

The Blue Diamond

ON the morning of my twenty-fifth birthday there was—I venture to affirm—no individual, within the bills of mortality of this great city, as luckless as myself. At eight of the clock on that morning I passed out of my boarding-house, having no right to re-enter it, in the character of a dweller therein, because I had nothing wherewith to satisfy the landlord's demands. I stood in the streets of this wealthy city, with no clothes save those upon my back, no money to purchase a crust—*no name that I was legally entitled to use.*

This condition of utter destitution in which I found myself requires explanation, and, especially, the last fact I have stated. That explanation is briefly this: My mother—whom I scarcely remembered—had died, as I had always been told, when I was about four years old. Since that time my home had been with my father, who lived in seclusion at a gloomy country-house, about thirty miles from the city, on the Hudson River. He had educated me entirely himself, and, as he was a man of great attainments, and possessed the faculty of imparting his knowledge to others in a marked degree, the education I thus received was complete in every part save one. But this, when I found myself in the condition I have described, proved to be the most essential thing I could have acquired. I was absolutely without knowledge of the ways of the world—knew nothing of business save its name—and, having never gone further from my father's house than a country walk would take me (except three short journeys, with him, to the wildest part of the State), I was as ignorant of men as the child unborn.

Thus I had lived, quite content with my lot; for, though my father never received visits or made them, and was rough and repellent with every one whom he was forced to meet, he was always kind to me, and I am sure that he really loved me. As for myself, I lavished upon him all the affection of my nature, which, of course, had no other outlet; and, though the misery he bequeathed me was terrible to endure, I have never blamed him, because I am certain he never dreamed it would happen to me.

He was very wealthy, and he had many times assured me that all his property would descend to me. Indeed, he had allowed me to read his will more than once, and in it I had found myself the sole legatee, hampered with no other condition than that, as I was (*and was brought up purposely to be*) ignorant of the world, certain trustees were appointed to manage my property, and pay me the entire income. Thus circumstanced, and with these prospects, I had passed a happy life, ignorant of evil, and delighting only in my books, my flowers, and my sylvan sports. It was the story of Rasselas over again, save that I had no desire to leave my happy valley, and cared to know nothing of the world without.

But clouds will inevitably obscure even the brightest and longest-continued sunshine. My twenty-fifth birthday was approaching, and my father—always kind save to himself—had granted me permission to give a little *fête* to my humble friends, the country-folk who dwelt near us. He stipulated, however, that he should not be present; and, though that condition damped my joy, I could not press the point, because I was sure he would not be happy in the gay society of my friends. As fortune would have it, about a month previous to the day of the *fête*, he was summoned to the city on important business connected with his estate, and he decided that he would remain absent until after that occasion. I did not oppose his decision, though my heart was

heavy when he took his departure, and I felt a gloom I had never before experienced, as if some fearful misfortune was about to happen.

My presentiment was true; but no effort of my imagination—unused as I was to sorrow—could have pictured the dire fatality which was about to fall upon my head. At two o'clock of the morning after my father's departure, one of our servants roused me from a peaceful sleep, and told me that a messenger from the railroad depot nearest to our house wished to see me. Hastily drawing on some indispensable clothing, while my heart beat fearfully with an indefinable terror, I descended to the hall of the mansion, and there found a small, nervous-looking man, who, fumbling with his hat in both hands, seemed to be trying to find a place in which to hide himself.

The servant had lighted the hall-lamp, and, by its glare, I saw his pale face as he glanced up at me, fearfully, when he heard my foot upon the staircase. It was but a momentary glance, for he turned himself quickly round, as if anxious not to meet my eye; but I read the whole dreadful tale in it, and, ere he spoke, I knew that my father was dead.

It was too true! There had been a dreadful railroad accident near the city, and among its victims—crushed out of life in a moment—was my poor father. I don't think that I realised my loss at the moment, but before morning dawned— though I dreamed not of the full extent of the calamity as regarded my future—I was lying in utter desolation on the floor of my chamber, mourning the only real friend I had ever known. I need not dwell upon my discharge of the simple duties which followed the bringing of his mangled remains to the house. They roused me, for the time, from the stupor of grief into which I had fallen; but, when the funeral was over, and they who had attended it, few in number, had departed, I should have sunk back into the same state, if the last misfortune his death was to entail had not suddenly presented itself.

The next heir to the estate—failing myself—was a second cousin whom I had never seen until I saw him at the funeral. He was there, accompanied by his lawyer, and, when every one save these two, and the legal gentleman who had managed my father's affairs, had left, my cousin's adviser requested the production of the will. When my father had shown me this document, I had seen him take it from and return it to a small iron safe let into the wall of his study. Thither I repaired, accompanied by those I have mentioned; and, without any doubt on my mind that I should easily find it, began searching in the safe. My first quest did not result in its discovery, and in the second I was aided by my father's lawyer. Every paper in the safe was examined, and, indeed, everything whatever we found there was taken out. There was no will at all in the safe!

Still, the truth did not force itself upon me. I thought he had placed it somewhere else, and, assisted by all the others, I searched every receptacle in the house where it was possible it could have been deposited. It could not be found, and the dark disaster which had been hanging over me, unconscious, since my birth, fell like a levin-bolt out of a sunny sky. I was an illegitimate child; and, if that will was not produced, I was also a beggar!

This startling announcement was made to me, quite coolly, by my cousin's lawyer; who, when I was in a condition to receive it, also gave me the explanation, in a matter-of-fact way, as if the subject was as commonplace to me as to himself. My mother had been married in her youth, out of obedience to her parents, to a man old enough to be her grandfather. His character was such,

that she did not even respect him, and nothing but his wealth would have induced even her worldly parents to force the marriage upon her. Very soon after the marriage, she met my father—then a poor man—and they fell in love with each other. The sequel was a mere repetition of the old, sad tale which has been told of thousands, and will be repeated to the end of life's chapter. Brutally treated by the jealous old man, she sacrificed her fair name, and fled with my father. Very shortly afterward, my father's elder brother died childless, and he became possessed of great wealth. Quite content to give up society for the sake of the woman he loved, my father secluded himself and my mother in the country-house I have mentioned, where I was born one year afterward. It had always been my father's intention to marry my mother if her husband obtained a divorce, or when he died. Out of revenge, the old man took no steps to procure a divorce—for he knew my father's intention—and, to complete the misfortunes of my poor mother, he lived longer than she did. She was as happy as she could be, with her sin hanging over her, in my father's love, to the last; but she died when I was four years old—just two months before her husband—and thus the reparation her lover longed to make was [forever] prevented.

After her death, my father forsook the world altogether, and, wishing that I should honor my mother's memory as he did, had carefully concealed from me the facts that were known to all the world except myself. It was a mistaken kindness, doubtless; but he had meant to act rightly by me, and, even in my first desperation, I never blamed either him or her.

There was still one chance left, as I thought when I had recovered from the first terrible shock of the communication. The will might possibly be at his banker's, in the city, and thither my cousin and the two lawyers repaired. Two days afterward, my last hope was dashed to the ground by a curt letter from my cousin, enclosing fifty dollars, saying that I was at liberty to take all my clothes with me, but that I must leave the house at once, as no will could be found. Too sick at heart to care what became of me, I obeyed the command literally, and, making my way to this city, took lodgings at the house I have described myself as leaving on the morning of my birthday. A very short time sufficed to exhaust my money, for my inexperience of the world was so great, that I was cheated right and left. All I could spare of my wardrobe followed, but I obtained very little for the clothes, and that was also soon spent. Thus, as I have said, on the morning when I was twenty-five, I stood in the streets of the great city, houseless, penniless, friendless, and without even a name—as forlorn a man as ever walked upon the face of the earth.

I had not been quite so foolish as to sit down idly, all this time, waiting for fortune to fall into my lap. Each day since I had arrived in the city I had passed every hour, while the stores remained open, seeking for any kind of work that I could perform. Here again my inexperience and my utter want of reference had entailed failure, and on this particular morning I had resolved to devote but one more day to the fruitless quest. If it remained fruitless, I would leave the city, and seek the humblest kind of labor in the country; for, though “to beg, I was ashamed,” I was *not* ashamed to dig, if such toil would give me bread.

I need not dwell on the disappointments of that day. My perseverance was of no avail, although I continued to apply at store after store, until even the small shops were closed, and no place but dens of vice remained open. At midnight I left a large hotel, where I had applied for a servant's position, and, turning into the first bystreet, paced moodily along it, sick at heart, and weary, almost to fainting, with bodily fatigue.

During the day the sky had gradually become overcast, and now the rain began to fall, soon increasing in severity, until it fell in a perfect torrent. At this moment I found myself under some large trees, fronting a high wall, enclosing, perhaps, half a block of ground, in the midst of which space I could dimly discern the upper portion of a large, old-fashioned house.

It was a gloomy situation, not far from the riverside; but the trees afforded me some shelter, and I remained there, pacing to and fro beneath them, for nearly an hour. I had resolved not to go back to my lodging-house, though I had no reason to suppose I should be refused entrance, because I had a horror of debt, however small; and now I only waited for the morning light to begin my tramp into the country.

Several persons passed me while I remained under the trees; but I paid little attention to any of them, or they to me, until two men, closely muffled in great-coats and slouched hats, so that their eyes were the only feature of their faces to be seen, came up the street from the direction of the river, examined me searchingly, by the light of the gas-lamp near which I stood, as they passed, and, proceeding to the corner of the block, crossed over, and returned on the other side of the way, until they reached a point opposite my position.

Here they paused, and, conversing in low whispers, seemed to watch my motions; but, after a time, retraced their steps, and disappeared around the corner. My impression was, that they were private watchmen, and, having satisfied themselves that I meant no harm by remaining under the trees, that they had gone to complete their rounds.

Dismissing them from my mind, another more important fact forced itself on my consideration. The rain had now continued long enough to soak the trees quite through, and their foliage no longer afforded me any protection. It became necessary, therefore, to find some other shelter, and, remembering that I had noticed a small gateway in the wall, the arch of which might answer the purpose, I went to it at once. I found that it would supply my need even better than I had hoped, for it was deep and narrow, and closed at the rear by a solid door, instead of a gate. The wind, blowing from behind the wall, drove the rain away from, instead of into, the recess, so that it was quite dry, and likely to remain so. My need was too great to allow any hesitation, and I sat myself down in this little sentry-box—to which my mind compared it on the instant—with a feeling of thankfulness that I had never experienced when reposing on down, in the days of my happiness.

How long I sat there I do not exactly know, for I fell into a doze which was fast merging into a sound slumber. But my misfortunes had not yet reached their culmination, and my sleep was rudely broken in a manner that the wildest imagination could not have anticipated.

It has been proved, in many instances, that dreams which appear to consume a lifetime in their action, really pass through the brain in a moment, and that they are often caused by some extraneous circumstance occurring simultaneously with the dream.

This was, doubtless, the case with that which I dreamed in the archway. I thought I was hurrying over a wide plain, amidst rain and darkness, when I suddenly fell into a deep pit. The fall stunned

me for a moment; but when I revived, I saw that the pit was full of huge serpents, that were visible to me through a lurid light which appeared to emanate from their own bodies.

The largest of these pythons threw a coil of his immense body round me the instant that I struggled to my feet, and, raising his misshapen head above me, fixed his glaring eyes on mine. Then, to my utter astonishment, he swung his head toward the knotted pile which his companions had formed behind him, and, in an unmistakably human voice, ejaculated the words:

“It's him, sure enough! We've got him at last!”

And as he spoke I was broad awake—struggling with two men, who had drawn me out of the archway, and were, apparently, intent on binding my arms behind my back!

This last was no dream! Two real men had me down upon my back on the wet pavement, and by the joint light of the gas-lamp at the edge of the sidewalk and a small lantern standing on the flags close to us, I recognised them as the men who had previously watched me from the other side of the street. The lurid light I had seen in my dream was, doubtless, that of the lantern flashed suddenly into my retreat, and the words which I thought the serpent uttered, were probably spoken by one of these men.

Startling as the occurrence was, I was not greatly alarmed, because, as soon as I recognised them my former idea that they were watchmen recurred to me, and I at once decided that they were arresting me as a suspicious character. This thought calmed me instantly, and, the moment I could speak, I told them that they need not use violence, as I would go with them quietly.

Much to my surprise, they did not answer me, or desist from their attempts to tie my arms, and I suddenly became convinced that they were not officers, but robbers, or, perhaps—and the thought caused my brain to whirl with horror—*resurrection men!*

I had read that vagrants had often been murdered in the great cities by wretches who supplied the surgeons with subjects for dissection; and the thought that I had fallen into the power of such fiends rendered me desperate.

With a violent effort, I hurled them from me, and struggled to my knees, at the same time uttering a shrill cry for help. It was my last exertion, for in it I exhausted my strength, and my assailants now had little trouble to master me.

Rushing upon me furiously, before I had time to gain my feet, they hurled me back upon the pavement, half stunned, and, while one of them knelt upon my arms as he straddled over my body, the other quickly picked up the rope he had dropped, and, passing it around my legs, bound them securely together.

Once more I uttered a despairing cry for aid; but scarcely had I done so when the villain, kneeling on my arms, drew from his breast a piece of white cloth, which he unfolded, and pressed firmly on my mouth. *It was a pitch-plaster*, and, though I could breathe through my

nose, which he carefully left uncovered, my cries were effectually silenced, and the shock to my nerves was so great that I could no longer struggle!

Very coolly and quietly the ruffians now completed their task, and bound my arms as tightly as they had my legs. Then, getting on their feet, one of them picked up and shut the dark-lantern, and the other, drawing a whistle from his pocket, blew upon it a peculiar signal. This was answered, almost immediately, by the sound of carriage-wheels coming round the next corner toward the river, and in a few seconds the vehicle drew up at the edge of the sidewalk, close to the group. A whispered conversation now ensued between the driver of the carriage and my captors, at the end of which I was lifted up, and deposited on the back seat within it. One of my assailants followed me inside, the door was shut, the other ruffian mounted the box, and the carriage drove rapidly away.

I have no distinct idea how long that dismal ride continued, for, ere it ended, I lost consciousness. The horrible impression on my mind that I had been kidnapped in order to be murdered, and my body sold to the surgeons, was enough in itself to deprive me of my senses; and when to this was added the irksomeness of my bonds, and the torture of the pitch-plaster over my mouth, it is not to be wondered at that my physical powers succumbed, and that I fell into insensibility.

When I recovered my senses, I thought myself in profound darkness, and recollect wondering “if this was death.” After a little time, however, my eyes accommodated themselves to the gloom, and I was able to perceive that a faint ray of light shone upon me from the roof of what seemed, to my excited mind, a very charnel-house. I was lying upon the flagged floor of a vaulted stone chamber, perhaps ten feet square, at one end of which I descried a heavy iron door, and, in the arch above me, a small, round aperture, apparently the only opening for light and ventilation the place possessed. A rough wooden bench, fastened to the wall at one side, was the only article that could be called furniture in the dungeon; but in a far corner, I dimly saw a dark heap, which, on close examination, proved to be bones.

My bonds and the plaster had been removed during my insensibility, and I was able to examine the cell thoroughly. The bones in the corner seemed, to my fevered imagination, human; and when I had ended my inspection of the place, I was convinced that I was in a receiving-vault for dead bodies, probably connected with some hospital.

Strange as it may seem, this idea restored hope to my breast; for I thought that the “burkers” had made a mistake in supposing me dead, and that, when the surgeons found me alive, I had nothing to fear from them. The only dread I now felt was, that they might not visit the vault for some days, and thus I might perish from want of air and food.

Resisting the depression caused by this hypothesis, however, I determined to make the best of my gloomy situation, and, stretching myself at full length on the wooden bench, I summoned all my patience to await the coming of my deliverers.

My endurance was not taxed as greatly as I had feared; but the manner of my rescue, and the appearance of my liberator, were equally as unexpected and startling as all that had gone before.

I had been reclining on the bench probably half an hour—though it seemed to me a whole day—when my eyes, now accustomed to the gloom, caught a gleam of light shining through a small hole, which was probably the keyhole of the iron door. The instant afterward, it was obscured; I heard a key rattle in the lock, the door swung slowly open and, starting to my feet, I beheld a vision that I thought at first must be the effect of incipient insanity.

Framed like a picture in the square aperture of the doorway, stood a young girl, perhaps eighteen years of age, clad in a flowing white robe that gave her the aspect of one of Raphael's angels. In her hand she held a small lamp, the yellow flame of which illuminated her face and figure with a weird light that rendered her whole appearance most unearthly, but, at the same time, enhanced her loveliness in an equal degree. From her low, broad forehead, soft shining tresses of ebon hue fell to her fair shoulders in a shower of rippling curls. Beneath archly curving brows, and long, silken lashes, that swept cheeks fairer than snow, shone two dark-blue eyes, that, as they rested upon me, were filled with the tender light of pity. Her lips, half parted, seemed carved of dewy coral, and disclosed her tiny, pearl-like teeth, as dewdrops shine amid the petals of the rose. Her rounded right arm, outstretched with the lamp, to light her way, seemed the arm of Hope beckoning me to deliverance, and her left hand, gathering to her breast the loose folds of her robe, appeared to rest upon her heart with a gesture significant of love.

In all my secluded life I had never seen a maiden half so fair, and, though I was soon convinced that she was mortal, I was almost afraid to speak, lest she should vanish. She was, therefore, the first to break the silence, and, to my utter astonishment, exclaimed, in a tone of great surprise:

"Why! *you* are not my cousin Martin!"

I heartily wished I was, if the relationship would have entitled me to its privileges; but, seeing that she was now alarmed as well as astonished, I hastened to tell her that my name was Francis North.

"But how did you come here?" she asked, as if amazed. "Are you in league with Martin Dane—"

She left the sentence unfinished, and a sharp shudder ran through her slight frame, as if the question she would have asked was associated with fearful recollections.

More and more bewildered at the singularity of the entire affair, I at once related to her all the circumstances of my adventure, concluding with a vehement declaration that I was in league with no one to do evil; and, least of all, to bring injury upon her.

"There is some strange mistake here," she said, hurriedly, when I had ended my story. "Thank Heaven! my desire to spare those I love a fearful crime, has led me to your rescue! Follow me, instantly; for, if we linger, those may come who would not scruple to take your life to hide their secret—though you are not the victim they hoped to secure."

With these strange words, and admonishing me to silence by an emphatic gesture, the lovely girl turned from the doorway, and, followed closely by me, took her way through a narrow passage, apparently the basement-hall of some large building. Recognising this fact almost immediately, I

soon perceived, also, that the building must be a private mansion, and no hospital. This, and the language of my deliverer, had now quite convinced me that my rough treatment was due, not to “resurrection men,” but to a private vengeance, and that my captors had taken the wrong man prisoner. But this only added to the singularity of the affair, and my curiosity was so strongly excited to learn its true meaning, that I resolved, ere I parted from my conductress, to question her closely.

While passing through the narrow hall, and up a steep flight of stone steps into what seemed a large garden, she gave me no opportunity to speak to her; and I, also, recognised the prudence of silence while within the building.

A few moments after entering the garden, however, we came to a small door, set in a high wall surrounding it, and, when she had unlocked this door and thrown it open, I abruptly demanded, forgetting all courtesy in my excitement, who it was I had been mistaken for, and why he was the object of such persecution.

“I cannot tell you,” she answered, in a low, firm tone, betraying no sign of fear, though the place, time and circumstance might well have excused apprehension in a far less delicate organisation. “Content yourself that you have escaped death; for such, indeed, would have been your portion, if I had not rescued you. Ask no questions, and be gone at once. Nay, place leagues between you and this fatal spot. You may be recognised by those who mistook you for their intended victim; and if you are, your life is not worth an hours purchase!”

“Place leagues between me and this spot!” I repeated, involuntarily, in my astonishment. “Impossible! I have not a penny in the world! and if my life *does* depend on it, I can fly no faster than my feet will carry me!”

It must have been my good angel who uttered these words through my lips. To confide my poverty to an utter stranger—and, least of all, to *her* whom I already loved, though I was not yet conscious of the fact—would have been the last thing I should have thought of doing, if I had had time to deliberate. But I *did* confess it, through some divine inspiration, and the consequences were quite as strange as anything that had yet happened; and, in the sequel, far more important to my happiness than the wildest imagination could conceive.

Elevating her lamp—which, as the rain had ceased, and the wind gone down, was still alight — she fixed her eyes upon my face, and, by the lurid glare of the flickering flame, seemed to read my very soul.

I know not what she saw in my burning eyes— perhaps it was the love I had not yet confessed to myself—but as she gazed, the marble pallor of her cheek changed to a rosy blush, and, instantly turning aside, she placed her left hand within her bosom. When it was withdrawn, it held an old fashioned green silk purse, one end of which was filled with coin.

Thrusting this into my hand, she cast upon me an imploring look, as if to deprecate any refusal, and then gently pushed me toward the door in the wall.

“This will aid you to escape,” she whispered, earnestly. “Indeed, it is necessary that you should fly as far from this place as possible! Go *now*, I beseech you!”

“May we not meet again?” I asked, passionately, retaining for a moment the delicate hand that had given me the purse.

The blush deepened on her cheek, and her hand trembled in mine, but her faltering answer gave me no hope.

“It is best—for both of us—that we should not,” she said, unsteadily; but then her tone changed to one of alarm. “Do not linger!” she cried, vehemently. “Go, go, at once! Your delay endangers *my* safety as well as yours!”

I think—for *now* I knew I loved her—that nothing but this consideration could have induced me to part from her so quickly. Peril to her, however, was an idea that banished every selfish thought; and, pressing my lips, with one long, quivering kiss, on that tiny, white hand, I stepped out of the doorway.

The door itself closed behind me with a loud crash. I heard the key turned, and her light footsteps on the gravel of the garden as she fled toward the house; and, turning myself about, to inspect the place I had emerged from, I experienced the final surprise of that night of marvels.

It was the self-same house, beneath the trees in front of which I had sought shelter from the rain at midnight! and the door by which I had now found egress was covered by the little arch, from which my captors had so rudely dragged me forth!

Fairly stupefied by this discovery, I hurried away from the spot, with no idea where I was going; nor did I entirely recover from my bewilderment until hours had passed, and I found myself on the bank of the river, some miles beyond the limit of the built-up portion of the city.

The sun had fairly risen when I reached a secluded spot amid a grove of trees on the brink of the water. The morning was mild and pleasant, and, fearfully fatigued, mentally and physically, by all I had undergone the previous night, I threw myself at full length upon the turf, to seek the rest I so sorely needed.

At first, however, it was impossible to sleep. My thoughts were constantly fixed on the lovely girl I had so strangely met, and the passion she had so suddenly inspired in my breast. Though I could have little hope that she had as suddenly fallen in love with me—indeed, I was not so egotistical as to imagine this possible—still, I did not despair of awakening her love, if I could again meet her. And, lying there on the soft turf in the bright, cool morning, I began to plan how I should find her, and to build air-castles as to what would happen when I had accomplished this.

Knowing the situation of the house whence she had delivered me, and presuming she resided there, I felt I should have no difficulty in communicating with her, if I could learn her name; and, while reflecting how I should discover this, I suddenly bethought me of the purse.

Instantly I had drawn it from my breast, and, hoping to find some clue, either on it or in its contents, I eagerly examined it. It was of green silk, finely netted, and just below the opening in the centre was embroidered, in gold thread, a monogram formed by the letters "C. A."

This was, so far, satisfactory; and, much elated, I proceeded to inspect the contents.

In one end I found about a dozen gold coins, and in the other, a hard, globular substance wrapped in paper. This I took out carefully, and, expecting to find some writing on the paper, unrolled it cautiously. There were several pieces of the paper, and nothing written on either; but, when the last one fell from my fingers, I sprang to my feet in profound astonishment.

Disclosed by the removal of its paltry wrappings, there lay in the palm of my left hand an enormous rose diamond of the first water, colored by a faint blue tinge that greatly enhanced its beauty, and weighing, as well as I could judge, not less than eighty carats!

At the first glance, I was aware that this jewel was worth a fortune, but its value by no means gave it the highest interest in my mind. My father had been a collector of gems, and, inheriting his love for them, I had read nearly everything that had ever been published about them. I knew, therefore, that a diamond of such size and value would be registered, and its ownership well known to the dealers in jewels.

This fact made it quite possible for me to discover its last purchaser, and subsequently, all I desired to know about the young girl who had delivered me from the vault. The idea had scarcely formed itself in my mind, when I began to retrace my steps toward the city, and, urged by a delicious hope that cast out every fear, I soon found myself once more in its busy streets.

My first proceeding was to rescue from the pawnbrokers, with the help of one of the gold pieces from the purse, some of my linen and clothes; and then, returning to my old boardinghouse, the accommodations of which I could now pay for, I dressed myself, and recruited my exhausted energies with food.

This done, I went straight to the establishment of the most celebrated jewellers in the city, and was soon closeted with the senior partner of the firm. To him I exhibited the gem, and related as much of my adventure as was necessary to convince him that I had not obtained possession of it fraudulently, and then asked him if he recognised the diamond.

"Of course I do!" said he, instantly. "I have never seen it before, but there is no doubt that it is the celebrated 'Blue Diamond of Markham.' It is an unique gem, and is fully described in the trade registers."

I then requested him to consult his register, and inform me in whose possession it was supposed to be, as I wished, of course, to restore it to its rightful owner. I added, however, that there were circumstances connected with its delivery to me which I could not disclose, as such disclosure might peril the safety of another person besides myself, and I was, therefore, bound to proceed with caution in returning it to its owner. In the meantime, I should deposit it with him for safe keeping.

He made no objection to this, and, having examined the register, informed me that the name of the person to whom it had last been transferred was Clarence Allerton, who then resided at No. 204 B— Street, in this city, and was a man of large wealth.

Taking a receipt for the diamond, I left the jeweller, and hastened to the locality described as the residence of Allerton.

If the coincidence of the initials on the purse with his had left any doubt in my mind that I had obtained the right clue, it would have been dissipated now. No. 204 B— Street was the house in the garden, in which I had been imprisoned Allerton was, probably, the father of the sweet girl who had delivered me, and it only remained for me to devise some plan of becoming acquainted with him, in order to secure an introduction to her.

If the diamond had come into my possession under the ordinary circumstances of accident, I could have effected my purpose by taking it to him in person. But I did not forget the significant warning of my deliverer, and I felt that her safety, as well as my own, depended upon my first obtaining a solution of the mystery attending my kidnapping; for I was almost certain that, if I could get at the truth of this, I should have the instigator of the outrage in my power.

After due reflection, therefore, I decided that my best course was to find the “Martin Dane” for whom I had been mistaken, and, without delay, I began the task of tracing that individual.

I need not detail all the difficulties I encountered in this effort. Suffice it to say, that, on the fourth day after my interview with the jeweller, I discovered who Martin Dane was, and the residence of his family—but only to be met with the startling information that he had been missing for three days! His mother and wife—I must confess that I experienced a strong sense of relief at finding that he *was* married, and that his wife was *not* my unknown deliverer—were in a state of distraction on account of his disappearance, and I was very glad to find [someone] to consult with, in the person of a shrewd detective, who had taken charge of the case by order of the Chief of Police.

I had no doubt whatever that the persons who had kidnapped me had now got hold of their true victim, especially when I learned that Martin Dane's mother was the sister of Clarence Allerton which, of course, would make him the cousin of Allerton's daughter, as I believed my rescuer to be. It was, therefore, quite probable, that if the villains had not killed him at once, he was confined in the same dungeon that I had escaped from. Acting upon this hypothesis, my resolution was soon taken, and, first obtaining his solemn promise to keep the information I gave him secret, at least for the present, I related my whole adventure to Carter, the detective.

My reason for binding the officer to secrecy was that I feared we should discover that *her* father had committed a great crime, and I shrank from giving publicity to any fact that would involve her in trouble through him. Besides, if her father was criminal, I had no idea of putting myself forward as his accuser, because I wished to stand well with her, and she would not be likely to look with favor on a man who had brought her parent to shame.

This decision was not very prudent, perhaps, as it might tend to defeat the ends of justice; but lovers are proverbially imprudent, and I was no exception to the rule. Happily, Carter preferred concealment to open action, as he hoped to secure more fame by doing everything himself, and we lost no time in perfecting our plans.

These were quite simple, consisting only in obtaining a search-warrant from a friendly magistrate, and then penetrating the suspected house in sufficient force to overcome all opposition. The warrant was procured without difficulty. Carter mustered six of his subordinate officers on whom he could rely, and midnight found us at the arched gateway which had been the scene of the beginning and end of my adventure. The officers had come prepared to break open the gate, or any locked door that might oppose their entrance; but, much to my surprise, we found the gate wide open, and, quickly crossing the garden, I led the way to the door by which my lovely rescuer had brought me out of the building.

This was fastened, but the skill of my followers was quite equal to the occasion, and the obstacle did not long detain us. How they managed it, I did not take the trouble to examine, but in a few moments the door swung open with a dull crash, and I hastily led them down the stone steps into the narrow passage, which terminated, as I have before described, at the door of the cell where I had been confined. In single file, like Indian braves on the war-path, and with the same silent caution, we stole along this passage, until, suddenly turning a sharp angle, a bright light flashing in our eyes brought us to a halt.

The scene that met our gaze was one well calculated to astonish and even appall the most callous in our party. The iron door of the cell was wide open, and its whole interior was luridly illuminated by the ruddy flame of a flaring oil-lamp placed on the ground near the entrance. By this sulphurous glare—the very light of the infernal pit—four human figures were visible, forming a tableau worthy the pencil of Rembrandt himself. In the centre of the dungeon a man, in the prime of life and of a noble presence, lay stretched upon the stone flags, held down forcibly in that position by a stalwart ruffian, whose forbidding aspect was terribly expressive of brutal cruelty. In the foreground, assisting the first ruffian in preventing the struggles of their victim by clinging to his ankles, knelt a grey-haired old man, whose venerable appearance—if it had not been for the vindictive passion expressed in every line of his face—contrasted strangely, indeed, with the scene and his actions. In the fourth figure of the group I recognised, with feelings impossible to describe, the lovely form of her who was now never absent from my thoughts—the young girl who had delivered me from that same dungeon.

It was plain that she was no party to the outrage which she was compelled to witness, for she was crouched against the wall at the rear of the cell, as if shrinking from the sight; and, though silent—doubtless from fear—every line of her pallid face, and her whole attitude, were expressive of despair and horror. I need scarcely say that no effort of my own will could have prevented me from rushing forward, instantly, to interpose between her and those who were evidently *her* persecutors, as well as the foes of the youth on the ground. But Carter, who wished to do everything in a professional manner, restrained me with a firm grasp; and, thus compelled to inaction, I was able, though not composedly, to hear and see all that passed.

Almost immediately after we came in sight of the group, the prostrate man ceased to struggle, and, in a tone of mingled rage and alarm, exclaimed:

“What is it that you want with me? Would you murder me, Uncle Clarence?”

At these words, the old man released hold upon the prisoner's limbs, and, starting to his feet, glared down at his victim's horrified face with a malignant scowl, that rendered his visage that of a fiend.

“Murder you?” he cried, hoarse with passion and exertion, and stamping on the echoing flags in a fury of hate. “Aye! and your whole cursed brood! You and your imbecile father have been my bane through life. But I'll end it now, though the gibbet be my portion for the deed!”

And, as he uttered the last sentence, he drew from his breast a heavy pistol! The ruffian who had been holding the youth down, sprang to his feet with an exclamation of fear, and turned upon the old man, as if to prevent a catastrophe he had not expected. But his movement was anticipated, and his cry drowned by the agonised scream that burst from the lips of the young girl as she darted from the corner and flung herself bodily upon the breast of the aged assassin. There was a deafening explosion, a confused rush by my own party, a clamor of furious oaths and shouting; and, emerging from a phrensiad struggle, which, during its brief continuance, seemed to me a foretaste of the horrors of the nether pit itself, I stood, with the insensible form of my darling clasped close to my heart, gazing, in dumb astonishment, at the other actors in this startling drama.

The youth who had so nearly been the victim of the old man's insensate rage, stood leaning, in exhaustion, against the further wall of the cell, whither he had staggered as soon as he could extricate himself from the *melee*. Opposite him was the wretch who had been holding him down when we first came upon the scene, powerless in the strong grasp of two of Carter's subordinates. Between them, and stretched at full length upon the floor of the dungeon, lay the aged man, his grey hairs dabbled in blood, and his pale face looking ghastly in the lurid light of the smoking lamp. Beside him knelt Carter, his right hand pressed upon the prostrate body's breast. The other officers were grouped in various attitudes about these central figures, and, in the doorway, my own form, supporting that of the unconscious girl, completed a weird picture, the slightest detail of which I have never forgotten.

When the officers raised the old man from the ground, he was found to be quite dead. The ball from the pistol, diverted from its murderous aim by the frantic rush of the young girl, had penetrated his heart; and, at the climax of his wild rage, his soul had gone to meet its Judge.

* * * * *

The explanation of all this mystery, and the sequel of my story, may be briefly given. Claire Allerton—which I found to be the name of my lovely preserver—was *not* the daughter of the would-be assassin, but the child of his only brother, as Martin Dane was of his only sister. Their uncle had been disinherited by his father, for faults committed in his youth. Always reckless and vindictive, Clarence Allerton was not the man to sit down tamely under what he considered a

wrong, and, as time passed, his determination to obtain redress and vengeance grew into a positive madness, under the influence of which he hesitated at nothing which would enable him to accomplish his purpose. The father of Claire was a weak-minded man, easily influenced by any stronger nature, and, misled by the pretended repentance of his brother Clarence, he constituted the latter guardian of his daughter. When he died, Clarence assumed entire control of Claire's person and estate, and at once proceeded to apply the revenues of the last to his own uses.

Not content with this success, however—for his insane greed could not be satisfied with less than all of his late father's wealth—he began to plot the ruin of his sister's son, Martin Dane, who had been the direct inheritor of the remainder of the estate. As a necessary part of the plan he had devised, the uncle carefully prevented any intercourse between the cousins, and, from time to time, related cunningly worded lies to Claire, which convinced her that her cousin Martin was conspiring to ruin not only her uncle, but herself. Strange as it may seem, Claire did not discover that her guardian was really insane until shortly before the adventure in which I figured so prominently, though many of his acts were obviously dictated by positive lunacy. The purchase of the Blue Diamond was one of these, for he could have no earthly use for so valuable a jewel, and he had no love for gems at all. But the fact that he gave it to her to keep, telling her it was nothing but a quartz pebble, proved that its purchase was the mere freak of a disordered mind; and it is probable that it was prompted by some wild notion of preserving her from poverty, though his telling her that it was valueless nearly defeated his intention, if he really entertained it.

But Claire's eyes were opened at last, when she accidentally overheard her uncle directing the ruffians who kidnapped me to lay in wait for Martin Dane, who was to be decoyed to the garden-gate by a forged letter from herself, imploring her cousin to rescue her from her uncle's tyranny. She heard him tell them to bring their victim, by a roundabout way, to the house, and confine him in the vault—which was, indeed, nothing more than a wine-cellar—and, when they had departed on their nefarious errand, she heard the old man mutter fearful words, which convinced her that he intended to starve her cousin to death!

Ignorant of the proper means to take to secure the protection of the law, and shrinking, besides, from the public disclosure of her uncle's insanity, she resolved to rescue her cousin unaided. In my case, as I have related, she succeeded admirably; but when the real victim had been captured, her uncle gave her no time to do more than follow him to the vault, where, in answer to her prayers for Martin's life, he frightened her into silence by the most horrible threats. If it had not been for her accidental delivery of the diamond to me, her cousin would have been murdered, and, in all probability, she herself would have fallen a sacrifice to her uncle's insane fury.

My readers will hardly need to be informed that, when the fearful memory of her guardian's attempted crime and dreadful death had been somewhat softened by time, Claire Allerton became my wife. But I may state that, in consequence of the unfortunate madman's reckless mismanagement of her estate, almost the only dowry she brought me, save her love and beauty, was the Blue Diamond.

Frank Leslie's Pleasant Hours, August 1872