

*The Monk Detective;
or,
The Maniac's Release*

by W. Jared Hall

Chapter I.

AN INFANT DESERTED

OTTO WHALSTADT was an orphan at fifteen years of age. His father, at one time a prominent business man in New York, and supposed to be wealthy, died, leaving his money affairs much complicated. In fact, he was insolvent, his assets being largely below his liabilities. The wife did not long survive her husband, and Otto, being the only remaining child of a once numerous family, was left dependent upon his own exertions for a living.

Ten years preceding this event, William, an older and an only brother, possessing a wild, roving disposition, conceived the idea of going on a whaling voyage. Everything possible was done to dissuade him from the hazardous undertaking, but without effect. He left his home at night, and succeeded in reaching a small port on the coast of Maine, where he shipped on a whaler. This was the last heard of him by his parents, or anyone with whom he had been previously acquainted, and the vessel in which he sailed having been lost in a storm off the coast of Newfoundland, nearly all the crew perishing, gave additional weight to the supposition he was dead.

Otto, at the time of his mother's death, being too young to have any matured plan of operation, incidentally fell under the favorable notice of a gentleman of leisure and fortune just then preparing for a tour of Europe. Taking a likely interest in the orphan's present and future welfare, he kindly proposed to bear his expenses to Spain, and see him well-established with some good firm in Madrid. Otto, having no near relative living, gladly accepted the generous offer, and in due time held a remunerative position in a large mercantile house in the Spanish capital.

It is not our purpose to follow his business career for the quarter of the century subsequent to this beginning. It is enough to know that honesty, faithfulness, morality and good judgement, carried him successfully from poverty to wealth, and in 1847, he was principal partner in the house which, twenty-five years before, had given him a situation as clerk. He also owned a handsome residence on a first-class avenue in the city.

Nearly twenty years anterior to this date, a young woman of more than ordinary personal attractions, accompanied by a man, came to Madrid, and put up at the hotel where Mr. Whalstadt was at the time boarding. They kept themselves closely secluded, taking their meals in their rooms, and not once during their stay did they appear in the parlors or on the street. There was something very singular in connection with them, and yet no steps were taken to unravel the mystery. With the exception of the landlord and a servant or two, no others about the house saw them. The names given, and which were put upon the register, were "Bernard Kenchberg and Anise Brenier."

Matters continued thus for eight or ten days, when, one morning, in taking up the accustomed refreshments, neither man, woman nor their baggage were to be found; but under the bedclothes, in the apartment specially occupied by the woman, an infant was discovered lying in a condition of semi-unconsciousness. Immediately reporting this fact, an investigation was had, when it was ascertained beyond any reasonable doubt, that the child—merely a few hours old—had been drugged and purposely deserted.

This occurrence afforded material for a vast amount of gossip among the boarders and guests of the hotel, and for several days considerable bantering was indulged in, to determine, if possible, who would adopt it. In a moment of unguarded expression, in reply to the witty remark of a young lady, Mr. Whalstadt said he would be a father to the little stranger, if no other would. Taken instantly at his word, the lady, thinking it a capital joke—he being unmarried—took the babe, carried it to him, and laid it on his lap, having first held its face up for a parental kiss.

This transaction assuming so much of reality, Mr. Whalstadt finally agreed in good faith to take upon himself the responsibility of the foster-parent. With this understanding, he caused the child—previously christened “Rachael” by the acclamation—to be placed in a respectable family, there to be carefully reared until old enough to attend school, when he would further provide for her.

She soon grew to be a bright-eyed, playful little girl, and wherever Mr. Whalstadt visited the family in whose charge she had been placed, would climb upon his knee, toy with his watch and chain, wind her arms around his neck, pressing her soft, warm cheek hard against his, and in a thousand other ways give expression to the contentment and happiness filling her young heart.

During these interviews, which became more and more frequent, a close attachment was formed, and Mr. Whalstadt improved every opportunity to win her entire love and confidence. He was indulgent, even to excess, and the good dame to whom he had confided the special care of his “pet,” cautioned him many times, lest his extreme generosity spoil the child.

At the age of ten, she was removed to boarding-school—one of the best in the country—and ample arrangements made for her comfort and advancement. Eight years here, and Rachael, her course of education complete, was one of the most beautiful and highly accomplished ladies in the proud old metropolis. Her kind-hearted benefactor, however, insisted she should still remain in the institution and give her attention to the study of French and German—she being proficient only in English and Spanish.

Mr. Whalstadt was still unmarried, had become immensely wealthy, and it was generally conceded Rachael would eventually be sole heir to his vast possessions. This wholesome intimation, taken in connection with her exquisite loveliness and refinement, drew around her a host of admirers, all eager to secure her heart and hand, to say nothing of the fortune.

Naturally warm-hearted, impulsive, generous and confiding, yet possessing to an extraordinary degree that peculiar intuition—a faculty of mind capable of divining the cause and motive of individuals in her everyday intercourse with them—led her rightfully to understand the true

import of profuse adoration, and prepared her to give only proper consideration to the flattery of which she was the constant recipient.

One by one, those who sought to win her affections, would appear, press their suit with all the ardor of youth and apparent good faith, but neither by word nor look did she give them encouragement or hope of success. Some were chagrined, other vexed, and still others maddened by defeat. Among the latter was a young man—Carlos Berolzheim—who had been in the city about a year, and was ostensibly studying the profession of medicine. He appeared to have a fortune at his command, was well educated, accomplished and self-possessed, and had been admitted into the best society. There was that, however, in his presence which impressed Rachael with a feeling akin to fear, and of all her suitors she disliked him the most. On one particular occasion, the impression of something wrong was so strong and palpably evident that she made her suspicions known. His retort was self-convicting, convincing her of the correctness of her judgement, and thenceforward she refused to hold any conversation with him. If she had previously had doubts of his true character, his conduct during the few weeks following was not calculated to reassure her in his favor. She found it absolutely necessary to avoid him in every instance.

Chapter II.

THE DETECTIVE AT WORK

RACHAEL WAS out in the seminary grounds one evening. She felt depressed in spirits, had been unusually sad all day, and had gone alone—stolen away from among her young associates with whom she was a great favorite—to commune in secret with her thoughts. She sat there on a rustic seat, watching the stars as the night gloom gathered around her, thinking—thinking of her mother, father, brother, sister. Her pulse quickened, her cheeks flushed and her temples throbbed at the bare probability that she might have one or all of these near and dear relatives living. Then another thought crossed her mind, drove the hot blood from her face, sent the life current rushing to her heart, and filled her with unutterable dread. “Perhaps—perhaps I am nobody!” and large teardrops fell on either cheek.

She did not often suffer these reflections to affect her thus, but on this occasion she felt unusually melancholy. She had expected to have seen Mr. Whalstadt during the evening, but he had sent word that unexpected business called him from the city, and possibly he might be absent several days. She felt particularly disappointed; why, could she hardly have told.

This unhappy meditation was continued until a late hour, and she was about returning, when she was startled by a heavy hand laid upon her shoulder. Turning quickly, she met the gaze of Carlos Berolzheim, and though it was quite dark where she sat, she detected an expression on his countenance which filled her with fear. With an effort to repress the sudden alarm, and rising to her feet, she said:

“I wish you would leave me, Mr. Berolzheim. You are very ungenerous to intrude in this manner.”

There was a perceptible leer curled his lip for an instant, as he replied:

“I was about to leave the city for a time, but could not go without first paying you my parting respects. Please be seated.”

There was a depth of meaning to his tone, and a haughtiness of bearing not to be mistaken, but without affecting to notice these ominous indications, she answered:

“You have heard my wish, and I would thank you to retire. I desire to be alone.”

“Sorry to act contrary to your commands,” he retorted, moving in front of her, “but as I have taken good care that no one will disturb us for a few moments, it is best for you quietly to submit, and listen to a proposition I have to make.”

Suiting action to the words, he placed one hand upon her arm, and pushed her back on the seat from which she had just risen.

“Unhand me, sir!” she said sharply, springing to her feet again, and stepping to one side. “If you do not leave me instantly, I will call assistance to protect me from further insult.”

“You will do nothing of the kind,” he replied, advancing to where she had retreated. “If you would avoid a greater evil, do as I ask. I am not in a mood tonight to be trifled with. Listen you shall, or by ——, you will—”

The sentence was closed abruptly by a stunning blow from a clenched fist, which laid him at full length on the ground. He, however, regained his feet quickly, and made a motion as if to draw a weapon, but encountering the stern, piercing gaze of Otto Wahlstadt—one arm supporting the frightened Rachael, and the other raised with an admonishing gesture—he moved away into the darkness, muttering:

“I’ll have my revenge, though I walk through blood to reach it!”

“Go! villain and coward!” hissed Wahlstadt. “No one fears you or your threat.”

Carlos Berolzheimer passed rapidly out of sight among the trees and bushes with which the grounds were plentifully adorned, and immediately afterward the sound of a carriage was heard, as if driven at a rapid pace.

“I have a positive impression,” Rachael said, the sound of wheels on the hard road having died away in the distance, “that this man will yet do me a great wrong. Since my first acquaintance with him, he has persistently forced himself into my presence, and his conduct at times has been absolutely insulting.”

“There is a mystery in some way connected with him,” Mr. Wahlstadt replied, leading her to the seat from which she rose at the approach of Berolzheimer, and sitting down beside her. “To satisfy our suspicions I have taken the trouble to inquire to some extent, into his history and antecedents, and to accomplish this, employed an officer. It appears that this is not the first time

he has visited Madrid, having been here on at least two or three other occasions, and is well known to the authorities. The studying of a profession is merely a blind to cover some wicked design. He is also associated with one Ollendorf, living out near the *Palacio Real*, and who is said to be a desperate character.”

Rachael made no reply. She was thinking, and he added:

“I sent you a note stating that I should be absent from the city this evening, but events rendering it unnecessary to go, I decided to fulfill my original engagement with you. This accounts for my sudden but timely appearance.”

“I am indeed thankful for your kind interposition,” she responded, “and firmly believe it was most opportune. Though Mr. Berolzheimer has often acted strangely toward me, there was something in his conduct tonight indicative of imminent peril.”

“Perhaps it would be advisable,” Mr. Wahlstadt remarked, after a short pause, “in view of his singular persistency and threat, to change the time set for our marriage, and instead of deferring it, as was originally designed, let it take place immediately. It is not essential,” he went on, “or necessary you should longer remain in the seminary, and when married, I could give you more efficient protection.”

“Whatever you advise,” she returned, “I shall feel free to sanction. You are my best and truest friend, and if, as you have so often told me, I could make you happy by being your wife, you have my consent.”

“Happy, dear Rachael!” he replied, drawing her yielding form closer to him. “The man who would not be happy with you, does not deserve happiness.”

“If all that is mine to give—even life itself,” she answered, leaning her cheek against his shoulder, “will repay the debt of gratitude I owe you, then indeed my cup of bliss be full.”

“The debt, Rachael, if it ever existed, was long ago cancelled,” he rejoined. “Your contentment and ease has always been my first desire, and in exact proportion to my success in this particular, so has been my remuneration. As the account now stands, it is I rather who am the debtor. Do you know, Rachael,” he continued, placing a hand under her chin, and raising her face until their eyes met, “that I sometimes think I am asking too much? But if the kindest wish of my heart and the possession of an ample fortune will compensate you for the sacrifice, they are yours unreservedly.”

“Have you not been father, mother, brother, sister to me all my life, with never so much as one harsh word or even rebuke for my many errors?” she returned, laying her soft hand in his, and looking up into his face with an earnest gaze, “and now that I may add even a little to your future peace, by giving back what rightfully is your own—being just what you have made me—is it too much?”

There was a long embrace, a fond kiss more eloquent than words when Mr. Wahlstadt remarked:

“In my selfish happiness I forgot you were out in the night air. It is quite damp here, and we will return immediately.”

Rising, and offering her his arm, they started toward the seminary building.

As they left the rustic seat, a monk, wrapped in his cloak and hood, rose up from a bush where he had overheard what passed between them, and had also witnessed the assault and threat of Berolzheimer. Watching the receding figures until they disappeared in the gloom, he gave utterance to his thoughts in a half audible soliloquy:

“A great wrong has been committed. A black deed is in contemplation. To God be all praise, if I—the humblest of his servants—am instrumental in righting one while defeating the other!” and turning short, walked rapidly from the grounds.

Chapter III.

THE PLOT OVERHEARD

IN the environs of Madrid, close by the mountain base, not far from the river, and almost under the shadow of the great *Palacio Real*, stood a low, unassuming house. The front was narrow, even with the sidewalk, and occupied ostensibly as an eating and drinking saloon; yet, during the daytime, scarcely a man or woman was seen to cross the threshold. It was only occasionally the place was visited, and then mostly by men, who came and went stealthily—often at the dead hour of night.

Back of the saloon—a dirty, ill-provided apartment—was a larger and more comfortable room, fitted up with some degree of comfort and cleanliness. Off one side of this was a bedroom, closet and pantry; and still back of these was a patch of earth, perhaps twenty-five by fifty feet, inclosed with a high board fence, and crowded with plants and shrubs of a great variety. The arrangement showed a skillful manager, and though on an exceedingly diminutive scale, was nevertheless exceedingly beautiful.

Near the centre was a rustic bower, covered and re-covered with vines artistically trained, until they had formed a compact surface, through which even the sun’s rays could not penetrate. There were two small openings leading into this cozy retreat, but even these were so artfully concealed by overhanging clusters as to effectually screen the interior. Flowers of the rarest kind grew and blossomed on almost every foot of earth within the inclosure, and not a weed or blade of grass was suffered to draw nourishment from the soil. Winding paths of white ocean sand crossed each other at various places among the thick foliage, and a person a few feet from the door leading into the garden could be perfectly hidden from view.

For nearly twenty years these premises had been occupied by a man and woman known as Ollendorf. Who they were, beyond name, or from whence they came—though supposed from Germany—had never been ascertained.

They were a strange couple, filling a strange position in society, and subjects of general suspicion. The city authorities had often tried to penetrate the secrets of the place, but were never successful. Although strongly suspected, nothing wrong could be positively charged against them; and but for the notoriously suspicious characters occasionally hanging around, there would have been little visible to excite more [than] a passing interest.

It was the general impression, however, especially in official circles, that Ollendorf was a consummate rascal, and one of the leading spirits of a band of desperadoes, which had long infested the city; while it was equally apparent that his wife had taken upon herself a task which was crushing the life out of her by slow torture. It was also abundantly evident that she had once been handsome and accomplished. Her form was good, her features—if full and healthful—would have been remarkably comely; but her eyes were sunken, her cheeks faded, and there was a restlessness visible in her every action, betokening a mind ill at ease.

The universal bearing of these persons toward each other was another particular which had been specially noticed and commented upon.

Seated alone in the door of his saloon, invariably smoking an old, blackened, clay pipe, and wrapped in sullen silence, he would remain long intervals; while she, equally indifferent, toiled away at her domestic duties, or worked in the garden, trained and cultivating, and was often seen to weep. What seemed to be her chief object and where she spent the most of her time, was in her miniature forest. Here, frequently, she would remain, not only all day, but during the entire night.

These observations, designed especially for the public good, had been made from time to time by the proper authorities through detectives stationed on one of the towers of the palace.

The night following that of the scene between Berolzheimer and Rachael, in the seminary grounds as late as twelve o'clock, Ollendorf sat in the door of his saloon, smoking and looking out on the street. To a casual observer, he would have appeared in profound meditation; perhaps half asleep, but in reality was scanning every object within reach, with quick, eager glances. There was no light burning in the house, had been none lit during the evening, and the deep silence of midnight rested upon and around the spot. Still, Ollendorf remained there—his wife reclining upon a rustic couch in her floral retreat. She, too, might have been taken for one asleep; but every sound—often the mere chirping of insects—would rouse her, and rising on one elbow, listen long and attentively, then drop back with a deep sigh.

Directly the bell of a neighboring convent tolled the hour of one, and soon afterward a young man, with light soft tread, came creeping along in the shade of the old palace.

When in front of the saloon, he turned short and entered, passing Ollendorf without recognition. Ten minutes later, an old man, moving slowly with the assistance of a crutch and cane, approached from an opposite direction. His hair and beard—the latter very long and thick, covering nearly all his face—was a grizzly color, and his advance was made apparently with the greatest feebleness. When at the door of the saloon, he wheeled rather abruptly for one so decrepit, and passed in unceremoniously.

Ollendorf still sat in the doorway, puffing short whiffs of smoke from his pipe, and gazing searchingly either way along the street, as if to detect the presence of a third party. Apparently satisfied, he rose to his feet, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and closing the door, bolted it on the inside.

Immediately following this, a monk, closely muffled in a cloak and hood, with cross and beads suspended from his girdle, came out from a deep recess in the walls of the old palace, and crossing an open space, reached the high fence in the rear of Ollendorf's lot. Striking three distinct but low raps on a particular board, he paused and listened. In a moment, there was a movement within, when the board was slid noiselessly aside, and he entered the inclosure.

"Have they come?" asked the woman who admitted him.

"They have, my daughter," he replied, partially removing the muffling from around his face; "and through God's infinite goodness I hope this time to be successful."

"Amen!" was the firm but low response. "Save the peace of my child," she added, "by defeating the designs of these wicked men, and I will die contented and happy."

"Have faith in the blood of our blessed Saviour, and right will surely triumph." His voice trembled as he spoke. "The clouds which have darkened what should have been the best part of your life are breaking away. The horizon is already streaked with light, and soon the sun's bright rays will shine upon you again."

"God grant your predictions may be verified," she replied, sinking upon her knees, and leaning her head forward until her face almost touched the ground. "I have suffered—none but my Maker knows how much. My poor heart is broken, crushed, bleeding, and an hour is a lifetime of torture. Holy Father, is there peace—forgiveness for such as I?"

"Penitence and atonement for past errors and offences, with a course of righteousness in the sight of God for time to come, will save your soul from perdition," enjoined the monk, laying his hand reverently upon her head. "Rise, child, and lead me to the place you have arranged. The fiends of darkness are in counsel, and the innocent may suffer."

Without speaking, the sorrowing woman rose slowly to her feet, her face wet with scalding tears, and taking the monk by the arm, led him along one of the narrow paths, amid overhanging foliage, toward the house.

At this time, in a small underground room or vault, directly beneath the saloon, and reached through a cunningly-devised doorway, formed by the panel work in the bar counter, were three men—Ollendorf and his guests. They were seated at a table, on which burned a taper giving a light barely sufficient to reveal the surroundings. There was also a decanter of spirits, and three glass tumblers standing upon the table.

The younger of the trio was Carlos Berolzheimer, Rachael's rejected suitor. The one with crutch and cane, was known by a variety of fictitious names, but who generally answered to that of Hensch—old Hensch.

"Carl, in his quarrel with Rachael," remarked Hensch, drinking a full glass of liquor, and refilling his tumbler, "spoiled all our plans, and we have got to arrange others."

"Well, what others have you to propose?" asked Ollendorf, drily, evidently in no very good humor.

"Simply, to take forcible possession of all we can at the present time, then wait for future developments," answered Hensch, affecting not to notice Ollendorf's ill-temper.

There was no immediate reply, and Hensch continued:

"As matters have shaped themselves recently, it will be necessary for us to leave here for a while at least, and we may as well help ourselves to a good pile before starting, as to go without it. This, you will observe, must be done, if done at all, immediately. Only yesterday, I detected men on the old palace watching this place."

"Well, what did they discover?" returned Ollendorf, sullenly.

"Perhaps nothing on which to found additional suspicions," rejoined Hensch, coolly; "but I am satisfied we are more than suspected. Carl has acted the fool, not only in this matter with Rachael, but several other affairs in which he has of late been engaged, and the sooner he takes a short leave of this city the better it will be for him and us."

"It is not the first time he has been compelled to visit other places," replied Ollendorf, sarcastically. "I, for one, would suggest that he stay away after this. There is no excuse for his failure with Rachael. Less stupidity and self-conceit, and he would get along better. Henceforth I will have nothing in common to do with him."

Carlos Berolzheimer, thus far, had taken no part in the conversation, and, although maddened by the insinuations, he refrained from retorting, hoping, probably, to avoid an open rupture; but the words of Ollendorf sent the hot blood to his face and temples, and brought him to his feet. Seizing a tumbler, he hurled it with all his might at Ollendorf's head, while the latter barely escaped the missile by dodging, the glass striking the wall and flying into fragments. In an instant, there was the flash of a bright blade, then a moan, and Carlos Berolzheimer lay a corpse on the floor—Ollendorf's knife had pierced in his heart.

Hensch did not speak for several moments. He sat looking steadily at the body. Then, having seemingly sufficiently weighed the matter in his mind, he said:

"Perhaps it is well he is out of the way. He would probably have got us into difficulty. Not being in a position to stand very close scrutiny, the safest course is the best. Dead men tell no tales. Let us put him out of sight, and then to business."

A trapdoor in the vault floor was opened, and the body dropped through. It was then closed, and the two resumed their seats at the table.

“In case we are obliged to change our location,” began Hensch, “Wahl had better be disposed of. It would not be safe to leave him in the asylum.”

“He must not have his liberty,” interrupted Ollendorf, quickly. “If there is any probability of such an event, he must be put out of the way at once. I have urged the necessity for this course, ever since he was placed in the asylum. It could have been done at first without any risk, and that would have settled the matter effectually. It must be done now, whatever the hazard, and immediately.”

“Precisely what I had decided upon,” returned Hensch. “I have got everything arranged, and will give you the particulars.”

“Let there be no delay, or exhibition of soft feelings for the sake of sentiment,” put in Ollendorf. “Strike at the root, and strike home.”

“Again, precisely what I was going to propose,” rejoined Hensch, swallowing another glass of liquor. “You see I am known at the asylum as Wahl’s brother, and have always manifest a good deal of interest and sympathy for my poor, afflicted relative. Wahl, of course, repudiates my generous tokens of consolation, and flies into a towering passion whenever he sees me; but this, you see, keeps up the delusion. Now I shall visit the asylum early tomorrow morning, as I have a hundred times before, and so arrange my cards that he gets into his stomach the merest particle of a drug I have prepared, when he will go quietly to sleep and never wake again. The drug will leave no trace of its presence in the system, even if examined, and we will be safe from that quarter. Carl’s failure with Rachael has lost us a handsome pile, but I have learned this evening that Wahlstadt has taken her from the seminary to his residence, and that he did this afternoon draw on his own private account a large sum of money, besides furnishing a set of diamonds at a heavy price. This looks as if he intended to marry the girl himself, and that the money and jewels were for outfit and expenditures incident to such an event. We will make an entrance into his residence tomorrow night, and carry off this loose change and diamonds. It will be the best we can do under the circumstances.”

“Can it be accomplished without very great risk?” asked Ollendorf.

“No more than is always incurred at such undertakings,” replied Hensch. “If there is no interference, of course there will be no blood spilt; but you know dead men tell no tales.”

“I understand,” answered Ollendorf, “and we will consider the course settled.”

“There is another matter,” continued Hensch, “which is in my humble opinion needs quite as prompt action as anything else just at this time. Your wife should take a little of the same drug I propose to give Wahl. She will get us into trouble before we know it. I am satisfied of that.”

“That is my conviction,” replied Ollendorf, “and has been for several months. She is greatly given to religious reflections of late, and two or three times within as many days, I have detected a monk in the garden with her. I do not wholly like the movement, and to save our necks from the halter, perhaps she, too, had best be removed.”

“Let it be done tomorrow, then,” rejoined Hensch. “We will make a clean sweep of it.”

“It seems to be a work of necessity,” and Ollendorf rose to his feet. “We will meet at twelve at the eastern corner of Placa Mayor.”

“Agreed,” and the two ascended to the saloon from which Hensch took his departure.

As they passed from the vault, the monk crawled away from a small aperture in the wall, where he had overheard their conversation, and which he had reached by creeping some distance under the floor of the room in the rear of the saloon.

Hensch, having laid aside his crutch and cane—they being merely a disguise—placed them in position again before passing out on the sidewalk, and assuming a bent form, moved slowly away from the place. Keen and observing as both he and Ollendorf were, during the moment they stood in the door before Hensch stepped out, they failed to detect two officers crouched in a dark nook on the opposite side of the street, and who cautiously dogged the steps of the receding figure.

Chapter IV.

THE MONK AND THE MANIAC

THE sun was but a short distance above the horizon on the morning following, when the monk knocked at the great door of the insane asylum. His garb gained him a ready admittance, and he passed the portals unquestioned.

“Show me to the cell of the maniac Wahl,” he directed, drawing his cloak and cowl closer round him.

“This way, reverend father,” was the response, and the man led off through a long, narrow, corridor, up a flight of stairs, through another corridor, and finally paused before an iron door heavily barred and bolted. “Will you enter alone, or do you desire an attendant?” asked the man, bowing before the monk. “The patient is one of our most dangerous subjects, and he may do you a bodily injury.”

“I will enter alone,” answered the monk. “You may close the door, but remain near to be of service if necessary.”

The key was turned, the door opened, and the monk entered; then the passage was again closed. It was a large apartment, with walls, floor and ceiling of smooth, cut stone. On the side opposite the door, was a good sized window, thoroughly protected by heavy bars of wrought iron, firmly imbedded in huge blocks of stone, and so close together that an arm could hardly be passed

between them. It afforded a sufficient amount of light and air; but that was all. No view of either the city or country could be obtained. At one side was a low couch on an iron frame, strongly secured in a nook formed by a monster stone pillar. There was no other furniture—not even a chair or table.

On the couch lay a man past the middle of life. His face was toward the wall and the entrance having been effected with so little noise he did not move though evidently awake.

“Peace and the blessing of God be upon you, my son,” and the monk stepped forward to the centre of the cell.

With a single bound the man stood on his feet before him.

“Who sent you here?” he hissed, his eyes dilated and his powerful proportions expanded to their full capacity. “Was it that fiend who has made everybody believe he is my brother and that I am insane? Do I look like a man bereft of reason? Look at me, sir monk! View me closely. See these legs, these arms, this chest, these eyes, this face, this head, and tell me on your honor, is there anything here that even appears deranged? The world is crazy, not I, else a sound man, firm in body and mind—who never injured even so much as a hair on the head of a fellow-being, would not be held captive these twenty years.”

“It is wrong, my son,” interrupted the monk, watching every word and act of the man with intense earnestness, and dropping on one knee. “God will avenge you in his own good time.”

“Avenge!” he shouted, raising a clenched fist. “Who says avenge? The fiends of hell, allied to the imps of darkness, could never conceive a torture that would satisfy my vengeance. Could I lay this hand upon his throat, his, that pretended brother of mine, I would close my grip, slowly, not at once—O, no! not at once, slowly, and laugh to scorn his shrieks of agony as life went out by inches, not in a moment, a week, a month a year,—years I would hold him here, and even then my soul would not be satisfied.”

“For the sake of your wife and child,” interposed the monk, “would you not forgive?”

A sudden change swept over the man’s features. A power of internal emotion, like a mighty whirlwind upon the sturdy oak, shook his stalwart frame, until he leaned against the wall for support.

“My wife, my child?” His words were scarcely above a whisper. “A villain robbed me of one, the other I never saw.” He paused. His breast heaved, his fingers worked nervously and his lips were tightly compressed. Then turning his gaze upon the monk, and stepping out from the wall, his voice still low he asked:

“Know you aught of them?”

At this instant, a sudden fire shot from his eyes, his face grew livid, and before the monk could reply, he became fierce again, adding—

“Speak, man, and speak the truth! If you deceive me, I will rend you limb by limb. Speak! Keep me no longer in suspense. Know you aught of them?”

“I do, my son,” answered the monk with forced calmness, “and came here to conduct you to them. We do not believe you are insane, and here is our good King’s order for your release,” handing him the document properly signed and sealed.

He clutched the paper eagerly, comprehended the contents in an instant, and sank on the floor in a swoon.

That strong man, whose mental sufferings for twenty years of cruel imprisonment no tongue could tell, no pen describe, and whose sensibilities had been trained by sad experience to meet every trial, could not endure the abrupt, positive assurance of release. The overwhelming joy that swept through his mind, swayed him like a leaf shaken by the fierce autumnal blast, and like it, he trembled a moment, then fell utterly overpowered.

It was night again—the second following the scene between Rachael and Berolzheimer. The bells had tolled the hour of twelve, and a thick fog hanging over the city, the darkness was intense. The bustle and noise of busy life had long since ceased, and with the exception of an occasional rattle of carriage wheels over the flinty pavement, the light, rapid step of some late reveller homeward bound, or the slow, measured tread of watchmen in their weary, monotonous rounds, the capital was wrapped in gloomy silence.

At this hour in a magnificently furnished apartment of a palatial residence, near the centre of the metropolis, were three persons. Otto Wahlstadt, the rich merchant, Rachael, his adopted daughter, and an elderly woman, the housekeeper; while surrounding the building at regular intervals, concealed under the foliage of some bush or in the dark shade of a convenient recess, were a half-dozen men wearing the uniform of the king’s police.

The Wahlstadt residence was large, stood on a spacious lot, and everything pertaining to the building or grounds was on the most elaborate scale. Soon after one o’clock, two men entered the premises. One came stealthily over the fence in the rear, the other through the front gate, and after a tortuous route, intended for a careful survey of the surroundings, they met at the western corner of the house.

Here they consulted together a moment in whispers, then separated, one remaining at the corner, which commanded a view, as much as the darkness would admit, of two streets and the usual approach to the building, while the other crept along close by the wall toward a back entrance which had been purposely left open.

Reaching this, he reconnoitered the interior closely, then passed in. A moment later something occurred to distract the attention of the man outside. He turned to look in the direction when a quick, heavy blow, felled him senseless on the ground. Two men sprang upon him, and before he could make any sound or resistance, he was securely gagged and ironed.

There was a hurried movement around the building, then a sharp, shrill whistle followed by a rapid exit of the man from inside. Two officers having hastily stationed themselves at the open door, one on either side, and holding a short rope between them, caught the legs of the fleeing burglar, throwing him heavily on his face. Before he could offer any resistance, he was ironed and secured. The gag was then removed from the other, and the two conducted into the elegant drawing room of the residence, where the family were assembled. The sight here presented to their astonished gaze was not calculated to inspire very flattering hope, the surroundings plainly indicating that a trap had been set for them and that they had been caught.

Just at that moment a carriage stopped before the gate, and three persons alighting came up the walk to the front. They were admitted to the apartment into which the burglars had been taken.

One was a woman dressed in deep black, with a veil entirely concealing her features. Her companion, and on whose arm she was leaning, was a finely proportioned, noble looking man who may have been fifty, but who looked to be much older. They were accompanied by a monk, whose hair, beard, and general appearance, indicated that he passed the time usually allotted to mortals, but whose limbs and intellect were yet strong and unimpaired. He was dressed in the full garb of his profession, and stood near the doorway through which he had entered, the lady and gentleman on his right. Directly opposite was Mr. Wahlstadt and family, and extending across one side of the room, were the officers, their prisoners in the centre.

Chapter V.

THE REUNION AND END

“THIS intrusion was necessary,” remarked the monk after a short pause, “that the goodness of God might be verified in the flesh, inasmuch as we hail a triumph of righteousness through the defeat of the vicious and ungodly. The extent and importance of this movement has yet been scarcely surmised. Ostensibly to secure these two desperate villains in the very act of their depredations—in reality but a prelude to what I yet have to disclose. To fully understand subsequent disclosures it is desirable to know something of the past, which I propose to give in as few words as possible. Nearly a quarter of a century ago, I was passing from St. Petersburg to Berlin by way of Finland and the Baltic. During the voyage there was a terrific storm, and the vessel was lost with all on board except two—a young sailor and myself. It is only necessary here to state that I owed my life to his direct interposition. The disaster occurred off the coast near Colberg, to which city we were taken, and from thence my young friend accompanied me to my home in Berlin. I had a daughter Isabelle, an only child—beautiful, accomplished and very dear to me. I was not blind to the result that would follow this close intimacy. I rather desired it, being pleased with the youth, and the longer the acquaintance the better I was satisfied. They were married; and being wealthy, I gave my daughter a liberal endowment, sufficient to maintain them in elegance and ease, with the understanding that he should abandon his sailor-life.

“Unknown to me, my daughter had had a previous suitor, named Lendorf, whom she once rejected, and he left the country. About the time of her marriage this Lendorf returned, and through the crafty deceit of a plotting villain, succeeded in seducing her from her nuptial vows. The guilty pair fled, pursued by the outraged husband, and for twenty years I could gain no

information of them. My wife died during the first twelve months of her sorrow, and I immediately afterward entered a monastery in Berlin.

“At the end of this period of doubt and uncertainty, of pain and mortification, I received a letter from my daughter, whom I had long supposed dead, giving full particulars where she could be found, and urging me to make all haste in coming to her. I obeyed the summons at once, came to Madrid and found my child. From what she has told me I have gathered these additional facts, some of which have been substantiated by my own experience since reaching here. The man with whom my daughter eloped was not alone in the operation. He had an associate, named Ishmael, a very bad character, and together they succeeded in getting possession of all the money I gave my child. This seems to have been the main object in the movement. They came here and she stopped at a hotel accompanied by Ishmael, where an infant was born—a legitimate offspring of her marriage—which they at once deserted.”

Rachael and Mr. Wahlstadt had been sitting, but now rose quickly to their feet, and he inquired:

“How!—What—what is this you say? Repeat it. A child left at a hotel? How long ago?”

Rachael dropped back into her chair, her eyes wandered from one to the other, and she listened with intense earnestness.

“Prepare yourselves for a great surprise,” resumed the monk; “but let me finish my narrative. The husband had followed them to this city. They learned of his presence and took immediate steps to get rid of him. They succeeded in bringing him into their power through an accomplice, who gave him a drug that rendered him temporarily insane. Ishmael then took him to the asylum, and representing himself as the maniac’s brother, effected his imprisonment. By a judicious application of the drug a foundation was laid for his permanent retention. Not yet sufficiently steeped in crime to cause his murder, this as the next best course was adopted, and when they would have effectually removed him it was difficult to be accomplished. To the deluded woman, they represented that he had followed them, but was killed in a quarrel. Then, turning upon her, they threatened her with instant death, if she told or even showed a disposition to disclose anything connected with their movements; and settling in the outskirts of this city soon gathered around them a crowd of vicious, desperate characters. Broken-hearted by the distress she had brought upon herself, compelled to work as menial, and yet dare not say aught in the extenuation of her rights, she led a wretched existence—praying constantly that no one with whom she formerly associated, might find her in her fallen condition. For nearly eighteen years she was kept in ignorance of her child. She had been told it was dead, having died from the effects of the opiate administered when they deserted it. One night very late, when she came in from her garden —on which she had bestowed all her affections, and where her whim was gratified by non-interference—she overheard Ishmael and Lendorf with an accomplice arranging a plan, in which the accomplice was to assume a profession, mix freely in society and marry a young woman; after which to murder her guardian, a very rich man, whose property she would inherit, then poison her. This would give them the property, when they proposed to leave for the United States. In that conversation she learned that this young woman was her daughter; that she had been adopted by a very wealthy merchant, and was his only heir. With a view to learning still more, she effected a plan by which she could overhear them in their secret meetings, and here

she learned that not only her child was living but her husband also. This knowledge created a new life in her, and watching an opportunity she sent a letter to the office addressed to me in Berlin, in hopes, if alive, I would get it and come to her assistance. I received the note, came, and two weeks of labor has revealed the details of the villainous plot. These men you have arrested are Ishmael and Lendorf, known here as old gray-bearded Hensch and Ollendorf. I charge them with murder, highway robbery, burglary and false imprisonment.” During this long explanation there was but one interruption, and every word had been listened to with the utmost interest.

“What have these intimations of a child, its adoption and marriage to do with me? What have they to do with Rachael?” asked Wahlstadt, puzzled and bewildered. “Are we the parties to whom you have alluded? The suspense is terrible.”

“You are,” answered the monk. “She is that woman’s child.”

“Who? What?” interposed Rachael, starting to her feet again, but falling back quickly, trembling between fear and hope. “[] Mother! she—who is my mother? Tell me,” she continued, “Hae I a mother? If so, where is she?”

The strange woman crossed the floor with an unsteady step, and approaching Rachael, dropped on her knees, pleading:

“My child, can you forgive me?”

Rachael gazed at her an instant, then at Mr. Wahlstadt and the monk, tears coursing down her cheeks. “Is it true? Is this woman my mother? Do not torture me. Is she my mother?”

“I am your mother, child,” answered the woman throwing back her thick veil. “Could you ever forgive me?”

“Forgive you—my mother? How cruel to ask. Would I not forgive her? O, is this true!” and she fell upon the woman’s neck sobbing convulsively

With a sudden bound, one of the prisoners sprang forward, and raising his manacled hands, aimed a terrific blow at the head of the woman on whose bosom Rachael lay half-unconscious. As a flash of light, so was the motion of the man who escorted her into the room. Springing upon the assassin, he clutched him by the throat, and hurled him away with such force as sent him heavily against the opposite wall.

“Fiend!” he hissed, towering upward until his herculean proportions were fully displayed, and turning a withering scowl upon the baffled culprit, “would you rob me of her a second time? Get you from my sight, base dog! lest I forget myself and cheat the executioner of his labor. Away, tempt me not beyond what I can endure.”

By this time the offender had been more securely ironed, when Mr. Wahlstadt said:

“Remove the prisoners from the room and guard them well, that they may not escape.”

The order was promptly obeyed, when the woman struggled to her feet and assisting Rachael to rise, said:

“My dear, dear daughter, this is your father. Dear William, this is our child”; and the strong man folding his arms about the two drew them to his heaving breast, hot rapid tears falling upon their faces.

“The father and mother,” remarked the monk, advancing a few steps, “have reason to be very thankful to you, Mr. Wahlstadt—”

“Who?” interrupted the man, starting up from his bowed position. “Who is Wahlstadt? That was my name once. I changed it to Wahl because it was shorter. Did you ever live in America?”

“I was born there,” answered Mr. Wahlstadt, eyeing the questioner closely.

“In New York?”

“Yes.”

“Did you have a brother William?”

“I did. He went on a whaling voyage and was never heard of afterward.”

“Great God!” he exclaimed quickly. “You are my brother! I am William; and it was you, Otto, who acted the part of a good father to our poor child during my great sorrow and misfortune!”

The scene which followed these revelations can be drawn from imagination, and our story is done. It only remains for us to say that the saloon was searched, the body of Berolzheimer found, and Ishmael and Lendorf ultimately executed for the murder. Otto divided his property, giving a large share of it to his brother, and the monk settled a new endowment upon his daughter – now a poor, broken-hearted woman, to whom no kindness would effect more than a momentary respite from that deep dejection, which long years of suffering had made a part of her nature.

“I have sinned past forgiveness,” she would say; and then her husband would clasp her to his heart with—

“Let the dead past be forever buried, Isabelle. We are together now, and our child is even more accomplished, possibly, than we could have made her— why not be happy?”

Rachael was infinitely happy. She wore the diamond set, but not as a bride; and in company with her father and mother and Uncle Otto, enjoyed the pleasure of a general tour through Europe extending into the United States, where they visited the graves of her grandparents in New York, and then returned to Madrid. Here the monk came and made it his home with them, devoting his

life to encouraging and sustaining those principles of righteousness and truth, which alone brings peace and quiet to the mind.

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