and did not like him—in fact hated him, for they had overheard some words between them. Her sympathies were so great for her that she wanted somebody better able than she, she said, to find out the trouble, and save Mrs. Stevens.

I asked my wife, on her telling me where this woman lived,—in the same building with Mrs. Stevens,—how the woman looked, how she was dressed; for I was surprised at finding her in that quarter of the city. "O," she said, "plainly, poorly, but neatly dressed—looked like a sempstress." And I at once saw that misfortune had been playing with Mrs. Stevens, she having gone down from a somewhat elegant boarding-house into a respectable but poor quarter.

My wife had told the lady that I would look into the matter; and that night I made haste to visit her, calling on the other lady first, to find whether I might obtrude upon other callers. I found that I might call without intrusion; and Mrs. Stevens expressed great pleasure at seeing me. After a few words had passed, I told her I knew she was in trouble, and asked her why she had not demanded my services, which were ever ready for her.

"O, sir," said she, "my troubles took such a shape that I knew you could not help me— nobody can. I am driven on by despair; but for my child, I think I should have long since committed the crime of suicide," and the tears streamed from her eyes.

I was so convulsed with sympathy that I could hardly speak, but mustering as firm a voice as I could, I said, "Madam, have hope. There never was a case so desperate yet, but some chance of escape might be involved in it. I do not wish to pry into your affairs, but I know you are suffering wrongfully, and I could wish that you might tell me enough to enable me to see if I cannot help you; and let me say here, that I know enough already to be aware that your chief trouble is in some way connected with Le Roy."

"Le Roy!—do you know him?" she exclaimed. "Ah, I forget. You know him, of course; but do you know any more about him than travelling with him that day—and what do you know?"

"Yes, I know him as a miserable villain,—heartless and coarse."

"I think you must know him, for he is all that you call him. That he is heartless and coarse, repulsive and tyrannical, is true. I do not know that he is criminal; but I fear he is. Do you know?"

"Yes, he is; as such a nature could not well otherwise be—"

"O, then my condition is worse than I thought," said she, sobbing.

I consoled her all I could, and in the result induced her to acquaint me with her story,—and it was a fearful one, in many respects,—which I shall not here relate; bad enough, as you will see, in those which I shall tell. It was, in brief, this. She had married privately the son of a wealthy man, who had intended that his son should form an alliance with the daughter of an old schoolmate of his, a wealthy New York merchant, residing in Brooklyn. But the young man could conceive no affection for this young lady—revolted; declared that he had a right to choose a wife for himself. His father, who had intended to set him up in business with a large capital, being angry with his son’s refusal to even attempt the alliance he desired for him, turned him off with only a comparatively small amount of money, and threatened that if he ever married anybody else but the girl he desired him to marry, he would cut him off in his will. The son, falling in love with the lady in question, married her privately; and it so chanced that Le Roy, happening to be at the minister’s house, calling on a servant girl, at the time of the marriage, was called in with the girl as a witness. The son, Mr. Stevens, had gone to Europe, and died there. But, just before his death, his father had died intestate, and the son’s child became entitled to her part—a fourth, if I rightly recollect—of a large estate; but there was no evidence of the marriage save that which Le Roy could furnish; as the servant girl had gone nobody knew where. An advertisement in the Herald had failed to find her,—she might be dead,—and the minister who performed the ceremony could not identify Mrs. Stevens. But Le Roy, when hunted up by Mrs. Stevens, recognized her, and seeing here a chance to make money,—she having unfortunately told him why she needed his testimony,—refused to swear to his signature unless she would marry him, pretending at once to fall violently in love with her. And the poor woman had gone on resisting his offer of marriage, till at last driven to almost distraction, and mourning over the future of her child, she had consented, for her sake, to marry the wretch. She had told him that she would try to become guardian for her child in the Surrogate’s Court, and would save all she could from her allowance from year to year for him. But the father having died first, and the son having right, therefore, to a large amount of personal property, which would become in good part his wife’s, if the estate should happen to be so divided that she got other than real estate for his share, the scamp saw that he would likely have the handling of the funds, so deemed that he might possibly induce her to give all to him, to get rid of him—would not yield the point. Marry him she should, or she and her child might starve.

At last, having been constantly dogged by him in the city,—he having written her letters almost daily while at Goshen,—having followed her as far as Litchfield, and written her a letter compelling her to return to the city, that he might have more immediate communication with her, she, to save herself from poverty, and from the greater motive of preserving her child from want, and to secure her just rights, had consented to marry him within a week. Every day was adding to her gloom and distress. She loathed the man; but she saw no way out of the trouble but to marry him, privately, whereupon he was to go forward and swear to his signature, his presence at her marriage to Mr. Stevens, etc.

The widow cried bitterly. I sympathized deeply with her. I could see no way out of the dilemma; but I reflected that one might possibly be hunted out; and I said to her, “Madam, don’t give up hope till the last minute. We’ve time to work a little yet. Something will turn up to aid you—be sure of it.”

“O,” said she; “O, I hope, I pray there may; and—yet, O my child! my child!—O, I fear I am doomed!”

I consoled her all I could, and left her, agreeing to return duly. Getting out upon the street, and taking a few listless steps, I conjured my brain for an expedient. At last I resolved to devote myself to the work of freeing that woman at all hazards; and instantly I had firmly fixed that resolve, I felt (for some reason which is inscrutable to me, unless the doctrine of our having “guardian angels” is true), that a new power of thought possessed me; and I seemed to see the straight way out of this difficulty at once; and although it did not prove a way of thornless roses, exactly, I did see it pretty clearly—for I hit upon a man who proved able to give me just such information as I wanted; and I went straightway to my old friend, Jordan Williams, formerly a detective, and who, I thought, knew Le Roy. I told my story in confidence to Williams, and said, “Now if we can manage in some way to get Le Roy into limbo for some of his misdeeds, we can frighten him out of this scheme, and make him give the requisite testimony.”

“Yes, yes,” said Williams, “and although I am no Jesuit, yet if ever the ‘end justified the means,’ whatever they are, it would in this case. Le Roy is guilty of a thousand crimes, but he has some sort of influence with the courts and officers, and we could not get him up on any former crime. He must be guilty of a fresh one. Let’s see; let me manage this part. They are to be married within a week? Well, I saw Le Roy day before yesterday; he looked rather seedy for a bridegroom. He asked me then if I could loan him a little money, which I of course refused to do. Ah, I have it; he must want a suit of clothes, and other things; I’ll fall in his way to-night, and if he asks for money, as he will, I will give him a check for fifty dollars on my bank. I have three thousand dollars and over, there, now. My habit is to always make figures (I hate to write out the full words,—you know I don’t write over well),—and then fill up the blank with a line. On the back I’ll put the figures \$500. He’ll see that, and I’ll leave a little space after the figures \$50, on the face, for another ‘nought.’ I’ll have a witness to the size of the draft, before I hand it to him. He’ll surely never let such a chance go. He’ll want five hundred to splurge with on his bridal tour, you see, and he’ll think he can make it all right with me.”

Williams’s ingenious plan worked. Le Roy wanted one hundred dollars. Williams declared he would not let him have but fifty—he must borrow the other fifty elsewhere; and he wrote out a note for fifty for Le Roy to sign, payable in ten days from that time, as Le Roy wished it, and gave the check to him, having first shown it to a friend, who put a private mark on it.

Le Roy fell into the trap. Next day the five hundred dollars were drawn—early, too; for only late in the morning Williams went to the bank to draw out his deposit, in order to learn whether the draft had been presented. The bank, of course, in rendering his account, debited him, among other things, with the five hundred dollars, at which he expressed astonishment and indignation, as was his right to do, and refused to settle with the bank that morning, and they held on to the draft of course.

Williams lost no time in communicating with me, and I hastened to the widow’s; told her to be a little more yielding to Le Roy; to put on a more pleasant face, and to abide the result, with the assurance that she was to be delivered from the clutches of Le Roy at last; giving her some money to assist her in her distress. I advised her how to proceed with the arrangements for the

marriage; went home and instructed my wife, who took as much interest in poor Mrs. Stevens's fate as did I; put her in communication with Mrs. S.; and it was finally arranged that the wedding should take place at a cousin's of mine, who occupied a house in a very respectable portion of the city, and who, and whose wife, were let into the secret so far as proper. Mrs. Stevens was to represent this lady to Le Roy as an old friend of hers, whom she had come across of late, and who was assisting her.

Mrs. Stevens was all this while kept profoundly in the dark as to what course was finally to be pursued; and notwithstanding she borrowed much confidence from my perfect confidence, yet I could see that she was nervous, and feared a little that after all she might be victimized to Le Roy.

I saw to it that the legal portion of the matter was properly attended to. Williams settled with the bank under protest, alleging that the draft was a forgery, etc., the cashier agreeing to identify Le Roy when called upon; and at the last moment he was let into the secret that Le Roy was to be arrested on the night of the proposed wedding, and with Williams was duly on hand at the house, and properly secreted. Officers, two of them, were engaged to follow Le Roy, and at a given signal from me, were to enter the house. Mrs. Stevens had been allowed the choice of a minister; but the people of the house thought best to secure the minister of the church which they attended. Le Roy came in a carriage that evening, in great style. He was going to take the next train to Philadelphia, with his bride. He was as well arrayed as the great house of Devlin & Co. could dress him, and had probably borrowed, or by hook or by crook had procured a valuable diamond pin; and looked like a—well, a polished scoundrel; but he could not hide the intrinsic villainy of that face. The cashier of the bank was a notary public, and had, at my request, brought along his seals and stamp. I should add that my cousin had invited in several friends, who came in partial evening dress, making quite a lively party.

I was flitting about, making myself generally useful, and so disguised that Le Roy had no notion who I was. The time appointed for the ceremony drew on. Poor Mrs. S. was in a flutter. Le Roy tried to [soothe] her, took her aside and talked to her a little; put her arm in his: looked very proud, but a little provoked, as if he feared that at last she'd fail him—faint away, perhaps. The hour came, the attendants began to draw into order, and the minister, too, put on his gravity, asking that the parties to be married take their place, and Le Roy stepped forth to lead up Mrs. S., who sat at the end of the long parlors. Full of pride was he, suddenly to be humbled. As he approached her, I cast a glance at puzzled Mrs. Stevens, tripped to a side window, gave the appointed signal, and the door-bell rang with great fury, as I had ordered. All the people present were startled, and on the *qui vive* to know what such a call could mean.

“A fire somewhere!” “Is this house on fire?” “O, dear! What can it mean?” was ejaculated, etc., etc.

Meanwhile the servant had rushed and opened the door.

“Does Mr.—live here?” asked the officers.

“Yes.”

“Is he in?”

“Yes.”

“We wish to see him.”

“Take seats in this room,” said the servant. “He’ll be down presently. There’s a wedding going on up stairs.”

“We can’t wait—call him;” and the servant ran to call him, and the officers pushing on after him, entered the room. Le Roy was talking to his expected wife, and, facing the door, I was there, and giving the officers the secret hint, they exclaimed,—

“Our man, by Heavens! Mr. — (my cousin), whoever you may be, you must pardon us; but Mr. Le Roy, here is our prisoner. Sorry to break up a nice party; but, Le Roy” (proceeding to collar him), “we’ve hunted you out; been after you all day; a pretty man to be married; better have arranged your funeral.”

The ladies screamed, and said, “O, O!” Mrs. Stevens sank back upon a sofa, half fainting at the joy of her delivery, but not seeing yet how it was to be accomplished; and Le Roy stormed at the “outrage.” “Villains,” said he, “what’s your charge?— rascals, come to extort money, I suppose;” but his boastfulness subsided, as one of the officers whispered quite shrilly in his ear, “Williams is after you for the five hundred dollar forged check. We’ve got you, and there’s no escape.”

The minister was the most confused man I ever saw—quite lost his self-possession. I pointed the officers to a room, whither they took Le Roy, whose astonishment on encountering Williams there cannot well be conceived.

“You villain!” exclaimed Williams. “How dared you to abuse my kindness—you dog? You’ve no fool to play with. I’ve caught you, and at last you shall suffer for your crimes as you ought.” A tap on a door, leading into an adjoining room, and the cashier entered.

“Who’s that man?” asked Williams of the cashier, pointing to Le Roy.

“Mr. Le Roy, the man who presented this check. The teller was out, and I occupied his place so early in the morning.”

“And I,” said I, stepping up to Le Roy, and removing my slight disguise of full whiskers, revealing the side whiskers I was accustomed to wear, “Do you know me?” (He did at once recognize me). “What do you think now of your ability to ‘attend to your own business,’ as on that day the stage upset in Litchfield?—Officers,” said I, “take away your man. He’s good for five or ten years, if not fifteen, at Sing Sing.”

Le Roy turned pale—stammered out something, and sat down—saw he was caught. I motioned the ladies away from the door, and asked to be allowed to close it, desiring the officers, too, and

all but Williams, to go into other rooms, and closed the doors. "Le Roy," said I, "I am master here. I understand the whole matter of your villainy with that woman. You have only one means of escape. Here's a writing I have prepared for you. I'll read it." It was a simple statement that he recognized his signature to the marriage certificate of Mr. and Mrs. Stevens; that he saw the servant girl sign hers; that he was called in as witness, being there visiting the girl; that he not only saw her sign the document, but that he had read many notes from her, and knew her handwriting, and that this signature was hers; in short, a succinct statement of all the facts I could get hold of in the matter of the marriage. "Sir," said I, as I finished reading the document, "tell me if that is all true." He tremblingly said, "Yes." I opened the door, and asked the cashier to come in, in his character as notary public; got pen and ink for Le Roy, and asked him to put his signature to the statement. It was a perfect fac-simile of that subscribed to the marriage certificate. The notary, at my request, put him under oath, Mr. Williams and I having left the room for the time, so that the notary could properly state that he acknowledged the signature to be made by him without fear, and not under duress, etc. The notary gave us the signal to return, and I went into the parlor, found Mrs. S., and said, "It is done. He is caught. You are saved. The property is yours."

She did not faint away, as many a woman might, though she trembled with joy.

"Let me take you before the wretch," I said. "I have not done with him yet."

Mrs. S. took my arm, and accompanied me. Entering the room, I closed the door behind me, only Williams and the cashier being there, and proceeding to Le Roy, I said, "Your victim is safe, you villain—and now we have but one thing more for you to do. You must consent to be handcuffed, and taken to private apartments by the officers, and there kept till to-morrow, or you must go to the tombs at once. The forgery is proved upon you, and there is no escape but one; that is, go to the surrogate's office to-morrow, and swear to your signature, as you have done here. I have taken the precaution to put you on your oath, and secure your signature for comparison at this time. You see you are caught."

"I will, I will!" said Le Roy, trembling. He hated the thought of imprisonment. He had suffered it once for two years, and nearly died of the confinement. "But there's one thing more yet. You must deliver to Mr. Williams, or the cashier here, whichever you please, all the money you have saved out of the five hundred."

"I will, I will!" said he, with alacrity; and drawing his wallet, pulled forth a roll containing two hundred and ninety-five dollars of it, which was given to the cashier, who identified it, marked it, and put it in his pocket.

Le Roy was immediately given into the hands of the officers, and taken to their apartments for the night. We paid his coachman his charge, and sent him away.

There was rejoicing in that house that night, not over nuptials consummated, but broken; and a happier being never lived than seemed Mrs. Stevens. "Not only that my child is safe," said she, "from penury and starvation, but that I have escaped the presence of that loathsome man."

The cashier went home. Mrs. Stevens, Williams, and I had a conference, in which she gladly agreed to pay Williams for his loss of over two hundred dollars, or rather that of the bank, for it was the bank's in fact; and we dismissed her, Williams consenting that, though we had promised Le Roy nothing, yet if he went forward and did all he promised next day, faithfully, it would be no great crime to not have him duly arrested and tried, considering, too, the way in which he was caught. But after all, though, he went forward, and did as he agreed, and ought to have done, we made complaint, and lodged him in jail, where he remained for some three months; when, no one appearing before the grand jury against him, he was released, not, however, till I had visited him, and given him notice that he must leave New York forever, or we would re-arrest him; and he fled, greatly to Mrs. Stevens's relief.

What became of Mrs. Stevens; how she became an inmate of my house while the estate was being settled; how happily she is now living, and many things which I should delight to relate regarding all this matter, have no particular relation to a detective's life and duties; and so I end this, the really most interesting affair of my life, with the simple prayer that, if there are in the wide world others as horribly persecuted as was Mrs. Stevens, as happy deliverance may come to them, as was that to her.

McWatters, George. *Knots Untied; or, Ways and By-Ways in the Hidden Lives of American Detectives*. Hartford: J. B. Burr, 1871.