

The Two Sisters;
Or, The Avenger
by Allan Pinkerton

CHAPTER I.

IN the early part of April, 1851, I was attending to some business for the United States Treasury Department, under orders from Mr. Guthrie, the Secretary of the Treasury at that time. Having no one to assist me, I was obliged to do an immense amount of work, and to take advantage of every unoccupied moment, to rest and sleep. I was not, then, living in Chicago, but was temporarily boarding at the Sherman House, in that city, my own home being at Dundee, in Kane County, Illinois. One evening, I had retired early, exhausted by a hard day's work, and had just fallen into a sound sleep, when I was awakened by my old friend, William L. Church, the sheriff of Cook County, Illinois. He was accompanied by two other gentlemen, whom he introduced to me, as soon as I could make a hasty toilet and admit them to my room. One was Deputy-Sheriff Green, of Coldwater, Michigan, and the other, William Wells, of Quincy, a small town about six miles north of Coldwater. Mr. Church said that he wished me to listen to the story which Mr. Wells had to tell, and to give my services to aid in capturing two of the worst villains that ever went unhung, as well as to save their victims from their clutches.

Mr. Wells seemed to be about twenty-one years old, and had an erect carriage, which gave him a more manly and determined look than is usual in young men of his age. DrawnSg around the stove, we listened to his sad, sad story, which, at times, threw him into fits of violent passion, and at others, overwhelmed him with grief. I shall not attempt to tell the story in the disconnected manner in which he gave it to us, but will combine, with his account, the further information which we obtained at the close of my researches in the case. Of course, many of the details here given were unknown to young Wells at the time he called, with Mr. Church, to ask my assistance; but enough was known positively, beside much that was evident inferentially, to make my blood boil as I listened, and to draw tears even from Mr. Church and Mr. Green, accustomed as they were to scenes of agony and sorrow. The following is the story of Mr. Wells, together with many incidents which were developed later:

CHAPTER II.

ERASTUS B. WELLS, William's father, was about fifty-five years of age, and had long been a merchant in Boston. He had been successful in business, and had been a wealthy man, up to less than a year previous, at which time, he had been on the point of retiring from active life and establishing his son in his place. Mr. Wells was well known and highly respected in Boston, and had many friends and acquaintances. He was a man of large heart and generous instincts, so that he had been frequently asked to endorse accommodation paper for his business associates, and had given the use of his name and credit very freely—too freely, as events proved. A very dull season in trade came on, and, although his own business was not seriously affected, his friends went down, one after another, leaving him to meet their debts, for which he had made himself liable. In consequence, Mr. Wells, himself, was called upon to pay the notes which he had endorsed for his friends, and the result was financial ruin. After selling all his property, he found

himself stripped of his whole fortune, (except a small sum) with a family dependent upon him for support.

While his affairs prospered, he had been blessed with one of the happiest homes imaginable. His wife was industrious and loving, and his children, of whom he had four, obedient and affectionate. His children's names and ages were as follows: William, twenty-one years; Mary, seventeen years; Alice, fifteen years, and Emma, nine years. Mary was already a well-developed woman. She was tall, but her figure was compact and plump. Her face was almost a perfect oval in shape, and her eyes were large, and expressive, jet black in color, fringed with long, fine lashes. She was noticeable for the beauty of her soft, clear, brunette complexion, which was a rich olive, deepening into a delicate red in her cheeks. She had a small mouth, red, full lips and very regular, pearly teeth. But her greatest charm was her sweet expression, which spoke directly to the hearts of all who met her. She did not belong to the class of sentimental beauties, who look as if a strong wind would blow them away; but, on the contrary, she possessed a glow of health and flow of spirits which added greatly to her attractiveness. Hers was a strong nature, kept in check by firm, religious principles.

Alice had reached the age "where womanhood and childhood meet." She was not as tall as Mary, nor was her figure as fully developed. She had her mother's eyes, dark grey in color, and she almost rivaled Mary in the beauty of her complexion. When she laughed, she showed such pretty teeth, lips and dimples, that many considered her the beauty of the family.

Mrs. Wells was a noble woman, and, in the hour of her husband's distress, she showed a courage superior to all misfortunes. William and the girls, also, were sources of great comfort to their father by the cheerfulness with which they met the change in their circumstances. Mary, as the eldest daughter, felt that it was her duty to take an active part in the struggle against poverty, which was now commencing. Although naturally timid, she had the courage to carry out any plan which she considered right and necessary. The Wells family had not gone into society a great deal; hence, they were spared much of the heartless treatment that is so generally inflicted in fashionable circles upon those whom fate deprives of wealth. Still, there were many among their acquaintances, who dropped them as soon as they became poor. Although they keenly felt these slights, they did not give way to useless repinings, but adapted their habits and mode of life to their changed circumstances, with cheerful resignation and contentment. In a short time, nearly all of Mr. Wells' property had been absorbed in the payment of the debts of his friends, and he had only a small sum left. He pondered for some time as to what would be the best course for him to pursue. Many of his friends advised him to take advantage of the credit which his established reputation for honesty and business capacity would command, and start in business again. But the shock of his losses, although not caused by any neglect of duty on his part, had so unnerved him, that he felt it would be impossible, at his age, to commence at the foot of the ladder, perhaps only to be again dashed to the ground before he could reach a secure position. He, therefore, took a small cottage in Boston, temporarily, while settling his affairs, and moved thither such necessary furniture as he was able to reserve from the sale of his effects.

Having finally satisfied all his creditors, he had remaining only a few hundred dollars. He then decided to go West and purchase a farm in the State of Michigan, which was, at that time, rapidly filling up with New England settlers. The soil was rich, and the country was well

wooded and watered, so that farms, which could then be bought from the Government at low rates, would become worth thousands of dollars in a few years. He had money enough to buy a quarter-section of land, and to stock his farm with a few cows and the necessary oxen and farming implements required in breaking and working a new piece of ground. He proposed to put up a comfortable log-house, where, with good health, he hoped that they might soon become independent—for he felt that no one was so truly independent as a successful farmer, owning a well-stocked farm, free from debt.

The girls were quite delighted at the prospect, not only on account of the future pecuniary advantages, but because it would remove them from the probability of contact with those who had known them when wealthy. The undesired pity of their friends was almost as hard to bear as the contemptuous sneers of their enemies; so that they were not sorry to make a decided change of residence. It did not take long to prepare for the journey, and in a few days they were westward bound.

The tracks of the Michigan Southern Railroad had been just laid as far as Laporte, Indiana, and many gangs of men were at work all along the line, ballasting the road and putting it into smooth running order. The opening of the road had made a large area of valuable farming lands easily accessible, and settlers were pouring in fast.

Mr. Wells bought a quarter-section of land (one hundred and sixty acres) near Quincy, Michigan, where he put up a small dwelling-house and barn, investing what little money he had left, in live-stock and farming implements. Quincy was a mere village, consisting of a tavern, two or three stores, two small churches and a few dwelling-houses.

The Wells family soon found that there were many little things required which, having no money, they could not obtain, as Mr. Wells would not go in debt for anything. He could not expect much return from the first year on a new farm, especially as he was comparatively a novice in the business, not having had any experience since he was a boy, working on his father's farm in New England. Both he and William, however, worked very hard, and succeeded in fully realizing their anticipations for the first year's crops, though, of course, the returns were no more than sufficient for their bare subsistence. The prospects for the ensuing year were very bright, provided they could get through the winter safely, as the farm was a fine one, and their late-and-early labor had put it into excellent condition. But, as winter came on, it was evident that it would be difficult to provide the necessities of life for the whole family until Spring.

Accordingly, as soon as the cold weather put an end to farm-work, William applied for and obtained a place as foreman of a gang of men at work on the railroad, a position he was well qualified to fill. All his wages, he brought home and put into the general family fund, which Mr. Wells disbursed as needed. It also occurred to Mary and Alice that they might contribute something to the family treasury, (beside getting their own living,) by hiring out for the winter to do housework in Coldwater, the nearest town of any size.

In the West, at that time, (and it is so, even now, in the country,) the domestic servant held a much higher place, socially, than at present. She was looked upon more as a companion than as a servant; and the daughters of wealthy farmers often worked out for small wages, rather than

remain at home toiling for nothing. Mary's acquaintances in Boston would have probably raised their hands in holy horror, if they had heard that the Wells girls were working out; but it did not in the least affect their social standing in Coldwater. In fact, it rather raised them, as it should have done, in the estimation of their neighbors.

William, therefore, obtained places for them in Coldwater; Mary taking a place as domestic in the family of Mr. Cox, a merchant, while Alice took a similar position in a restaurant at the depot, kept by a man named Blake. Their wages were one dollar and fifty cents for Mary, and one dollar for Alice. The girls soon settled down to their duties, and got along unusually well. Mary generally finished her work earlier than Alice, and then went down to Blake's to assist her. Having completed their daily tasks, they would have a pleasant chat, or take a short walk, but they never received any company. Alice, while waiting on the table, would be polite to all, and would pleasantly answer any questions put to her; but as soon as her duties were finished, she held herself quietly aloof from every one.

Mrs. Blake did a fair share of the work herself, although she had one servant besides Alice. She was a good little woman, of very pleasing appearance, and had been married eight or nine years, though she had no children.

Mr. Blake was a remarkably handsome man. He was six feet in height, and carried himself with a very erect, military air. His features were regular and clear-cut, and he was the picture of good health. His hair and silky moustache were jet black, and his complexion, though dark, was clear and smooth. He was generally dressed in excellent taste, with the exception that he showed a weakness for jewelry. He wore a showy diamond pin, and frequently looked at his watch, a very valuable English, gold hunting-case time-piece, which he carried attached to a massive gold chain. At that time, gold watches were not as common in the West as now, and Blake displayed his very ostentatiously. In general, however, he was very agreeable in his manners. He attended very little to the business of the restaurant, leaving it to his wife, while he went about the country a great deal, driving a fast horse, which he owned. He was away from home most of the time, in fact, going sometimes to Toledo, Detroit, Laporte, and Chicago.

Coldwater lay a quarter of a mile distant from the depot, and Blake rarely went to the town; though he was always very civil and polite to any of the residents who visited his restaurant. About all that was known of him in Coldwater, was that he had kept the restaurant for two years, and seemed to be making money. Stations then were very far apart on the railroad, and travelers frequently drove long distances to take the train, remaining at Blake's overnight and leaving by the morning train next day. Blake's business was, therefore, that of a hotel-keeper; his barkeeper, under Mrs. Blake's superintendence, attended to most of the work in Blake's absence, and accounted to Mrs. Blake every night for the money received.

Although Alice was an inmate of the house, she was engaged in sewing for Mrs. Blake most of the day, and saw nothing of the boarders, except at meal-times. Hence, as far as the girls knew, the restaurant was a highly respectable place, and it was not until I had rent the veil of mystery surrounding it, that they learned the true character of the persons who made it their rendezvous.

Blake, as we subsequently learned, was in reality a most villainous and dangerous man. For twelve years he had been a professional gambler and swindler. He had been in the habit of traveling on the Mississippi and its tributaries, always as a gambler or roper-in. He had been seen in Dubuque; was well acquainted in Keokuk and Cairo; had gone up the Missouri to Independence, and, thence, out on the plains; Natchez, Vicksburg, Memphis, and New Orleans—all were familiar haunts; and, as a cool, desperate villain, he had an extensive reputation, though he had not yet been exposed at Coldwater, where little or nothing was known of him.

His object in following up the line of the new Michigan Southern Railroad, was to take advantage of the men at work on the road, and fleece them of their hard-earned wages, by gambling games. His restaurant, in reality, was a regular gambling den, and was the resort, not only of all the fast men and gamblers of Coldwater, but, also, of many young men, sons of rich farmers in the vicinity. There were a variety of games played; but the gambling portion of the house was removed from the rooms of Mrs. Blake and Alice, and no sound of the games was ever heard outside of the gambling rooms. For experienced gamblers, there were “square” games of poker, faro and roulette, Blake, whenever he was at home, officiating as dealer; at other times the rooms were closed, except for poker and other games not requiring a “banker.” For farmers, laborers, and inexperienced young men, Blake had a special faro box, arranged in such a way as to enable the dealer to know every card before slipping it out, and to make it win or lose at his pleasure. He had inveigled so many persons into his clutches, that there were a number of rumors afloat about the character of the house and its proprietor, but they were so vague as never to have reached either William or Mary.

About eleven miles from Coldwater, was the little town of Bronson, situated about half a mile from the railroad station of the same name. The only building at the station, was a tavern, kept by one Harris, a great friend of Blake. It was afterward discovered that, at Burr Oak, six miles from Harris’ tavern, a gang of counterfeiters were at work; and, in order not to attract attention to Burr Oak, most of the gang stopped with Harris. The latter was a most consummate villain, and his wife was even worse; so that congenial spirits were not wanting among the keepers of the tavern and their guests.

Among the frequenters of Blake’s gambling rooms and Harris’ tavern, was a young man named Sloan, son of a well-to-do farmer near Coldwater. He had lived with his parents, until he had exhausted their patience by his extravagance and dissipation; he had then left home to take a place as stage-driver. At first, he had driven a stage from Coldwater north to Lansing. Soon becoming a most proficient “knight of the whip,” he had gone to Chicago to drive for Frink & Walker, the owners of all the stage lines running north, west and south from that city.

In those days, lively scenes could have been witnessed in front of the Tremont House, where all the stages started from every morning. Old drivers would try to see how near they could come to overturning their vehicles without doing so, and green hands, in their efforts at imitation, would come to grief, and be hauled from the ruins of a general smash-up.

Sloan had learned to cut a circle in the street with a four-horse team and a heavy stage, and was as good a driver as could be found. Hence, he had easily obtained a stage on one of the western routes, but had taken leave of absence, and come home to spend the winter with his friends. Up

to the time he left Coldwater, Sloan had not been a vicious man; but stage-driving had not been a good school for his morals. He was about five feet nine inches in height, full-faced, dark complexioned, and had dark eyes and hair. He wore heavy side-whiskers, and a Kossuth hat, which he kept on his head, indoors and out. He would have been very good looking but for his rakish, dissipated appearance. He was well acquainted with Blake and his barkeeper, Jim Kelly, so that he was quite at home about the restaurant.

I have now presented all of the *dramatis personae* of the tragedy which was shortly enacted, and will proceed to give the particulars thereof, as they occurred.

CHAPTER III.

MARY was in the habit of calling frequently to see Alice, and soon became well acquainted with Mrs. Blake. While in the latter's rooms, Blake would occasionally meet Mary, and, in this way, he came to know her. He hardly noticed either of the girls, as a rule, though he sometimes spoke to Alice, while she was waiting on him at table. Once or twice, apparently by accident, he overtook Mary and Alice when on their way to town, and walked part way with them. Occasionally, also, he walked with them to Mrs. Cox's, and returned with Alice. He was always very respectful, however, and seemed to pay very little attention to them.

Three months passed quickly away without any incidents of consequence. William came often to see his sisters, and they were allowed to go home once a month, to pass Sunday. Every week they sent their wages home; and their spirits were kept up by frequent letters from their parents, and by the thought that the little sum at home was increasing slowly by their assistance.

About this time, Sloan began to notice Alice, and, in order to see her as much as possible, began to take his meals at the restaurant. While Alice was waiting on him, he used to say sweet things to her; but, though she always waited upon him promptly, she paid no attention to his sweet speeches and loving looks. If he attempted any familiarity, she always walked out of the room.

There were a number of young men, farmers' sons, clerks, and students from Coldwater, who were very anxious to get acquainted with Mary and Alice; but the latter were quietly reserved, and they coldly repelled all advances. The decided manner with which the sisters shunned all gentlemen's society, greatly exasperated these young men, and they talked a great deal about the girls. Sloan was particularly angry, and he tried his best to get introduced into Blake's family, but without success; as Mrs. Blake approved of the girls' conduct, and aided them as much as possible.

In the early part of March, Mrs. Blake decided to pay a visit to her mother, who lived in Ypsilanti. As she would need someone to superintend the restaurant during her absence, it occurred to her that Mary would be just the person for the place. Accordingly, when Mary next visited Alice, Mrs. Blake suggested the plan to her, and urged her warmly to accept the position of housekeeper for two or three months. Mrs. Blake said that the winter's work had completely tired her out, and that she wished to visit her family, in order to get rested. She had full confidence in Mary, who, though so young, was, nevertheless, very systematical and orderly; she

was sure that Mary would manage the domestic arrangements of the restaurant as well as she could, herself.

Mary did not like to leave Mrs. Cox. She got along well with the family, and liked her place. On the other hand, Mrs. Blake offered her two dollars a week, to take full charge of everything at the restaurant; and, though she would have more responsibility, it would give her, also a more independent position. There were two other important advantages: the increase of wages, and the fact that she would always be with Alice. They had several talks upon the subject, and, finally, Mrs. Blake offered her two dollars and fifty cents a week, and Alice two dollars, if Mary would accept the situation of housekeeper, while Mrs. Blake was away. This decided the matter, and Mary agreed to the terms. She felt that she could not afford to refuse an offer, which was not only advantageous pecuniarily, but which would enable her to live with Alice.

When Mary informed Mrs. Cox of her intentions, that lady was quite displeased; and, in order to induce her to remain, Mrs. Cox repeated a number of the ugly rumors that were afloat with regard to Blake and his restaurant. Among other things, she said that there had been a bowling-alley attached to the restaurant, which had burned down one night, very strangely; and it was strongly suspected that Blake, himself, had fired the building, in order to get the insurance on it, which was very heavy. Mr. Cox came in while they were talking, and said that Mary must not mention what Mrs. Cox had told her, because there was no certainty of the truth of the story; though such were the suspicions of some of the people living in Coldwater. It was, also, publicly reported that Blake kept a gambling-house, and he advised her not to go to such a place. Mary was horrified at these stories; but, at the same time, it seemed strange that Mrs. Cox should not have told her these things before, knowing that her sister was employed in the restaurant, and that she, herself, often went there. She told Alice about the rumors, and asked her whether she had seen anything wrong about Blake, or the restaurant. Alice replied that she had not; but that Blake had always been quiet and gentlemanly in his words and actions; and that the restaurant, though having a bar attached, had been remarkably orderly and well-conducted. They, finally, agreed to lay the matter before William, and abide by his decision.

William was working on the railroad between Coldwater and Quincy, and often visited Coldwater station on business, always stopping to see Alice when he came there. The next time that Alice saw him, she told him about the rumors concerning Blake's restaurant, and asked what he thought of them. He said that he had heard such rumors, and had closely questioned the track-men and others as to the truth of the stories; but they had unanimously pronounced them false. With regard to the charge of setting fire to the bowling-alley, the fact that the insurance had been paid without question, was sufficient evidence of Blake's innocence. William considered Mrs. Blake's offer too good to be refused, and, therefore, advised Mary to accept it. Alice informed Mary of William's decision, the next day, and Mary gave Mrs. Cox notice that she would leave in a week.

At the end of that time, she moved down to Mrs. Blake's, and was given a small but pleasant room with Alice, on the second floor. Mrs. Blake remained a week, in order to instruct Mary in her new duties; and then, feeling that matters would run smoothly without her, she packed her clothes, preparatory to a visit of three months.

Mrs. Blake was rather jealous of her husband, but she knew the purity of the girls' characters so well, that she had no fears of them. What she did fear, however, was that Blake would bring strange women into the house, in her absence; and, to guard against this, she cautioned Mary not to allow any straggling women to stop at the restaurant.

"If any women come 'round," said she to Mary, "you must insist on turning them out. If Blake objects, you write to me. I shall be only sixty miles away, and I will come over and soon oust them. I have all confidence in you, Mary, and so has Blake; and he has agreed to let you have your own way, while I am gone."

Blake then took his wife to Ypsilanti in his light cutter, the sleighing being good, and returned in about a week. He brought a letter from his wife for Mary, and had a long talk with the latter about the business of the house. He asked her a number of questions about the financial and culinary arrangements, but showed no more freedom of manner than when his wife was at home.

Mary and Alice were now very happy. They had good situations, and, as they were always together, began to feel almost as contented as if they were in their own home. Mary had no difficulty in managing the house, and all went on smoothly. Kelly, the barkeeper, occasionally came in to turn over the money from the bar, and to order extra meals for late passengers; but he was always very respectful to both girls.

Sloan was at the restaurant most of the time, and he used to sit in the dining-room, with other fast young men, every evening, the bar being in the same room. If anything disorderly occurred, Mary would walk into the dining-room to see what was the matter, and immediately the disturbance would cease. It was a strange sight to see the manner in which the worst rowdies cowered before this slight girl of seventeen.

Alice did not possess her sister's power of command, and found it very hard to control some of the customers. Many of the young men tried to make the acquaintance of Alice at table, and several of them sent invitations to parties, etc., to both girls, but no answers were ever returned. In consequence, it was generally conceded that the sisters "put on a good many airs" for girls in their position, and the young men were duly indignant. Sloan was particularly angry at Alice, for whom he had conceived a violent passion, and he never ceased to think about her. Alice became almost afraid of him, and said to Mary, once:

"That man makes me tremble every time he looks at me."

The California gold mines had only recently been discovered, and the "gold fever" was at its height in Coldwater. It seemed as if everyone was preparing to start for the "diggings," and farmers were offering their farms for sale at very low prices, to obtain the means to carry them across the plains, to the land of promise in California. The stories of the wealth to be obtained by a few months' work in the mines had affected all classes of people, and even the oldest and steadiest were tempted.

It is not to be wondered, then, that men like Blake and Sloan should have turned toward the new *El Dorado* with longing hearts. Blake was about tired of a settled life, and, moreover, he was

aware that his character was becoming known, and that some of his dupes would be apt to bring a hornet's nest about his ears, some day, which might result in still more unpleasant revelations with regard to him. He, therefore, began to make preparations for a move, keeping his intentions perfectly secret from everyone except Sloan, with whom he now became very intimate, indeed. Blake needed such a man as Sloan for a tool, and so, drew him on to commit the crime which they were then engaged in planning, in order to prepare him for other schemes of villainy, when Blake should require his services. Sloan was greatly flattered at being noticed by Blake, who was much superior in education and intellect to any of the men in that vicinity, besides being a dashing, daring sort of a fellow, with great ability to fascinate his associates. Thus, by flattering Sloan's vanity, Blake obtained a complete mastery over him; and it was only necessary for Blake to say the word, to lead Sloan into any wickedness that might turn up. These two now remained together constantly, making frequent visits to Harris, at Bronson station. Harris would sometimes come back with them, as, also, two men known as Dick and Joe. These latter were a bad lot, and showed their hardened characters in their faces.

Two weeks passed thus very pleasantly to the sisters. Their work was not tiresome, and they were always happy in each other's society. During the day, they were quite busy, but, after seven o'clock, they usually sat down in the sitting-room and read aloud to each other, or talked over past pleasures and future prospects.

All went along quietly at Blake's, until one morning the great equinoctial gales commenced, and brought with them a heavy snowstorm. Very few customers visited the restaurant that day, and those who did brave the storm, went home before evening, leaving only Blake, Kelly, Sloan, and the sisters in the house.

After tea the girls went into the sitting-room, where they sat, listening to the storm, and looking into the fire. In a short time, Blake came in and conversed with them for some minutes. He was dressed with great care, and he made himself very agreeable, yet without showing the least want of respect. He was soon called out by Sloan, who told him that Harris had just come. As Sloan went out, he glanced at Alice with that devilish expression in his eye that always frightened her, and she was so alarmed that she begged Mary to go to bed. Norah had already gone to her room; and, as there was no prospect of anyone coming for meals at that hour, Mary agreed, and the sisters prepared to retire.

They went to the back door and glanced out at the storm. The snow almost blinded them, but they saw that there was a light in the stable, and caught a glimpse of Blake, Sloan, and a stranger, moving about, the stranger being Harris. There was nothing unusual in this, so they closed the door and went to bed.

Blake's room was opposite the sitting-room, and, next to it, was the room of Norah, the Irish cook. The sitting-room was between the kitchen and the dining-room; the sisters' bedroom was upstairs, directly over the main outside entrance to the dining-room.

The girls little thought that at that moment the plot was being planned, and the arrangements made, which should forever blast their lives. As they knelt to ask God's aid and blessing, Blake

and his attendant scoundrels were preparing for a crime most foul. But, ignorant of the depravity of these men, the sisters retired in peace, and quiet soon reigned over the house.

CHAPTER IV.

ABOUT midnight, a loud knocking was commenced at the main entrance, which quickly awoke the girls overhead. After a prolonged pounding, they heard a gruff voice, saying:

“Open the door! I am the sheriff, and I have a warrant to arrest you, Blake, for setting fire to your bowling-alley.”

The storm still howled fiercely, and the snow was drifting in immense sheets against the window-panes; but far above the noise of the storm, the terrified girls heard the knocks, and the stern voice commanding the inmates to open, in the name of the law. Not a sound was heard within the house, and again came the voice:

“Open the door! I am the sheriff, and I shall break down the door, if you don’t let me in at once.”

Then came a heavy thud, and the order:

“Break down the door, boys! I’m bound to have that scoundrel, Blake.”

Crash followed crash, the door yielded, and soon a number of heavy footsteps were heard, crossing the dining-room, and rushing about the lower part of the house. The men ran hither and thither, searching the rooms below, and blaspheming in a manner terrible to hear. They entered Norah’s room, dragged her out of bed, and demanded where Blake was concealed. Not finding him there, the search was continued. Suddenly, the girls heard a stealthy footstep outside their door, and then, a hasty fumbling at their latch. The door flew open, and Blake, in a voice, seemingly choked with terror, said:

“Oh! girls, hide me! hide me! They are going to arrest me!”

Before they could collect their scattered senses, Blake sprang into the bed, and forced himself down between the two girls, who shrank away, powerless and almost fainting from fright. The men in search were close behind Blake, however; and, as he drew the clothes up over his head, they burst into the room with a yell of exultation. The supposed sheriff and his men proved to be Sloan, Harris, Dick, and Joe.

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed Sloan, fiendishly; “this is where you spend your nights, is it, Blake? You’re a sly coon, but we’ve treed you at last.”

As he spoke, he seized the bed-clothes and, with a fling, threw them over the foot of the bed, disclosing Blake, in his night-shirt, lying between the nearly insensible girls.

Blake sprang up and said, in a horrified tone:

“Oh! gentlemen, gentlemen, you have gone too far! I was so frightened—as I really thought you had a warrant—that I rushed in here and begged the girls to hide me. The girls are virtuous, I assure you, but my indiscretion has placed them in an awful position. It is terrible! terrible! Don’t, for God’s sake, let anyone know of this. Come downstairs, and I will treat you to all the whiskey and brandy you want. This affair must be hushed up! The girls are as innocent as babes. It is all my fault.”

“Ha! ha!” sneered Sloan; “that you, Alice? Blake is smart, but I never knew he was a Mormon before,” and coming to the bed-side, with an insulting remark, he grasped Alice in his arms.

“Quit that sort of business,” said Blake. “The girls are as pure as snow, and I won’t have them insulted. Go downstairs, and keep quiet about this.”

“Well,” said Sloan, with an oath, “I’m going to have a kiss anyhow,” saying which, he clasped Alice close, and kissed her.

The poor child was powerless to resist, and an attempt to scream died away on her lips. Mary was pale as death, and she lay motionless, with a look of horror on her face, that would have moved less hardened wretches to pity.

“Go downstairs, I say,” repeated Blake, and all but Sloan left the room.

The latter again seized Alice, but Blake succeeded in forcing him from the room, and then returned to the door.

“Mary,” he said, “I have done you both a great wrong, but those men frightened me so much that I did not know what I was doing. You know that I never wished to do you an injury. Oh! forgive me! please forgive me!”

Mary’s mouth was parched and dry, so that she could not speak. She seemed to be the victim of a hideous nightmare, which rendered her will and muscles powerless.

Blake went on speaking:

“Mary, you won’t tell this to my wife, will you? She would feel terribly, if she were to know it. I will make it all right with the boys downstairs. All they want is liquor. Won’t you forgive me, and promise not to tell my wife?”

For a time, neither of the girls could speak, but Mary was, at length, able to find her voice.

“Leave the room, and let us alone,” she said. “I don’t know what I am doing. I am going crazy. Go! go! I pray God I may never see daylight.”

Blake saw that any further annoyance might make them desperate, and, therefore, went out. The girls lay in a nervous stupor for some minutes after his departure, but finally Mary got up and closed the door. There was no lock nor bolt upon it; so she motioned Alice to assist her, and,

together, they dragged their trunks against it, and barricaded it as well as possible. Neither could speak, but Mary opened her arms and clasped Alice to her bosom in a loving embrace. Their breaking hearts were relieved by a flood of tears, and crawling into bed, they passed the remainder of the night in each other's arms, trembling like leaves at every gust of wind that swept around the house.

After dressing, Blake went into the bar-room; there he found Kelly up, dealing out drinks to the scoundrels, who were laughing over their success in invading the privacy of the poor sisters' chamber. Blake tried to calm them down and induce them to go home; but they were partly intoxicated, and were determined to stay as long as they pleased.

Sloan said, with an oath, that he had never had so sweet a kiss before, and that Alice was bound to be his.

"Shut up, Sloan, you're a fool," said Blake.

"Don't talk to me that way, or I'll put a knife into you," muttered Sloan.

"I tell you, you're a d—d fool," said Blake. "Don't you know how to act your part any better? If you don't take care, we'll go to the penitentiary. If you'll keep your mouth shut and leave matters to me, we shall have a good thing out of this."

"That's so," coincided Dick. "I have done some shrewd things in my time, and I can always do well, if I have a good chum."

By this time, Harris had the sleigh at the door, the party took a parting drink, and in a few minutes, Harris, Dick, and Joe were on the road to Bronson.

When they had gone, Blake turned to Sloan and said:

"Now, Sloan, the time for rough work has not yet come. It will come, bye-and-bye; but, in the meantime, keep cool, don't talk much, and go slow."

"I'll have another drink, at all events," said Sloan, with an oath; "and mind you remember the bargain—Alice is to be mine!"

"Hush up! hush up!" said Blake impatiently. "I wish I had never known you. You're a cursed fool, and will spoil everything by your d—d gas."

Sloan took a deep drink of brandy, and, without another word, started out into the storm, to walk to Coldwater, where he had a room.

"Kelly," said Blake, "be sure to tell Norah that the row tonight was only a spree on the part of the boys, and that they had a mighty fine time. I don't think we shall have any trouble with Mary and Alice, but we must treat them kindly. If they should go home, their father and brother would soon be after us, and we should have to leave the country. If we keep friendly with the girls, we

shall be safe; but we must prevent them from running away in the first alarm and excitement. There is no fear of seeing William here tomorrow, as his gang will be busy clearing the snow from the track."

Having settled everything satisfactorily, Blake and Kelly took a "night-cap" of brandy before retiring; and, in a short time, the house was again quiet.

CHAPTER V.

THE object of this invasion of the girls' chamber will be readily divined. Blake and Sloan had determined to go to California together, and to take Mary and Alice with them. They were perfectly aware that the consent of the sisters could never be obtained; hence, they had decided to take them by force. This could only be done by so terrifying their victims as to prevent them from making any disturbance while traveling, and this scheme was the preliminary step. The scene which transpired in the bar-room, after Sloan called Blake out of the sitting-room, in the early part of the evening, was narrated to me by Sloan, after his capture; I give it, in order to show the villainous character of the men, and the way in which the plan was carried out.

Blake, Sloan, Harris, and Kelly sat in the bar-room, talking on general topics for about an hour. Blake was restless and nervous, frequently looking at his watch, and muttering:

"I wonder what keeps them."

"They will be here, sure," said Harris. "I never knew Dick to fail. I am afraid he has stopped to play cards, and, if so, it will be hard for him to break away. I never knew a fellow to get bound up in cards as he does."

Blake walked to the outside door, peered out a moment, and then crept noiselessly up to the door of the sisters' room, where he listened a short time. On returning to the bar-room, he said, as he sat down:

"They are sound asleep."

"Give us some whiskey," said Harris, and he poured out drinks for Sloan and himself. Blake neither drank nor spoke, but maintained a moody silence, looking anxious and irritable.

Harris took up a pack of cards and began to deal them.

"No, I don't want to play I am too much worried," exclaimed Blake, brushing the cards away. "I wish Dick would come!"

For some time, little was done or said. Blake walked up and down uneasily, occasionally opening the door to look out. At length, he asked:

“Harris, how in the world will you ever get home? This storm is the fiercest I have known for some years. Shall you and Dick go home to-night? “Then, without waiting for an answer, he continued: “It is better that you should go, as it might create suspicion, if you stayed here.”

“I don’t fear the storm,” said Harris; “and shall get home all right.”

In a short time, Dick and his friend, Joe, walked in, covered with snow. Blake grasped them warmly by the hand, and said to Dick:

“I am so glad to see you! I began to think you had forgotten me.”

“No,” replied Dick; “I am always on hand in an affair of this sort, though I don’t yet know exactly what s wanted of me. I don’t mind the snow. When I was sheriff of Butler County, Pennsylvania, I had to go out on a night similar to this, and I tell you, I made money before morning. The boys robbed an old man with lots of money, and I came down on ’em just in time to make em divide! The next morning, the old cuss met me when I had my share in my pocket, and put the case in my hands (being sheriff, you know,) to hunt up the thieves; but I never caught them, ha! ha! ha!” Then, slapping Joe on the shoulder, he added: “I think I can lay my hand on one of the boys that did that job, now,” and he burst into a fit of satanic laughter, in which he was joined by all except Blake, who took no notice, whatever.

A whispered consultation was then held between Blake, Sloan, Harris, Joe, and Dick the bar-keeper being half asleep behind the bar. Blake explained what he wished done and the other ruffians readily coincided. At eleven o’clock, Blake took a glass of brandy, his first drink that evening, and again looked out, down the track. Not a light was to be seen, and the snow was piled in great drifts over the track; it was quite evident that no trains could pass over the line for some time.

“Now is a good time to commence operations, is it not?” said Blake.

“Yes,” said Dick. “Harris, hitch up the team, and we’ll get ready to start for Bronson.”

Blake wished them good night, told Kelly to lock up the house, and went to bed. Sloan, Dick, Harris, and Joe took one more drink, and then went out to the stable. Kelly locked the door and tumbled into bed, at about half past eleven o’clock.

The events of the remainder of that terrible night have already been given, and I now return to the sisters.

CHAPTER VI.

ALL through the still hours of that gloomy night, the sisters mingled their tears together, almost speech less from physical fear and mental agony.

“What shall we do! what shall we do!” murmured Alice.

“I don’t know,” said Mary. “What *can* we do?”

What, indeed, could two innocent girls, the oldest but seventeen, do in a struggle with such crafty villains?

Toward daybreak, they fell into a troubled sleep, but by seven o’clock, they again awoke to all the horrors of their situation. After dressing, they remained in their room some time, fearing to go down stairs. They finally mustered up the courage to go into the kitchen, where they found Norah, going on with her work, as if nothing had happened. The sisters glanced at her in a half-frightened way, and she said:

“Shure, Mary, and didn’t yees hear the row last night? Faith, thin, they had a foine time playin’ their tricks on the masther. Didn’t yees hear them, Alice?”

Then was taken the fatal step which placed the sisters in the power of the scoundrels.

“No,” said Alice; “was anything going on?”

“There was, indade,” replied Norah. “Yees must ha’ slept sound the night, not to ha’ heerd thim bys that was here about midnight. There was a whole pack of thim, and, d’yees know, they broke in the door to the bar room. The blaggards came into my room, aven, and axed if the masther was there. But, after all, they was very dacent gintlemin on a bit of a lark, and they spent their money fraly. Kelly spakes well of thim.”

“We did not hear anything,” said Alice; “at least, I did not; did you, Mary?”

Mary did not answer. She could not decide what to do; but, as Alice had adopted that course, she thought best not to contradict her. She, therefore, pretended not to have heard the question, and walked into the sitting-room. She dusted the furniture mechanically, and then went to the window and looked out. On every side, she saw evidences of the severity of the storm. The snow was two feet deep on a level, and the roads were all blocked by almost impassable drifts. No one would venture out that day, unless compelled by some great necessity.

The girls prepared breakfast as usual; but, when Blake came in, they were unable to look him in the face. He sat down alone with them, as there were no boarders in the house, and talked in a very gentle and sorrowful tone about the unfortunate occurrence of the previous night. He said that he would take care that no harm should come to them. The boys had only tried to have a good joke at his expense, little thinking it would turn out so seriously. He would see that no one should ever hear anything about the matter, and that the girls’ reputation should not suffer.

The sisters said nothing, whatever, finishing their breakfast in complete silence. After their work was done, they went into the sitting-room, to talk over what had happened.

“Mary,” said Alice, “I want William to take us both home. How I wish he would come up this morning!”

“I do not intend to remain here any longer,” said Mary. “I would go home at once, if it were possible; but look at the roads! They are impassable, and the railroad is worse. Kelly says that no trains passed last night, and he thinks none will pass to-day. We cannot go to Coldwater, as we know only Mrs. Cox, and she is angry with me for leaving her. I would not let her know what has happened for the world, as she is a gossip, and would spread the story everywhere. The best course for us to pursue is to give notice that we shall leave at the end of the week. Blake is really sorry for us, and will prevent anyone from molesting us until then; and when we get home, father and mother will know what to do, in case the story gets abroad. As soon as William comes, he shall take our trunks home, and we will follow on Saturday.”

After further conversation, this plan was adopted; so when Blake came into the room, Mary told him that they were going home permanently on Saturday, as they could not stay in a place where they were subjected to such insults.

Blake expressed his regret at losing them, as they had always been so capable and trustworthy; but, under the circumstances, he could not blame them for leaving. He would guarantee that no one should ever learn the reason of their departure, outside of those engaged in the “joke.” He had always admired the purity of their characters, and the thought, that he had been the means of sullyng their reputations so irreparably, filled him with sincere sorrow. He could not sufficiently condemn his own conduct.

In this way, while apparently trying to lessen their fears, he was, in reality, working on their feelings in a most alarming manner. The only trouble which the girls anticipated, was the talk which would be made about them, if the story got abroad; but Blake cunningly magnified the scandal which would result, while professing to be able to keep it quiet. By making it appear that their guilt would be universally believed, if the story should ever get out, he made them think that he, alone, could save them from infamy. In this, he fully succeeded, as he was aware of Alice's falsehood to Norah, and, by casually referring to it, he showed them that the best thing for them was to keep the whole affair perfectly quiet. He talked so kindly, and seemed to feel so sorry, as almost to win the girls' respect, and he induced Mary to promise never to tell his wife.

He had now gained the point for which the plot had been laid, and felt confident of success in the whole scheme of abduction. He had sufficiently compromised the girls to accomplish two objects, as he thought. Having taken the first steps in deception, the girls would be afraid to appeal to any one, except their own family, for aid, and he proposed to get them out of the reach of their friends, as quickly as possible. He then intended that Harris, Dick, and Joe should tell the story of having found him in bed with the girls, to blacken their characters, and make their abduction appear like a voluntary flight. The falsehood which Alice had told Norah would, also, play an important part, as corroborating the theory that Blake had actually seduced the girls, before their flight. This would probably prevent pursuit by the officers of the law, while the Wells family would not have the means to hunt for him. The time that would elapse before the affair would become known, and the delay created in the early investigation, would give him such a start as to make his capture impossible, even if the county authorities should conduct the search.

Like all criminals, he was expert in hiding his tracks; but he had forgotten one thing that crime invariably carries its own punishment, and that there is no escape for the guilty.

CHAPTER VII.

DINNER was served at the usual hour, and Blake acted in the same kind, gentle manner as before. While the meal was in progress, Sloan entered the room, walked over to Alice, and put his arm around her neck. She sprang away from him in terror, while Blake rushed over to protect her, seemingly in a towering passion.

“Sloan, didn’t you do enough harm last night? Get out of this room!” he commanded, as if speaking to a dog.

Sloan turned upon him savagely, but, seeing that Blake was in earnest, he fairly cringed and said, as he crawled out of the room:

“I didn’t mean any harm. I’ll see you when you come out.”

Both the sisters felt the blow, but did not know what to do. They went immediately to their room, and Mary said:

“What is to prevent others from making the same kind of advances that Sloan has made? If William would only come, he would take us away at once; but there are no trains running, and there is no one to help us.”

They dropped on their knees and prayed for help, as only those can pray, who are driven to the verge of desperation.

Sloan and Blake had a meeting in the barn.

“You are acting wrong,” said Blake. “I had just succeeded in calming down the girls, when you must come in and spoil everything, by taking liberties with Alice.”

“Yes, d—n it, isn’t she mine?” asked Sloan. “Haven’t I a right to kiss her when I please?”

“Pshaw! You’re a fool! Don’t you understand that we shall have to use strategy? If you act properly, she will be yours bye-and-bye, but if you try to force things, you will find yourself in the penitentiary. I thought you had some common sense. She is young, she is courageous, and if you take liberties with her, the game is up. Many decent people come to my restaurant, and if they should hear her scream, they would burst in on you, and then where would you be? You fool! I wish I never had had anything to do with you. I see my mistake now.”

“Well,” said Sloan, in a conciliatory manner, “I will do just as you say, provided I am certain of having Alice.”

“What do you want to talk about it for? You must keep quiet, or you will get them excited, and they have friends all around to whom they might go. I’ll tell you what you must do. It will be a hard job, but it can’t be helped. You must go to Bronson, get a double sleigh with plenty of buffalo robes, and come here by eleven o’clock to-night. I will have the girls drugged by that time, and we will carry them off at once.” As he spoke, he drew a small phial of laudanum from his pocket.

Sloan touched the laudanum to his tongue and asked:

“Will that put them to sleep?”

“Yes,” said Blake; “it is laudanum. We can keep them drugged with it for seven or eight hours, and even longer by renewing the dose.”

An expression of brutal admiration came into Sloan’s face, as he said:

“Blake, you’re a bully fellow! What a fool I have been to kick against you! You’re just the man for me!”

“All right; now listen. I am going to carry them off to-night, so you must tell Harris to have a couple of bed rooms warm and comfortable for us on our arrival. Tell him to have Dick and Joe on hand to carry the girls into the house, as we shall be too numbed by the cold to do anything. Be sure to tell him to have the house quiet, with no outsiders around. Take this money, one hundred dollars, and give it to Harris to pay all expenses, including Dick and Joe.”

“I’m your man,” said Sloan, and he started off at a rapid pace for Bronson.

At supper, Blake acted in the same manner as at breakfast and dinner, taking pains not to say anything to hurt the feelings of the sisters. He was so kind and re-assuring in his conversation, that the girls began to have great confidence in him. He acted his devilish part well.

At nine o’clock, as the girls said good-night and started to go to bed, Blake said:

“Mary, you and Alice must be wholly exhausted from the terrible shock you received last night, and I am afraid you will be so nervous as to be unable to rest well. Let me give you each a glass of wine. It will quiet your nerves and make you sleep.”

Mary, at first, declined, but Blake pressed it upon her so urgently, yet politely, that she, at length, consented. The girls were both very weak and faint, as they had not felt like eating anything all day, and Mary thought that perhaps a glass of wine would do them good.

“I will set the wine outside the door of your room,” said Blake, “and you need not drink it until you are getting into bed.”

The girls then went to their room, and about ten o’clock, Blake came up with two glasses of wine. He set the waiter down on a chair close to the door, knocked, to let them know he had

brought the wine, and went down stairs. When he had gone, Mary brought the wine into the room, and, with Alice's assistance, barricaded the door as well as they were able. After saying their prayers, they each drank a glass of the wine and got into bed. They talked a few minutes and then dropped into a peaceful sleep. Care and fear faded out of their minds, and their only dreams were of home and parents. Finally, their sleep became heavier and deeper, until it was evident that the drugged wine had done its work.

CHAPTER VIII.

SLOAN arrived from Bronson shortly after eleven o'clock. He had a wide box-sleigh, provided with movable seats, and filled with hay and buffalo robes. Silently as cats, the two men stole up to the room of the sleeping girls. They easily pushed back the slight barricade against the door, and entered the chamber. Their light revealed to them the two sisters, sleeping in each other's arms. For a moment, even their hardened hearts were touched by the purity of the scene; but they forced back every good feeling, and proceeded with their damnable work. Lifting Alice out of bed, they hurriedly drew some of her clothing over her helpless form, wrapped her in a blanket, and laid her down. They then did the same with Mary. Both sisters were restless, in spite of the laudanum; and Mary, raising herself on one arm, muttered plaintively, as if dreaming:

"Mother! Oh! mother! Why don't you help me!"

This powerful and touching appeal from her unconscious lips, had no effect, except to cause Blake to administer an additional dose of the drug to both girls.

"There," said he, with an oath, "I guess that will quiet them."

He then packed some of the girls' clothing into a carpet-sack and put it into the sleigh. Sloan then lifted Alice in his arms, carried her down to the sleigh, and quickly covered her up completely with blankets and buffalo robes, as he feared that the cold air might revive her. Blake followed with Mary, whom he placed beside Alice. He then seated himself by them to watch, while Sloan sprang to the front seat to drive. The horses were kept at the top of their speed, where the drifts would permit, and, in about two hours, they arrived at Harris tavern.

As the panting horses dashed up, Dick and Joe came out and assisted Blake and Sloan to carry the unconscious girls to the rooms which had been prepared, and which were separated from each other only by folding doors. Alice was placed in one bed, and Mary in the other, while Blake and Sloan returned to the bar-room to get warm. When thoroughly warmed through, they instructed Harris not to disturb them in the morning, took a drink of brandy, and went to the rooms of the girls.

That night was consummated the crime which sent Blake and Mary to their graves—the guilty and the innocent. Blake had succeeded so far in his villainy, but, ere long, the avenger was to be upon his track.

It was nearly nine o'clock the next morning before Mary began to regain consciousness, and, for a time, she lay in a semi-stupor. Gradually, a dull, throbbing pain in her temples awakened her,

and she opened her eyes. Everything was new and strange to her. She must be crazy, she thought, and she said aloud:

“Oh! mother, what is it?”

Then she stretched out her hand, as if to touch Alice beside her, but touched Blake, instead. Her eye followed her hand; and, on seeing Blake, a dazed comprehension of the truth flashed through her mind. She sprang from the bed, hastily drew some of her clothes about her, and rushed to the door, which was locked. Blake also jumped from the bed, and approached her.

“Mary,” said he, in a stern, commanding voice, “take care! Remember, that now you are mine! I will do anything for you, if you will only love me. I love you truly. I tried to banish your image from my heart, but could not. I then determined that you should be mine. To accomplish this end, I sent my wife to visit her mother; and then carried out the plan which has placed you in my power. You must yield to me, and love me, or *I will kill you.*”

“Kill me, kill me at once! You are a monster! I know I am ruined, but oh! let me go from here!” Mary answered.

As Blake approached to take hold of her, she shrieked, “Murder! murder!” with all the energy of despair. At the same moment, came a piercing shriek from the adjoining room.

Sloan was a coarser villain than Blake, and, as Alice, on awakening, sprang from his side, with a scream, he struck her a blow that knocked her down. He then lifted her up and put her into bed.

“There, d—n you,” said he; “I’ll teach you not to put on airs. You’re mine, now, and you’ve got to obey me.”

Alice neither moved nor spoke, and Sloan, seeing that she had swooned, became frightened. He rushed down to tell Harris, and the latter sent his wife up. Mrs. Harris was a hardened wretch, who, like many another fallen creature, gloated over the ruin of innocent girls. She was capable of attempting any crime, which would bring in money.

I shall not try to describe the agony of those pure young sisters; it would be impossible for pen to give an adequate idea of their sufferings. Escape was impossible. They were in the hands of as inhuman monsters as ever drew breath; but there was no help for them, and they were forced to submit.

What a fate was theirs! Young, innocent, lovely, and entirely ignorant of the sin and misery of the world, they were dragged away from all that made life dear, and made to suffer cruelly, both mentally and physically. But their future trials were even worse than their present. They still had to pass through the most degrading of ordeals, from which Mary was to find escape only in death. What earthly punishment could be devised severe enough to punish justly the brutes who had debauched them?

Blake and Sloan went down stairs, leaving Dick and Joe to watch the girls, who were not allowed to leave their respective rooms. In the afternoon, Blake drove over to the restaurant, to get the girls trunks and remaining clothes, which he brought to Bronson about dusk.

In the meantime, the girls had dressed themselves, but they had eaten nothing all day, and they began to be faint and weak. On his return, Blake went in to see Alice, and found her weeping.

“Won’t you have some wine?” he asked.

“Oh! yes,” said Sloan; “she will take anything I offer her. I have been teaching her to mind me without making a fuss about it.”

Blake passed into Mary’s room, and asked her if she would take some wine. She was so weak and sick that she could not speak, so she merely nodded her head in assent. He then went down stairs, where he met Sloan.

“It is well they are dressed,” said Blake. “We shall not have any bother with them when they start out. Take some wine and cake up to Alice, and I will take some to Mary. We must leave here by the evening train. I have sent word to my wife to come and take charge of the restaurant; telling her that Mary had gone home sick, and that Alice had gone to nurse her. We must strike for the West and keep out of danger. We have got the girls pretty well broken in, but we must watch them, for if they give us the slip, their brother will be after us in no time. We must keep them stupefied with the laudanum, and prevent anyone from speaking to them, or seeing their faces. Hurry up! we have no time to lose.”

Sloan went up to see Alice, and made her eat some food and drink some wine, while Blake took some wine and cakes to Mary, and left her alone. Mary knelt down before she ate, and prayed her Heavenly Father to deliver her from the power of her enemies.

When, the evening train came along, Mary and Alice were sleeping quietly from the effects of a mild dose of laudanum, administered to them in their wine. The train stopped to take wood and water. Blake found one car almost empty, and in this car, the sisters were placed, being half carried in a drowsy stupor by Blake and Sloan. Both girls were heavily veiled and no one could have recognized them, even if any of their acquaintances had been on the train. Blake took a seat by Mary, and Sloan beside Alice, so as to keep control of them. The sisters were so far under the influence of the drug, however, as to fall asleep as soon as they were seated; and, in this way Laporte was reached, without any suspicion having been awakened in the minds of any one. From Laporte, the party went by a connecting line to the Michigan Central Railroad, and thence to Chicago, where all trace of them was lost.

CHAPTER IX.

NEARLY a week elapsed before the girls’ abduction was discovered. Kelly, the bar-keeper, said nothing in reference to the matter, and Mrs. Blake, on her return, three days later, supposed that Mary had gone home sick, as Blake had stated in his letter. Blake’s absence was nothing unusual, as it was his habit to start off suddenly, to be gone, perhaps, for several weeks.

William was too busy to go to Coldwater; and, although Mrs. Wells thought it strange that Mary did not write to her, she was not alarmed, supposing that the girls might be too much occupied to write.

When William went to Coldwater, however, and heard the story which Blake had written to Mrs. Blake, all was plain to him in an instant. His anguish was terrible, and he cursed himself for having advised his sisters to go to the restaurant to live. Mrs. Blake was equally affected. She loved her husband, brute as he was, and would not believe that he could have committed a crime. On the contrary, she accused Mary of leading him astray.

William did not know what to think nor do. He knew that his sisters were innocent, and that they must, therefore, have been carried away by force, but he could find no clue as to how or where they had gone. He returned home and gave his parents the sad intelligence that Mary and Alice had mysteriously disappeared. They were frantic with grief, but could suggest no means of recovering the girls. William then went immediately to Coldwater and laid the case before the sheriff. The sheriff was a man of excellent feelings, and his heart was touched at William's story; he, also, fully believed that they had been abducted by force. He at once sent for his deputy, Mr. Green, to whom he gave charge of the case.

"Green," said he, "you must not waste a moment in getting on the trail of these villains and their victims. You must then leave nothing undone to bring them back to Coldwater the girls to their parents and the scoundrels to jail. It will be a lasting disgrace to our county, if we do not bring the perpetrators of this vile crime to justice."

Green soon learned the particulars of the abduction, up to the time when Blake and Sloan took the girls away from Bronson. William, while at home, had obtained all the money that he could raise, and was ready to accompany Green on his search.

They, accordingly, proceeded west as far as Laporte, where they met the conductor of the train in which Blake had taken the party away from Bronson. The conductor described Blake and Sloan exactly, but could not describe the girls, as their faces had been closely veiled, and they had slept most of the time. He recollected that just before arriving at Laporte, he had seen the taller of the two girls trying to speak to some passengers, as they passed out of the car at Carlyle. The man sitting with her had pulled her down on the seat again, at the same time showing her a knife and apparently saying something harsh to her. The conductor had regarded it, at the time, as merely a family quarrel, with which it would be better for him not to interfere. There had been nothing else, whatever, to arouse any suspicions with regard to the party, and, therefore, no idea of abduction had ever occurred to him.

The party was traced as far as Chicago, the accounts always being the same that the girls had slept during the whole journey, except when changing cars, when they had seemed only half-awake.

Green and William arrived in Chicago and applied to Sheriff Church for his aid; but, though every effort was made, no trace of the villains could be found. All that could be discovered was that the party they were searching for, had arrived in Chicago, Saturday morning, but there all

clue was lost. They were determined to continue the search, however, and Mr. Church, therefore, advised them to put the case in my hands.

It was nearly morning, by the time William had finished the story of the abduction, so far as he then knew it; and, having agreed to undertake the task of discovering the villains, I parted with my visitors and returned to bed.

This form of crime was new to me then, and I never before had heard such a truly painful case. My heart was deeply touched, as I thought of the helpless misery of those pure, young girls, and I lay awake for some time, thinking over the best course to pursue. I had intended to go to my home in Dundee the next day, but I determined not to give up the chase, until I had rescued the girls, and brought to punishment the brutes who had debauched them.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER sleeping a couple of hours, I started out, very early in the morning, on my work of detection. Mary's avenger was now upon Blake's track, never to be shaken off. I had obtained a full description of the whole party from William and Green, so that I felt confident of my ability to follow them up, the moment I should discover any trace of them.

After visiting the depot and several hotels nearby, I walked into the American Hotel, on the corner of Lake street and Wabash avenue. Although I did not live in Chicago, I was well acquainted with the city, and knew Mr. Rossitter, the proprietor of the American Hotel, very well. Accordingly, I described Blake's party to Mr. Rossitter, and asked if any persons answering to their description had stopped at his hotel.

"Yes," he replied, "and I thought there was something strange about them. I did not like the appearance of the tall man. He looked like a gambler, and a desperate one at that. They gave their names as 'Brown and lady,' and 'Snell and lady.' They occupied adjoining rooms, opening into each other, and took their meals there, never once appearing in the dining-room. In fact, the ladies never left their rooms for any purpose, whatever, and looked dull and sleepy all the time. After they had gone, I learned from the chambermaids and waiting-girls that there were a number of suspicious circumstances connected with them. The ladies were evidently afraid of the men, and one of the latter had a small phial which, the chambermaid thought, contained laudanum. The men drank heavily and always had a bottle of wine on the table."

"Do you know where they went?" I asked.

"They went west on the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad, but I don't know where they were bound."

"When did they leave?" I asked, but immediately answered my own question: "Oh! of course they stopped over Sunday and took the train Monday morning. Goodbye, Rossitter," and I hurried over to the sheriff's office.

“Church,” I said, “I’m off. Detain young Wells and Deputy-Sheriff Green until you hear from me. It is now Friday; you will probably get a dispatch from me by Monday or Tuesday. Keep them easy, and say that I am on the trail of the scoundrels.”

So saying, I went out and hastened to the Galena depot, being just in time for the morning train going west. The conductor, Mr. Wiggins, was an old acquaintance, so I entered into conversation with him, in the course of which, I asked him, casually, whether he had had charge of the train Monday morning, ten days before. He replied that “Deacon” Harvey had taken the train out that morning, the two conductors going out alternately morning and evening.

As I lived on the line of the road, I knew all the conductors, and hoped to get some information from Harvey, if we did not pass him between stations.

I then stretched myself comfortably in my seat, and began to ponder upon the probabilities as to Blake’s course. I knew that he was the moving spirit in the whole affair, and that all my calculations must be made upon his probable action. If he were going to California, he was taking a very circuitous route, since it was necessary to go much further south, if he intended to strike across the plains. Still, he might intend waiting somewhere in the interior of Illinois until spring, and then he could go down the Mississippi to St. Louis, or any other point that he might choose. It was not at all likely that he would go into an unsettled country to stay; he was too fond of company and gambling to do that. It was most probable that he would stop in some large town until spring, and then go to St. Louis, thence up the Missouri river to Independence, and from there start across the plains for California.

“Yes,” I soliloquized, inaudibly, “there is something probable in that. They will most likely hide in Illinois, but will they stay together? Sloan is a stage-driver, and is well acquainted on all the stage routes; hence, he will be of service in getting passes and reduced rates of fare on the stage lines. He will probably wish to remain east of the Mississippi, and Blake will not go far away. Well, I shall have to feel as I go along, trusting to getting some clue in Belvidere.”

The Galena and Chicago Union Railroad, (now absorbed in the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad,) was the first railroad commenced in Illinois, and the only one running west of Chicago. It had been completed only to Belvidere, in Boone county, from which point travelers and immigrants were carried west and north in stages, many of which were in waiting, on the arrival of each train.

At Marengo, John Perkins, the agent of Frink & Walker, got aboard the train to sell tickets to persons wishing to leave Belvidere by any of the numerous stage-lines, all of which were owned by the above-named firm. John was a fine young fellow, who had been promoted to his present place from that of stage-driver. He was a genial, shrewd man, who tried to be on good terms with every one, and generally succeeded. He and I were well acquainted with each other, and I determined to draw him out quietly, as he was just the man to have observed Blake’s party, if he had met any of them.

It is my practice never to tell anyone what object I have in view, unless it is absolutely necessary that I should do so. Therefore, I did not tell John what the business was which took me to

Belvidere. He joined me after he had been through the whole train, and we had a pleasant conversation. At length, I introduced the subject of stage management, upon which John was never tired of talking.

“How many different stage routes start from Belvidere?” I asked, after a few remarks had passed.

“Oh! several,” said John, and he went on to tell how many stages there were on each route, the number of times the horses were changed, the average number of passengers, and many other details.

“Do you employ many men to handle baggage?” I asked.

“Yes; we have six men in Belvidere alone, and they have all they can attend to.”

“What a number of drivers you must have, John!” I said, carelessly. “How do you ever manage to keep track of them all?”

“That’s an easy matter,” said he, pulling a memorandum book from his pocket. “This contains an alphabetical list of the names of all the drivers in my division.”

“You stage men have brought things down to a wonderful system,” said I, as I took the book and casually glanced through it.

I saw that E. Sloan was a driver on the route from Janesville to Madison, and I continued to turn the leaves as I said:

“Oh! so Sloan is driving for you, eh! I used to know him some time ago. He was driving for the Humphries, in Michigan, then, I believe.”

“Yes,” replied John, “he came to us from them.”

“He’s a good driver, isn’t he?”

“Yes,” said John, “very good, indeed.”

“Where is he now?” I asked, as I saw that John did not suspect me of having any particular object in my inquiries.

“He and his wife came west about a week ago and went on to Rockford. I gave him a pass to Janesville and told him he could have his old route, but I don’t know whether he will take it, as he said he could not decide what he should do for a week or two. He said he might like a southern route.”

“I am glad to hear he’s doing so well,” I replied. “He is an old friend of mine, and I should like to see him.”

“You will most likely find him in Rockford; but if he has left there, you can easily find where he has gone.”

“So, he has taken a wife, eh?” I said, half musingly. “I wonder whom he married. Did he have any friends with him?”

“Yes; a man and his wife were with him,” said John. “I did not like the looks of the man very much; from the ‘cut of his jib,’ as the sailors say, I took him to be a gambler, and one of the sort who always win.”

“Gambling is carried on everywhere just now,” I said. “You can find any number of gamblers at Galena, or Rockford. In fact, every little place seems to have its gambling hell. Do you remember his friend’s name? I wonder if I know him.”

“I have his name here,” said John. “I gave him a pass, too.”

As he spoke, he drew out a note-book and showed me the entry:

“Blake and lady—Belvidere to Rockford, with pass.”

“So, that’s the way you do things, is it? “I asked.

“Yes; we are not very particular now. Old Frink tells us to be liberal with the good drivers, and grant them small favors. Good drivers are hard to find, and while business is so brisk, we need all we can get. Hence, we lose nothing by treating them well.”

Now, I was close on their track. Blake got a pass to Rockford, and Sloan, to Janesville. It seemed strange that such men did not know enough to get off the beaten routes of travel, and endeavor to hide more effectually. I concluded that they had little fear of detection, and still less of pursuit, and, therefore, proposed to take things easily. I did not imagine for an instant the extent of Blake’s villainy, nor his real reason for frequenting the large towns.

On arriving in Belvidere, I went to the American House, as I was well acquainted with the proprietor, Mr. Irish; from him I soon learned that Blake’s party had stopped there one day.

“Blake is a pretty good fellow, isn’t he, Mr. Irish? “I asked.

“Yes; he seems to be a good fellow. He knows how to play cards; he never lost a game, while here.”

“Well, it would be hard to find a man in Belvidere who could get away with him at cards,” said I. “Did his wife come down into the parlor and associate with the other ladies?”

“No, indeed. But I must hurry away, as the stages are soon going out. Are you going west?”

“No,” I replied; “I may take a buggy and drive out a few miles, but I am not sure what I shall do. Oh! one more question before you go. Did Blake make much money here?”

“I guess he did; and that reminds me I think King went up to Mrs. Blake’s room while Blake was playing,” said Irish.

As he spoke, he gave a knowing laugh, and poked me with his finger in the ribs.

“Is it possible!” said I. “How long did he stay?”

“About an hour. You know, King has plenty of money, and I presume he treated the lady liberally. When he came down, he went into the room where Blake was gambling, and ordered drinks for the crowd.”

“After King went away, did anyone else go to Mrs. Blake’s room?” I asked.

“I think not,” replied Irish. “It was after eleven o’clock before King came down, and Blake went to bed by midnight. Blake is a good fellow, and I would like to have him for a regular boarder, as he is generous with his cash.”

“Well,” said I, as Irish moved off, “I believe I’ll change my mind, and go on to Galena by the next stage. I shall spend the night at Pecatonica; if there is anything I can do for you, let me know.”

What a terrible revelation had been made to me in this short conversation! I knew King well as an infamous libertine. What was the business that kept him in Mary’s room for over an hour? I had to shudder at the only answer that could be given. From all I could learn, the girls were kept constantly in a comatose state, which, together with the terror with which Blake and Sloan had inspired them, had prevented them from attempting to escape, or asking assistance. Mary, undoubtedly, had been made wholly insensible, before King was admitted to her room. He was a rich, but unscrupulous brute, fit for any crime, and the more revolting to nature it was, the more he would delight in it.

This terrible discovery filled me with horror, and I determined to lose not a moment in freeing the sisters from their brutal captors.

CHAPTER XI.

FIVE stages were on the point of starting for Rockford, and I took a seat beside the driver of one of them. The night was dark, and the road was none of the best, so that we seemed to creep along at a snail’s pace. I was impatient to grasp the villains, and rescue the sisters from their terrible position.

The driver of the stage was a pleasant, genial fellow; in conversation with him, I found that he knew Sloan, but that he had not seen him for a day or two. I was rather disconcerted at this news,

as I had hoped to find the whole party in Rockford. It was about half-past eight o'clock when we entered Rockford, and drove up before the Washington House, where the stages usually stopped.

I did not know how I should be received here. Only six months before, I had obtained the necessary evidence to convict some counterfeiters, who had a haunt in Winnebago County. With the assistance of the United States Marshal, I had arrested them and taken them to Chicago. I believed at the time that the landlord of the Washington House was, in some way, in the interest of the gang; hence, I was rather suspicious of him. I determined not to trust him at all, but to take a room, and make my investigations quietly.

Accordingly, I sauntered up to the register, entered my name, and glanced over the list of the arrivals for a few days back. I found that Blake and lady had been given room number five; and Sloan and lady, room number nine. I then ate supper and loitered around the barn, until I met the hostler. I asked him whether he knew Sloan. He said yes; but that he had not seen him for a day or two. Finding that nothing could be done that night, I went to bed, pretty well tired out.

Early the next morning (Saturday), I met the landlord; and, as I shook hands with him, I said, quietly:

"Don't talk with me, nor let anyone know who I am. I want to get some more evidence against those counterfeiters, and don't wish any one to know me. I may be here for two or three days; so, please keep mum for the present."

"All right," said he, and after taking a drink with me, he moved off.

I placed more confidence in the clerk than in the land-lord, but I thought best to tell him the same story. I then lounged about the hall, and saw everyone who came to breakfast; but none of the parties I was seeking made their appearance.

About ten o'clock, I went over to the stage barn, to see what information might be learned about Sloan. After a time, I made the acquaintance of the driver who had taken Sloan and Alice to Janesville. By treating him to whisky and cigars, I succeeded in making him talkative and friendly; then, I ventured to ask after Sloan.

"Oh! Sloan went up to Janesville with me Thursday week," said the driver. "He had a mighty fine girl with him, and she will make him a splendid wife; but, after all, he is a very shiftless fellow, and it is a pity to see such a nice girl throw herself away on him. To my mind, she is sick of her bargain, already. Why, she never spoke to him during the whole trip."

"So, you took them to Janesville, did you?"

"Yes; that's my run. I saw Sloan yesterday, and shall see him the next time I go up. Who shall I say was asking for him?"

I pretended not to hear his question; since, if I should give my real name, Sloan would immediately take the alarm; and, if I gave a fictitious name, it would almost certainly be strange to Sloan, and his suspicions might be excited. I, therefore, tided over the difficulty by asking the driver to take another drink; and, as the dinner hour had arrived, I bade him good-day and walked away.

I ate dinner very slowly and kept my seat until all the other boarders had finished. I carefully scrutinized the features of every one, but saw no one that would correspond to the description of Blake, or Mary.

My reticence and my strict rule against letting anyone know my business, made my search slower and more difficult but, at the same time, more certain than as if I had taken the landlord or clerk into my confidence. But I was determined not to risk even the possibility of giving Blake the alarm; so, I worked entirely unassisted.

I knew where there was a gambling saloon on the east side of the river, and I decided to pay it a visit. I, accordingly, walked to it, entered the bar-room, and sat down, ordering a glass of whisky and a cigar. There was a crowd in the bar-room, but I sat quietly smoking and listening to the talk around me. The afternoon slipped away without any new developments; and, as it began to grow dark, the crowd gradually thinned out, until I was almost alone.

Finally my patience was rewarded. Shortly after five o'clock, four men came down from the gambling rooms which, I knew, were upstairs. I immediately picked out one of them as Blake. He answered the description perfectly. His fine appearance and showy jewelry were unmistakable, and I knew that the man I was seeking, was before me. He was a representative specimen of the professional gambler. His companions were not professionals, but wealthy men who gambled for amusement. They called for drinks at the bar, and then two of them went out, leaving Blake and the remaining member of the party sipping their liquor, with their backs turned toward me. By this time, I was sitting back, apparently sound asleep; and, though I was quite near them, they took no notice of me, so that I was able to overhear their remarks.

"Call at ten o'clock," said Blake, "and I will have all arranged. She will be asleep by that time."

Good Heavens! could I have heard aright! Blake was deliberately planning to give his pure and innocent victim into the power of another lustful brute!

"By the Eternal! I will end it now!" I muttered, as I started to my feet. But the folly of my course flashed across me instantly, and I sat down again, fortunately unobserved by them. It would not do to act in my then excited state.

"Ten o'clock?" said Blake's companion. "All right; I will be there without fail."

"The door will be locked; but you knock, and I will let you in," said Blake, as his friend went out.*

Blake conversed a few minutes with the bar-keeper, paid for the drinks, and walked out. I allowed him to go some distance ahead of me, and then kept him in sight. He walked to the Washington House and entered the hall door. I quickened my pace and ran up the steps only a moment behind him. I hurried into the bar-room, but he was not there. I then went upstairs and found number five, which was a suite of rooms, with two doors opening into the hall. Before I could get out of the way, Blake opened his door and looked out. I was obliged to walk into a room, the door of which was fortunately unlocked, and pretend that it was my room. I waited there until all was quiet, and then slipped out, noiselessly. It was now nearly six o'clock, and I went to my own room to reflect upon what course to pursue.

At this moment, I recollected that I had no warrant upon which to arrest Blake. I had a justice's warrant, issued in Coldwater, Michigan, for the arrest of Blake

*By a peculiar coincidence, just at the time that this agreement was made, the nephew of Sheriff Church entered the latter's office in Chicago and said that he had just come in from Rockford. In the course of the conversation, he told Sheriff Church that there was a gambler in Rockford, who was cleaning out all the other gamblers there. He added: "The money that the man doesn't win, in one way, his wife obtains, in another. She is said to be a beautiful woman; but it takes one hundred dollars to make her acquaintance."

Of course, Church did not think of Mary in this connection, as the possibility that the girls might have been separated did not occur to him.

and Sloan; but this paper was useless in Illinois. Nevertheless, I had heard the bargain made to let a brute into Mary's room that night, and I determined that that crime should never be permitted. I would arrest Blake or die in the attempt.

I confess that I had never been so excited before. I had been deeply affected by William's story; I had heard of Mary's sale to King in Belvidere; and, now that the incarnate fiend was about to give her over to another man, I was ready to take the law in my own hands, if necessary, to prevent the outrage.

I had no one to assist me in making the arrest. It is true, I had many friends in Rockford; but they all lived across the river, and I had not been in West Rockford during the day. I decided to arrest Blake at once, however, relying on the justice of my case. After supper, therefore, I wrote a note to the sheriff, with whom I was slightly acquainted, asking him to come immediately to the Washington House, on very important business. I sent the note by a safe messenger and then went to my room to get my pistols. I put one in each pocket of my pantaloons and went down stairs, taking a position in front of the hotel. I was now perfectly cool, and was only awaiting the arrival of the sheriff, to assist me in arresting Blake.

CHAPTER XII.

THE minutes slipped rapidly away, and by half-past eight o'clock, I began to get excited again. Time was precious; Blake's appointment had been made for ten o'clock; but the man might

come earlier. I had no overcoat on; so, I went into the hotel, to wait for the sheriff. In a few minutes, I resolved to take some decisive action soon.

I walked upstairs and opened the door of number five. Blake stood in the middle of the room, beside a table, and was engaged in pouring some liquid from a bottle into a tumbler. He had evidently just finished writing a letter, as one lay on the table unsealed. A lady sat in the shadow near the window. As soon as Blake saw me, he walked towards me.

“Oh! I beg pardon,” I said; “I was looking for number seventeen.”

“It is not here,” he said, in a hoarse voice.

“Please excuse me,” I added, as I backed out of the room and closed the door.

In a second, I heard him bolt it.

“That is bad,” thought I; “but I know they are there, and that Blake’s friend has not arrived.”

I had just obtained a glimpse of Mary. She looked very haggard, and was terribly changed, as compared with the rosy, beautiful girl who had been described to me.

I then walked down to the street, but could see no signs of the sheriff. I walked as far as the bridge, but could not see him coming.

“I will end the matter now,” I muttered; “or he will end me, one of the two. I must have the girl out of danger before ten o’clock.”

It was then half-past nine. The landlord was behind his desk, as I entered the office, and I called him to one side.

“I’ll tell you what I am here for,” I said. “I have some business with Mr. Blake, in number five. You may possibly hear some noise, but don’t mind it. If I break anything, I will pay for it. I have sent for the sheriff, and I expect him every minute. When he comes, send him up to the room; but let no one else come up, until I call.”

“All right, Pink.,” said he; “I know you will do only what is right.”

I had a light coat on, and was unencumbered with anything which could place me at a disadvantage in a struggle; so I walked straight up to number five.

I gave a light knock. Blake evidently thought his friend had come, for I heard him moving across the room. The thought flashed into my mind:

“Perhaps Mary is already drugged! I hope not.”

Blake opened the door. In a second, I pushed into the room, locked the door, and dropped the key into my pocket. I then pointed my pistol at his head.

“You are my prisoner! “I said, in a stern voice.

The betrayer and the avenger were, now, face to face.

He started back, with an amazed look, and made a quick motion towards his pocket, as if to draw a weapon.

“Raise your hands over your head, and go to the other side of the room,” I commanded. “I will kill you if you attempt to draw your pistol.”

He did not move.

“Will you go back? “I asked, in a determined tone. “If you don’t go this instant, you’re a dead man. I know you are armed. Go back!”

He went. From that moment, I knew he was a coward. I had awed him by my commanding tone and resolute look.

As he moved back, Mary rushed toward me.

“Oh! save me! save me! “she exclaimed. “May Heaven protect you! Oh! where is my father! where is my mother! “

As she spoke, she fainted away at my feet; but I could not attend to her then.

“Let me come to her, I will revive her,” said Blake; and he dropped his hands by his side.

“Throw your hands over your head and keep them there,” I again commanded; he quickly obeyed.

At this instant, I recollected that I had brought no hand-cuffs with me. They are almost indispensable in my business; yet I had forgotten them.

“Blake,” I said, “keep your right hand over your head, take out your pistol with your left hand, and lay it on the table. If you make a single suspicious move, I shall kill you. I am a sure shot, and, on the least provocation, a ball will go crashing through your brain.”

“Who are you who dare talk to me in this way?” he asked. “This is my room; that lady is my wife; what business have you in here?”

“Pshaw! that lady your wife? That lady is Mary Wells, whom you have abducted, you scoundrel. Lay down your pistol, or take the consequences. One hand only; keep the other over your head,” I continued, as he began to lower both hands.

He then slipped his revolver out of his pocket and laid it on the table.

“Back again, now,” I said; and he obeyed. I stepped to the table and put his pistol into my pocket.

“You see that I have the advantage of you,” I went on; “I have three pistols while you have none.”

Then, glancing at Mary, who was just recovering consciousness, I said:

“Raise yourself, Miss Wells; I cannot help you, as I must look out for Blake.”

She raised herself and moved toward me.

“Don’t touch me, now,” I said; I don’t want to give Blake a chance of escape. I will talk to you bye-and- bye.”

Mary staggered back and fell into a chair, as a low knock was heard at the door.

“Who is there?” I asked; but there was no answer. “Who is there?” I repeated, thinking it might be the sheriff.

A fiendish expression of delight came into Blake’s face, and then, the thought flashed into my mind that it was Blake’s friend, who had been told to call at ten o’clock.

“Blake,” I said, “that is your friend, to whom you agreed to deliver Mary at ten o’clock. He can come in, if he likes, as I have pistols enough for both of you. You are a beast, not a man.”

“How the h—l did you know a man was to have been here at ten o’clock?” he asked, in a surly, but surprised tone.

“Because I heard you make the bargain with him. Mary was to have been asleep.”

“How long are you going to keep me with my hands over my head?” he asked.

“Until the sheriff comes to take you to jail; then, Mary, I will be ready to talk to you.”

“I may as well give up,” he muttered. “Your d—d pistol settled me. If I had got mine out first, it would have been very different; but I admit it was a fair game, and I am caught. I know that I have wronged Mary; that I have ruined her; but I could not help it.”

Mary attempted to speak.

“No, Miss Wells,” I said; “don’t talk now.”

Blake continued:

“I will do all in my power to atone for my crime. I have done wrong, indeed. This will kill my wife. I may as well go to jail quietly.”

I had given up all hope of the sheriff’s arrival; I therefore, decided that I had better take Blake to jail myself. It was my intention, then, to come back, to get all the information possible from Mary. I further expected to start for Janesville early the next morning, to rescue Alice and capture Sloan.

I glanced hastily at Mary. Her appearance was pitiable in the extreme; her face was perfectly livid, and she seemed absolutely helpless.

“Blake,” I said, “if I thought I could trust you to go quietly, I would take you over to the jail, myself.”

“You have the advantage,” said he, “and, of course, you will keep it. I shall make no resistance.”

“I’ll do it,” said I; “but mind! Just as surely as you attempt to escape, I will shoot you down, like a dog. I shall have no mercy on you; and if you attempt any treachery, you will be a dead man the next instant; be assured of that.”

“I will go peaceably,” he said, “there is no use in trying to resist; moreover, I want to keep the affair quiet for the sake of my wife and the girls.”

“Get your hat and come along, then.”

“Will you allow me to get an overcoat?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said, as I knew the more clothing he had on, the more powerless he would be.

On that account, I always have made it a practice to go without an overcoat, and have hardened myself to stand a great deal of cold without suffering.

I stood with my back against the door, while Blake went into the adjoining room to get his overcoat. Mary said, in a quick, excited manner:

“He will make his escape from that room, and he has a knife in his pocket.”

I sprang to the door connecting the two rooms, and said:

“Come in here! What knife was that you put in your pocket?”

“It is a lie,” he replied; “I did not put a knife in my pocket.”

“Lay your coat down on the table,” I said.

He did not obey, but looked as if he would like to rebel.

“Blake, lay your coat down and raise your hands above your head.”

He saw, by my eye, that I was not to be trifled with, and he obeyed. I examined the coat, but found no knife.

“Blake, what have you done with your knife?” I asked.

“She is a liar; I have no knife,” he answered.

Mary raised her head, and said:

“Yes, he has; it is concealed in the pocket of his pants. He means to kill either you or me with it.”

“Hand me that knife,” I said, firmly, “or I will spatter the room with your brains.”

With a sullen oath, he drew a fine bowie-knife from his pocket, and pitched it toward me.

“Have a care, Blake,” said I. “You should not throw a knife in that way. I know you wouldn’t hurt me for the world, but I advise you to be more polite in future.”

I picked up the knife and handed it to Mary.

“Keep that until I come back,” I said. “I shall return in three-quarters of an hour, and you had better keep the door locked, while I am gone.”

The man whom Blake had agreed to let in, had been gone for some time. I, therefore, apprehended no attempt at a rescue, unless Blake should get help in passing some of the saloons. Many of these drinking holes were still open, it being Saturday night, and only a little after ten o’clock. Still I did not fear any such attempt. Blake then put on his overcoat; I grasped him by the right arm with my left hand, and held my revolver in my right hand, ready to give him the contents, if he attempted to escape. He was a muscular, powerful man, and I did not propose to give him a chance to grapple with me.

We met no one on the stairs, as we went down, but I saw about a dozen persons in the bar-room. The hotel was raised three or four steps above the sidewalk, and, as we passed out of the hall door, Blake went down the steps so quickly as to make me jump the whole distance, in order to keep hold of him.

“If you make another attempt to escape,” I said, “you must take the consequences.”

“I wasn’t trying to escape,” he replied; “I don’t wish to be seen by any of the boarders.”

A short distance down the street, we passed two men, and I heard one of them say:

“The river is rising rapidly, and it will sweep away the bridge before morning.”

“Good God!” I thought, “what shall I do, if I can’t cross the bridge!”

In a few moments, we came in sight of the bridge; I then saw that two of the spans had already been washed away, and that communication was kept up by a single plank, thrown across from pier to pier. I, afterwards, learned that the two spans had been washed away about two weeks before. This night, however, there was danger that even the foot-planks might be carried off.

CHAPTER XIII.

As we neared the river I said: “Blake, we cannot cross.”

While I was in the act of speaking, Blake swung himself quickly around, facing me, and struck me a tremendous blow between the eyes. I should have fallen, had I not seized the lapel of his coat. Although it tore off, as he darted away, I kept my footing by means of the pull; but, for a second, I could see nothing but fire. Then the shock passed off, and I saw Blake rushing swiftly up the street. I dashed after him, instantly, leaving my hat behind, and shouted:

“Stop thief! stop thief!”

The crowds in the saloons began to pour out, and all was excitement. I was a swift runner, and felt sure of catching my man. He ran due east for a time, and then, turning north, passed through a street lined with trees. He had a good start of me, and was rapidly nearing the woods on the edge of the town. I had a clear view of him, as he ran, so I raised my pistol and shouted:

“Stop! or you are a dead man!”

He did not answer, but kept on running; so, I took a hurried aim and fired.

“Confound it! have I lost that shot!” I muttered. I again sighted at him and fired, as I continued the chase.

Someone at my side said:

“For God’s sake! Pinkerton, stop firing! Don’t you see that you have killed me?”

Just as Blake said this, he staggered and fell down, close by the fence. I found that my first shot had taken effect; the second, I found in the trunk of a tree, next morning.

“Get up!” I said to Blake, in a harsh tone; “I told you I would shoot you, if you tried to escape, and now I have done it.”

He tried to rise, but could not. By this time, the crowd from the saloons had come up. Someone said:

“Blake, who shot you?”

Seeing that there were many of Blake’s old chums in the crowd, some of whom were dangerous-looking characters, I raised Blake up and said:

“He is my prisoner.”

At this, the crowd fell back; but, at my request, four of them raised him up and conveyed him to a small tavern, nearby, where he was laid on a lounge. He was then insensible, and medical aid was at once called. I remained with him to hear the surgeon’s report; and, once, Blake opened his eyes and muttered:

“Pinkerton, I will kill you yet!” to which I made no reply.

In a few minutes, two doctors arrived and probed Blake’s wound. It was on the right side of the spine, near the small of the back, and they immediately said that he could not live more than a day or two. By this time, a great crowd had gathered around the tavern door; and, as I passed out, several voices cried out:

“There goes the murderer!”

“Send for the sheriff,” I replied; “I will answer to the proper authorities.”

I then went back into the tavern and wrote a note to Mr. Holland, a lawyer, asking him to meet me at the Washington House, as soon as possible. Having sent this note, I started for the hotel. The streets were filled with people, all in a state of great excitement, and my situation was neither pleasant nor safe.

On reaching the hotel, I went up to see Mary. I knocked at the door, and she immediately let me in. She was crying quietly, and was, evidently, very weak.

“Mary,” I asked, “what is in that phial?” and I pointed to the one I had seen in Blake’s hand.

“I don’t know,” she replied. “Blake always poured a few drops out of it into our wine, when he wished to make us sleep.”

“Mary,” I said, “you must not get excited at what I am going to tell you. *Blake is shot*. I had to shoot him to prevent his escape. I had no alternative, as he would have got into the woods.”

She said nothing, but continued to weep, even more bitterly than before. The thought flashed across me: “Can it be possible that she cared for this handsome scoundrel?” and I said:

“You do not feel angry with me, because I have done this, do you?”

“Oh! no sir; it is not anger that makes me weep; but oh! how horrible it is, to think of him being ushered into eternity with all his sins unrepented of! I have not words to express my gratitude to you for your kindness in rescuing me, and I hope no harm will come to you.”

At this moment, the sheriff and several citizens entered the room. I took the sheriff into an adjoining room, closed the door, and told him all that had happened. I then asked him to go over to the tavern and secure the papers on Blake’s person; I felt sure that some evidence of his guilt would be found on him. I, also, called Mary into the room and asked her whether she knew where Alice was.

“No, sir; Sloan took her away last Thursday week; but I don’t know where they went. Blake was writing a letter to Sloan, this evening, and I think he has it in his pocket, now.”

“I know where Alice is,” I said; “Sloan took her to Janesville. Sheriff, you would oblige me very much, by getting Blake’s papers. You need not fear that I shall run away.”

Mr. Holland, my lawyer, came in, at this moment, and I explained my case to him. He shook me warmly by the hand and said:

“It will give me great pleasure to defend you. I, not only, sympathize with you heartily, but wholly approve your course. You will have more friends in Rockford than ever before.”

Mr. Holland and the sheriff then went over to obtain Blake’s papers. They found the streets crowded with people, as the shooting had been plainly heard, and everyone was anxious to learn the cause of the trouble. During the sheriff’s absence, I advised the people who had crowded into the hotel, to go away quietly; and they, finally, did so. I induced Mary to lie down to get some sleep, and the landlord, at my request, sent a girl to stay with her.

I was just about to retire, when a gentleman asked to see me. He proved to be the pastor of the Methodist church in Rockford; he stated that, having heard, briefly, from the sheriff, the story of Mary’s wrongs, he had come to offer to take her to his own home, until her family should arrive, to take care of her. The hotel was so noisy, and the excitement was so bad for Mary, that I thankfully accepted his kind offer. I, therefore, procured a carriage, and Mary was, at once, conveyed to the minister’s house.

Meanwhile, the sheriff had searched Blake’s clothing and the following letter was found:

“FRIEND SLOAN: I am just coining money. Mary has several admirers, and I often have two gentlemen up to see her of a night. She is getting d—d pale, but all the gentlemen pronounce her a regular beauty.

“I have my eye on two stunning girls in West Rockford; and we will get them to go out on the plains with us, when we take Mary and Alice to the ‘diggins.’ If they won’t come willingly, *we know how to make them.*”

“Are you doing well with Alice? I am making more money out of this speculation than out of any I ever attempted before.

“Yours, etc., BLAKE.”

The sheriff brought this letter to me, and went off without locking me up; although I advised him to arrest me, as a matter of form.

“After reading that letter,” said he, “there is no power on earth that could make me arrest you.”

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was nearly four o'clock before I went to bed, but by six, I was up. I, at once, sent the following dispatch to Sheriff Church:

“SHERIFF W. L. CHURCH, Chicago:

“I arrested Blake last night. He broke away from me and ran for the woods. After a sharp race, I fired two shots at him. The first ball entered his back and passed through his body. The doctors pronounce the wound fatal. A letter to Sloan, found on his person, stated that he had two Rockford girls under his eye, whom he intended to debauch and take to California. Send William and Deputy-Sheriff Green by first train. Sloan and Alice are at Janesville. Will leave for Belvidere as soon as possible. I want Alice here. Fear Mary will be sick. She asks all the time for her father and William.

“ALLAN PINKERTON.”

Having sent the dispatch, I ate breakfast, and then, paid a visit to all the clergymen on both sides of the river. I narrated the particulars of the outrage that had been perpetrated on the girls; spoke of their innocence and beauty, and of the hellish means used to destroy them; called attention to the letter found on Blake's person, in which he spoke of an intention to debauch two Rockford girls; and, in fact, laid bare the whole vile scheme, which had been successfully carried out, in part.

The clergymen, unanimously, approved of my course. In their morning discourses, they gave their congregations a short sketch of Blake's wicked plots, and offered devout thanks that he had been stopped in his career of crime, before he had had the opportunity to carry out his designs on the two Rockford girls. Prayer was offered up for Mary and Alice; also, for Mr. and Mrs. Wells, that they might be given strength to bear up under their terrible affliction. In this way, Mary's sad story was conveyed to all the church-going people in Rockford, and many ladies called that day at the Methodist parsonage, to offer their services.

During the forenoon, I called to see Mary, and found that she was quite delirious. At times, Blake would appear to her; the fearful events of the first stormy night would float before her; and she would shudder and almost faint with agony. Again, she thought she was on the cars, making the forced trip, and she suddenly startled every one by a piercing cry for Alice. Then she

was at home, with her father, mother, and William, and her pleasant smiles showed that all was peace, purity, and happiness.

A physician stayed with her all the time; as I left, he went to the door with me and said that she had no appetite, and was running down fast. He wished that her sister would come, as Alice would have more influence over her, than strangers, although the Rockford ladies were doing everything in their power. She had youth and a good constitution on her side, however, and might pull through.

I returned to the Washington House, and as I passed some of the groggeries, the loafers, congregated in front of them, jeered at me, and called me a murderer. One bloated sot swaggered up to me and said:

“So, you are the murderer, are you? D—n you, I will put a ball through you!”

I turned on him and calmly said:

“I don’t know you, nor do I wish to; but if you give me cause, I will shoot you, too. I will show the people of Rockford what kind of a man you are,” and I advanced toward him.

He was, evidently, a cowardly braggart, for he slunk away into the crowd, and said no more.

Sunday was a busy day with me, as people came in to see me every minute. All the respectable people of the community were anxious to express to me their approval of my actions.

At seven o’clock in the evening, a carriage drove up, and, to my astonishment, William and Deputy-Sheriff Green jumped out. Immediately on receipt of my dispatch, in Chicago, they had obtained a special train, which had brought them to Belvidere; there, they had hired a carriage, in which they had come to Rockford.

I was delighted to see them, and, after a hasty supper, I took William to see Mary. I impressed upon him the necessity of being perfectly calm, and then led him into her room. Mary was propped up with pillows in a half-reclining position, and was very weak. William’s color rose and his eyes flashed, as he saw what a wreck Mary had become; but, in a second, tears filled his eyes, and he almost fell, as he walked carefully across the room, and knelt at the bedside.

“Mary, don’t you know me?” he said, in a voice trembling with emotion. “Don’t you know William?”

As the familiar tones reached her ear, a look of delight came into her face; she raised herself on her arm, gazed lovingly at William, and tried to speak; but her emotions overcame her, and she dropped back in a swoon. The Doctor, assisted by two ladies who were present, soon revived her, and she was able to speak in a faint voice.

“Oh! William, I am so delighted to see you! Where are father, mother, and Alice? Won’t they come to me?”

William took her hand gently, and endeavored in vain, to suppress the sobs that *would* come in spite of himself. His chest heaved convulsively, and his eyes were full of tears. Finally, he mastered his grief with great effort, and said:

“Father is coming as soon as he can. You will meet him in Chicago, if you are strong enough to make the journey.”

I will not dwell upon this affecting meeting. Sorrow is the heritage of the whole world, and we all have so much unhappiness in our own lives, that we, naturally, do not desire to contemplate the misery of others, too long.

CHAPTER XV.

I LEFT William with Mary, and returned to the Washington House, to see Deputy-Sheriff Green. Having told him that Sloan was in Janesville, I offered to go there to arrest the villain and get Alice. Mary needed her sister's presence immediately, as the physicians feared the worst.

Green said that I had already done everything, and that I ought to have some rest; so, he would go to Janesville. Accordingly, I gave him a letter of introduction to the sheriff of Rock county, and, in less than an hour, he had hired a buggy and started on his journey.

He reached Janesville at three o'clock in the morning; he then called up the sheriff and asked his assistance in arresting Sloan. The sheriff hurriedly dressed himself and accompanied Green to Sloan's room. Green had not forgotten his handcuffs, and, in an instant, Sloan was a prisoner.

Alice fairly cried for joy at her deliverance, but her joy vanished on hearing of Mary's illness.

Green brought both Sloan and Alice back to Rockford in the buggy he had used in going to Janesville; and, on reaching Rockford, Sloan was lodged in jail, while Alice went to Mary's bedside.

Blake lived through Monday, but died that night. I cared but little for this. I had done only my duty. I had the approval, not only of my own conscience, but, also, of all the law-loving people of Rockford. A death by violence was the natural end of such a life as Blake's. Sooner or later his sin was sure to find him out; in the course of my duty, I was the appointed instrument of vengeance.

The arrival of William and Alice did Mary much good, and she cheered up perceptibly. I thought it would be best to move her to Chicago, and the doctor agreed with me. We, therefore, started Tuesday morning by stage, and took the train at Belvidere. We reached Chicago without accident, and Mary was immediately taken to the Sherman House, where the proprietors, Messrs. Tuttle & Brown, had prepared their best room. The whole community deeply sympathized with the unfortunate family, and Mary received the greatest attention and kindness from every one.

Doctor McVickar was called, and his opinion was awaited with deep anxiety. When he came out from Mary's room, he said that it would be impossible for her to live. She had been poisoned by heavy doses of cantharides, or Spanish fly, administered for a purpose better imagined than described. It had been given to her in such large doses, and had had time to work into her system so thoroughly, that it would be impossible to save her.

Mrs. Wells was quite ill, at home, from the overpowering effects of grief, and Mr. Wells was not in Chicago, on our arrival there. He came on, immediately; but Mary had been dead an hour and a half, when he entered the Sherman House.

Poor Mary! Only a few days before, she had been so full of life, so beautiful now, she was a corpse. To her, however, death came as a release; and few would have cared to call her back to the suffering, which life would have entailed upon her.

Green obtained the necessary papers, and conveyed Sloan to the jail in Coldwater. He was there tried, convicted, and sentenced to imprisonment, at hard labor, for five years the longest term allowable by law for his offense, at that time. The villains, Harris, Dick, and Joe, had taken an early alarm, and fled to the wilds of the Far West; so that they escaped, temporarily, from the hands of justice. Their further career was never known, but, in all probability, they were hanged.

CHAPTER XVI.

TEN eventful years passed away. I had entered into business, on my own account, and was doing well. I had gone into Montcalm County, Michigan, on the track of some parties, who were suspected of stealing goods from the Michigan Central Railroad. Montcalm County was just becoming settled up; and, as I drove along in my buggy, on my way to the little town of Stanton, I began to fear that I had lost my way. It was a very sultry summer day, and my horse jogged along, with drooping head, evidently suffering greatly from the heat. I, therefore, decided to stop at the first farm-house, to water my horse and inquire the way to Stanton.

I soon came in sight of a farm-house, situated in a large clearing. It was, evidently, a well-kept farm. The house was neat and comfortable; the fences and barns were in good order; and the stock looked well-fed and well-cared for. Everything showed thrifty, capable management.

I drove up to the house, and entered the open door. A handsome lady was seated at a table, sewing, and three children were playing around her. I asked her where I could get water for myself and my horse. She gave me a drink, took down a pail, and handed it to me, at the same time pointing to the well.

I thanked her, and made a few remarks about the fine appearance of her farm. She said nothing, but I noticed that she looked at me in a very curious manner. I then went out, watered my horse, and returned to the house with the pail; the lady took it from me, and handed it to a brown-eyed little boy, to take into the house, all the time keeping her eyes fixed upon me. I have always had a great liking for a handsome face, and this lady was, certainly, a beauty; but she gazed at me so steadily that, I must confess, I was somewhat abashed. However, I asked the road to Stanton,

which she told me; and I then turned to get into my buggy. At this, she inquired, in a shy, timid way:

“Is your name Pinkerton?”

This question was rather startling, as I did not wish to be known; and Montcalm County having been so recently settled, I had not expected to be recognized there. Still, I could not deceive her, so I said, politely:

“Yes, madam; but you have the advantage of me.”

She held out both her hands, and said, smilingly:

“Why, don’t you know me, Mr. Pinkerton?”

I looked at her, and then at her three children, but could not recall a single familiar feature; so I was obliged to say:

“No; I do not know you.”

“What! not know me! Why, I am Alice Wells,” she replied.

“Good gracious! is it possible!” I said. “Well, this is a pleasant surprise.”

I could hardly realize that it was Alice. She was married to an upright, intelligent farmer, and her husband was then at work in the field. She was determined that I stay all night, and would not take “no” for an answer.

Finding that I could not get away, I drove my horse into the barn, while she sent for her husband. When he came, Alice told him who I was; as he knew all her previous history, and my connection with it, he received me with great cordiality.

A pleasanter night than the one I spent under their roof, I never passed. They did all in their power to make my stay agreeable, and succeeded perfectly. They were admirably suited to each other, and were evidently as devoted lovers as ever they were in their days of courtship, of which they related to me many amusing and touching anecdotes.

I have heard from them several times since then, and they seem to be as happy as mortals can ever expect to be.

THE END.

Allan Pinkerton, *Claude Melnotte as a Detective and Other Stories*. Chicago: W.B. Keen, Cooke, & Co., 1875. Pages 145 - 230.