



**The Complete Tales and Stories  
of Edgar Allan Poe**

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# The Bargain Lost (1831)

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“The heathen philosopher, when he had a mind to eat a grape, would open his lips when he put it into his mouth, meaning thereby that grapes were made to eat and lips to open.” — *As You Like It*.

At Venice, in the year —, in the street —, lived Pedro Garcia, a metaphysician. — With regard to date and residence, circumstances of a private and sacred nature forbid me to be more explicit. In all mental qualifications our hero was gigantic. Moreover, in bodily circumference, he had no cause of complaint; but, in right ascension, four feet five was the philosopher’s *ne plus ultra*.

Now Pedro was descended from a noble Florentine family; yet it was with little concern that, in certain boilings of the pot revolutionary, (during which, saith Machiavelli, the scum always comes uppermost) he beheld his large estates silently slipping through his fingers. Indeed, from his earliest youth, had Pedro Garcia been addicted to the most desperate abstrusities. He had studied at Padua, at Milan, at Gottingen. It is he — but let this go no farther — it is he to whom Kant is mainly indebted for his metaphysics. I have MSS. in my possession sufficient to establish what I say.

The doctrines of our friend were not very generally understood, although by no means difficult of comprehension. He was not, it is true, a Platonist — nor strictly an Aristotelian — nor did he, with Leibnitz, reconcile things irreconcilable. He was, emphatically, a Pedronist. He was Ionic and Italic. He reasoned *a priori* and *a posteriori*. His ideas were innate, or otherwise. He believed in George

of Trebizond, he believed in Bossarion. Of his other propensities little is recorded. It is said that he preferred Catullus to Homer, and Sauterne to Medoc.

Yet even this comprehensive philosophy proved an insufficient protection against the shafts of calumny and malice. At Venice wicked men were not wanting to hint that the doctrines of certain people evinced neither the purity of the Academy nor the depth of the Lyceum.

The great bell of St. Mark's had already sounded midnight, yet our hero was not in bed. He sat, alone, in the little chamber, his study, redeemed from the filth and bustle of the day. I hold minute attention to trifles unworthy the dignity of serious narrative; otherwise I might here, following the example of the novelist, dilate upon the subject of habiliment, and other mere matters of the outward man. I might say that the hair of our patrician was worn short, combed smoothly over his forehead, and surmounted with a violet-coloured, conical cap with tassels — that his green fustian jerkin was not after the fashion of those worn by the nobility of Venice at that day — that the sleeves were more deeply slashed than the reigning costume permitted — that the slashes were faced — not, as usual in that barbarous period, with parti-coloured silk, but with the beautiful red leather of Morocco — that his stiletto was a specimen piece of workmanship from the factory of Pan Ispan, of Damascus, attaghan-maker to the Effendi — that his slippers were of a bright purple, curiously filagreed, and might have been made in Japan, but for the exquisite pointing of the toes, and the fact that Baptista, the Spanish cobbler on the Rialto, opined to the contrary — that his breeches were of the white, satin-like cloth called 'celeste' — that his sky-blue cloak, or wrapper, resembling, in form, the anomaly, ycleped, a morning-gown, floated, like a mist, upon his shoulders, richly bestudded with crimson and yellow patches — and that his tout ensemble gave rise to

the remarkable words of Benevenuta, the improvisatrice, to wit: — “That the paroquet, upon a certain cathedral, resembled nothing so much as Pedro, the metaphysician.” All this and more — had I been a novelist — might I have detailed. But, thanks to St. Urfino, whatever I am, that am I not. Therefore upon all these subjects I say ‘mum.’

The chamber in which sat our hero was of singular beauty. The floor was covered with a mat (for it was the summer season) of the most brilliant and glossy pale yellow, formed from the rare and valuable reeds of Siam. All around from the ceiling fell tapestry-hangings of the richest crimson velvet. The ceiling, itself, was of brown and highly-polished oak, vaulted, carved, and fretted, until all its innumerable angles were rounded into a dense mass of shadow, from whose gloomy depth, by a slender golden chain with very long links, swung a fantastic Arabesque lamp of solid silver. A black, heavy, and curiously-pannelled door, opening inwardly, was closed, after the fashion of that day, with a chased brazen bar; while a single, huge, bowed, and trelliced window glared out upon the waters of the Adriatic.

The minor furniture of the room consisted, principally, of a profusion of elegantly-bound and illuminated books scattered here and there in classical disorder, on the tables, on the floor, and on two or three luxurious settees, having every appearance of the ottomans of Mahomet.

It was a dark and stormy night. The rain fell in cataracts; and drowsy citizens started, from dreams of the deluge, to gaze upon the boisterous sea, which foamed and bellowed for admittance into the proud towers and marble palaces. Who would have thought of passions so fierce in that calm water that slumbers all day long? At a slight alabaster stand, trembling beneath the ponderous tomes which it supported, sat the hero of our story.

He heeded not the clanging of the half extinguished lamp, as it rattled overhead in the currents of air; and the roar of the waters he heard not. A voluminous MSS.,



intended for publication on the morrow, was receiving the last touches of its author. I am sorry that our record has extracted nothing from this valuable work, which has, undoubtedly, perished in some ecclesiastical intrigue. Its title, however, I find to be "A complete exposition of things not to be exposed;" and its motto a line from Pulci, thus happily translated by a modern satirist: —

Brethren, I come from lands afar  
To show you all what fools you are.

As the storm grew stronger and more terrible, Pedro, totally absorbed in his occupation, could not perceive that, while his left palm rested upon a volume in sable binding, the blue lightning fluttered among its leaves with most portentous velocity.

"I am in no hurry, Signor Pedro," whispered a soft voice in the apartment.

"The devil!" ejaculated our hero, starting from his seat, upsetting the alabaster stand, and looking around him in astonishment.

"Very true!" calmly replied the voice.

"Very true! — What is very true? — How came you here?" vociferated the metaphysician, as his eye fell upon a man with singularly thin features, who lay, at full length, upon an ottoman in a corner of the chamber.

"I was saying," continued the figure, without replying to Pedro's interrogatories, "I was saying that I am in no hurry — that the business upon which I took the liberty of calling is of minor importance — that I can wait until you have finished your Exposition."

"My Exposition! How do you know I am writing an Exposition? Good God!"

"Hush!" replied the figure in a shrill undertone; and, arising from the settee, he made a step towards our hero,

while the arabesque lamp suddenly ceased its convulsive swinging and became motionless.

The philosopher's amazement did not prevent a narrow scrutiny of the stranger's dress and appearance. The outlines of a figure much above the common standard were blurred and rendered indefinite by the huge folds of a black Roman toga. Above his left ear he carried, after the fashion of a modern scribe, an instrument resembling the stylus of the ancients; and, from his left arm, depended a crimson bag of a material totally unknown to our hero, being luminous. There was another article of habiliment equally a mystery to the patrician. The toga, being left open at the throat, displayed the neatly folded cravat and starched shirt-collar of 1832. All these things excited little of Pedro's attention; for his antiquarian eye had fallen upon the sandals of the intruder, and he recognised therein the exact pattern of those worn before the flood, as given, with minute accuracy, in the Ptolemaiad of the Rabbi Vathek.

I find, upon looking over certain archives in Venice, that "Garcia, the metaphysician, was an exceedingly little, yet pugnacious man." Accordingly, when his visitor drew a chair close by the huge bowed window that looked out upon the sea, our hero silently followed his example.

"A clever book that of yours, Pedro," said the stranger, tapping our friend, knowingly, upon the shoulder.

Pedro stared.

"It is a work after my own heart," continued the former, "I suppose you knew Confucius."

Our hero's amazement redoubled.

A sad set of fools now-a-days I tell you. Philosophy is a mere trumpery. O, nous estin autos, as some one very justly observed, meaning 'auyos.' But, to tell the truth, it was very little better at any time. The fact is, Garcia," here the stranger's voice dropped to a whisper, "men know nothing about these matters. Your doctrines, however, come nearer to the point than any with which I am acquainted. I like your

doctrines, Signor Pedro, and have come a long way to tell you so."

The philosopher's eyes sparkled, and he fumbled, in great haste, among the rubbish on the floor, for his overthrown MSS. Having found it, he took, from an ivory escrutoire, a flask of the delightful wine of Sauterne, and placing them, with the sable-bound volume, on the alabaster stand, wheeled it before the visitor, and reseated himself at his elbow.

Here, if the reader should wish to know why our hero troubled himself to place upon the stand any thing so ominous as that book in sable binding, I reply that Pedro Garcia was, by no means, a fool; no man ever accused him of being a fool. He had, accordingly, very soon arrived at the conclusion that his knowing friend was neither more nor less than his August and Satanic Majesty. Now, although persons of greater height have been frightened at less serious circumstances, and although under certain dispensations of Providence (such as the visitation of a spider, a rat, or a physician) Pedro did not always evince the philosopher, yet fear of the devil never once entered his imagination. — To tell the truth, he was rather gratified, than otherwise, at a visit from a gentleman whom he so highly respected. He flattered himself with spending an agreeable hour; and it was with the air of being 'up to snuff' that he accommodated his visitor with a volume best suited to his acquirements and literary taste.

"But I must say," continued the stranger, without noticing Pedro's arrangements, "I must say that, upon some points, you are wrong, my friend, wrong; totally out, as that rogue Sanconiathon used to say — ha! ha! ha! — poor Sanconiathon!"

"Pray, sir, how old — may — you — call yourself?" inquired the metaphysician, with a cut of his eye.

"Old? Sir? Eh? Oh! a mere trifle. As I was saying, you have certain very outre notions in that book of yours. Now,

what do you mean by all that humbug about the soul? Pray, sir, what is the soul?"

"The soul," replied Pedro, referring to his MSS., "is undoubtedly —"

"No, sir!"

"Indubitably —"

"No, sir!"

"Evidently —"

"No, sir!"

"And beyond all question —"

"No, sir! — the soul is no such thing."

"Then what is it?"

"That is neither here nor there, Signor Pedro," replied the stranger, musing, "I have tasted — that is I mean I have known some very bad souls and some pretty good ones."

Here the stranger licked his lips; and having, unconsciously, let fall his hand upon the sable volume, was seized with a violent fit of sneezing upon which our hero, reaching his common-place book, inserted the follow memorandum: —

N. B. — *Divorum inferorum cachinnatio sternutamentis mortalium verisimillima est.*

The stranger continued. "There was the soul of Cratinus — passable! Aristophanes — racy! Plato — exquisite! Not your Plato, but Plato the comic poet — your Plato would have turned the stomach of Cerberus — faugh! Then — let me see — there were Catullus, and Naso, and Plautus, and Quinty — dear Quinty, as I called him when he sung a 'seculare' for my amusement, while I toasted him good-humouredly on a fork. But they want flavour, these Romans, one fat Greek is worth a dozen of them, and, besides, will keep, which cannot be said of a Quirite. — Terence, however, was an exception — firm as an Esquimaux, and juicy as a German — the very recollection of the dog makes my mouth water. — Let us taste your Sauterne."

Our hero had, by this time, made up his mind to the 'nil admirari,' and merely filled his visitor's glass. He was, however, conscious of a strange sound in the chamber, like the wagging of a tail, but of this he took no notice, simply kicking the large water-dog that lay asleep under his chair, and requesting him to be quiet. — The stranger proceeded.

"But, if I have a penchant, Signor Pedro, if I have a penchant, it is for a philosopher. Yet let me tell you, sir, it is not every dev — I mean every gentleman who knows how to choose a philosopher. Long ones are not good, and the best, if not very carefully shelled, are apt to be a little rancid on account of the gall.

"Shelled?"

"I mean taken out of the body."

"What do you think of a physician?"

"*Don't* mention them," here the stranger retched violently, "ugh! I never tried but one, that rascal — (ugh!) — Hippocrates. Smelt of asafetida — (ugh! ugh!) — took particular pains with the villain too — caught a wretched cold washing him in the Styx — and, after all, he gave me the cholera morbus."

"The wretch! the abortion of a pill box!" ejaculated Pedro, dropping a tear, and, reaching another bottle of Sauterne, he swallowed three bumpers in rapid succession. The stranger followed his example.

"After all, Signor Pedro," said he, "if a dev — if a gentleman wishes to live, he must have more talents than one or two, and, with us, a fat face is an evidence of diplomacy."

"How so?"

"Why we are, sometimes, exceedingly pushed for provisions. You ought to know that, in a climate so sultry as mine, it is frequently impossible to keep a soul alive for more than two or three hours; and after death, unless pickled immediately, (and a pickled spirit is not good) they will smell — you understand — eh? Putrefaction is always to

be apprehended when the spirits are consigned to us in the usual way."

"Good God! how do you manage?"

Here the Arabesque lamp commenced swinging with redoubled violence, and the stranger half started from his seat; however, with a slight sigh, he recovered his composure; merely saying to our hero, in a low tone: — "I tell you what, Pedro Garcia, once for all, we must have no more swearing."

Pedro swallowed another bumper, and his visitor continued.

"Why there are several ways of managing. — The most of us starve. Some put up with the pickle. For my part, I purchase my spirits *vivente corpore*, in which case I find they keep very well."

"But the body, my dear sir, the body!" vociferated the philosopher, for the wine had gotten a little into his head. Here he reached another bottle of Sauterne.

"The body! — well, what of the body? oh! ah! I perceive — why the body is not all affected by the transaction. I have made innumerable purchases of the kind in my day, and the parties never experience any inconvenience. There was Cain, and Nimrod, and Nero, and Caligula, and Dionysius, and Pisistratus, and — and the Jew — and — and a thousand others, all very good men in their way, who never knew what a soul was during the latter part of their lives. Yet these men adorned society. Why isn't there V——, now? — whom you know as well as I — is he not in full possession of his faculties, mental and corporeal? Who writes a keener epigram? Who reasons more wittily? Who — but I have his agreement in my pocket book." Thus saying, he drew, from the luminous bag, a book with clasps of cornelian, and, from the book, a bundle of papers, upon some of which Pedro caught a glimpse of the letters MACHIA, MAZA, RICHEL, and the words DOMITIAN and ELIZABETH. From these papers he

selected a narrow slip of parchment, and, from it, read aloud the following words: —

In consideration of certain mental endowments, which it would be unnecessary to specify, and in farther consideration of the sum of one thousand Louis d'or, I, being aged one year and one month, do, hereby, from this date, make over, to the bearer of this bond, all my right, title, and appurtenance in the shadow called 'my soul.'

Done at Paris, this — day of —, in the year of our Lord —,  
FRANCOIS MARIE AROUET.

"A clever fellow that," resumed the stranger, "but he was wrong about the shadow — the soul a shadow! — no such nonsense, Signor Pedro. — Only think of a fricaseed shadow!"

"Only think of a fricaseed s — h — a — d — o — w!" echoed our hero, whose faculties were becoming gloriously illuminated, "now, damme," continued he, "Mr. — humph! — damme! (hiccup) if I would have been such a nincompoop. My soul, Mr. — humph! — yes, sir, my soul."

"Your soul, Signor Pedro?"

"Yes, sir, *my* soul is — is — is — no shadow, damme!"

"I should be sorry to suppose, Signor Pedro —"

"Yes, sir, *my* soul is peculiarly calculated for — for — a stew, damme!"

"Ha!"

"A ragout —"

"Eh?"

"A fricasee —"

"Ah!"

"Or (hiccup) a cotelette — and I'll let you have it a bargain."

"Couldn't think of such a thing," said the stranger, calmly, at the same time arising from his seat.

Pedro stared.

"Am supplied at present —"

“Eh?”

“Have no cash on hand —”

“What?”

“Very ungentlemanly in me —”

“Humph!”

“To take advantage of —”

“Sir!”

“Your peculiar situation.”

Here the stranger bowed and withdrew, in what manner our philosopher could not exactly ascertain; but, in a well concerted effort to discharge a bottle at the scoundrel, the slender chain was severed that hung from the ceiling, and the metaphysician prostrated by the downfall of the lamp.

The End



# Loss of Breath (1831)

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*O Breathe not, etc.*  
*Moore's Melodies*

THE MOST notorious ill-fortune must in the end yield to the untiring courage of philosophy—as the most stubborn city to the ceaseless vigilance of an enemy. Shalmanezzer, as we have it in holy writings, lay three years before Samaria; yet it fell. Sardanapalus—see Diodorus—maintained himself seven in Nineveh; but to no purpose. Troy expired at the close of the second lustrum; and Azoth, as Aristaeus declares upon his honour as a gentleman, opened at last her gates to Psammetichus, after having barred them for the fifth part of a century....

“Thou wretch!—thou vixen!—thou shrew!” said I to my wife on the morning after our wedding; “thou witch!—thou hag!—thou whippersnapper—thou sink of iniquity!—thou fiery-faced quintessence of all that is abominable!—thou—thou—” here standing upon tiptoe, seizing her by the throat, and placing my mouth close to her ear, I was preparing to launch forth a new and more decided epithet of opprobrium, which should not fail, if ejaculated, to convince her of her insignificance, when to my extreme horror and astonishment I discovered that I had lost my breath.

The phrases “I am out of breath,” “I have lost my breath,” etc., are often enough repeated in common conversation; but it had never occurred to me that the terrible accident of which I speak could bona fide and

actually happen! Imagine—that is if you have a fanciful turn—  
imagine, I say, my wonder—my consternation—my despair!

There is a good genius, however, which has never entirely deserted me. In my most ungovernable moods I still retain a sense of propriety, et le chemin des passions me conduit—as Lord Edouard in the “Julie” says it did him—a la philosophie veritable.

Although I could not at first precisely ascertain to what degree the occurrence had affected me, I determined at all events to conceal the matter from my wife, until further experience should discover to me the extent of this my unheard of calamity. Altering my countenance, therefore, in a moment, from its bepuffed and distorted appearance, to an expression of arch and coquettish benignity, I gave my lady a pat on the one cheek, and a kiss on the other, and without saying one syllable (Furies! I could not), left her astonished at my drollery, as I pirouetted out of the room in a Pas de Zephyr.

Behold me then safely ensconced in my private boudoir, a fearful instance of the ill consequences attending upon irascibility—alive, with the qualifications of the dead—dead, with the propensities of the living—an anomaly on the face of the earth—being very calm, yet breathless.

Yes! breathless. I am serious in asserting that my breath was entirely gone. I could not have stirred with it a feather if my life had been at issue, or sullied even the delicacy of a mirror. Hard fate!—yet there was some alleviation to the first overwhelming paroxysm of my sorrow. I found, upon trial, that the powers of utterance which, upon my inability to proceed in the conversation with my wife, I then concluded to be totally destroyed, were in fact only partially impeded, and I discovered that had I, at that interesting crisis, dropped my voice to a singularly deep guttural, I might still have continued to her the communication of my sentiments; this pitch of voice (the guttural) depending, I find, not upon

the current of the breath, but upon a certain spasmodic action of the muscles of the throat.

Throwing myself upon a chair, I remained for some time absorbed in meditation. My reflections, be sure, were of no consolatory kind. A thousand vague and lachrymatory fancies took possession of my soul-and even the idea of suicide flitted across my brain; but it is a trait in the perversity of human nature to reject the obvious and the ready, for the far-distant and equivocal. Thus I shuddered at self-murder as the most decided of atrocities while the tabby cat purred strenuously upon the rug, and the very water dog wheezed assiduously under the table, each taking to itself much merit for the strength of its lungs, and all obviously done in derision of my own pulmonary incapacity.

Oppressed with a tumult of vague hopes and fears, I at length heard the footsteps of my wife descending the staircase. Being now assured of her absence, I returned with a palpitating heart to the scene of my disaster.

Carefully locking the door on the inside, I commenced a vigorous search. It was possible, I thought, that, concealed in some obscure corner, or lurking in some closet or drawer, might be found the lost object of my inquiry. It might have a vapory-it might even have a tangible form. Most philosophers, upon many points of philosophy, are still very unphilosophical. William Godwin, however, says in his "Mandeville," that "invisible things are the only realities," and this, all will allow, is a case in point. I would have the judicious reader pause before accusing such asseverations of an undue quantum of absurdity. Anaxagoras, it will be remembered, maintained that snow is black, and this I have since found to be the case.

Long and earnestly did I continue the investigation: but the contemptible reward of my industry and perseverance proved to be only a set of false teeth, two pair of hips, an eye, and a bundle of billets-doux from Mr. Windenough to my wife. I might as well here observe that this confirmation

of my lady's partiality for Mr. W. occasioned me little uneasiness. That Mrs. Lackobreath should admire anything so dissimilar to myself was a natural and necessary evil. I am, it is well known, of a robust and corpulent appearance, and at the same time somewhat diminutive in stature. What wonder, then, that the lath-like tenuity of my acquaintance, and his altitude, which has grown into a proverb, should have met with all due estimation in the eyes of Mrs. Lackobreath. But to return.

My exertions, as I have before said, proved fruitless. Closet after closet-drawer after drawer-corner after corner-were scrutinized to no purpose. At one time, however, I thought myself sure of my prize, having, in rummaging a dressing-case, accidentally demolished a bottle of Grandjean's Oil of Archangels-which, as an agreeable perfume, I here take the liberty of recommending.

With a heavy heart I returned to my boudoir-there to ponder upon some method of eluding my wife's penetration, until I could make arrangements prior to my leaving the country, for to this I had already made up my mind. In a foreign climate, being unknown, I might, with some probability of success, endeavor to conceal my unhappy calamity-a calamity calculated, even more than beggary, to estrange the affections of the multitude, and to draw down upon the wretch the well-merited indignation of the virtuous and the happy. I was not long in hesitation. Being naturally quick, I committed to memory the entire tragedy of "Metamora." I had the good fortune to recollect that in the accentuation of this drama, or at least of such portion of it as is allotted to the hero, the tones of voice in which I found myself deficient were altogether unnecessary, and the deep guttural was expected to reign monotonously throughout.

I practised for some time by the borders of a well frequented marsh;-herein, however, having no reference to a similar proceeding of Demosthenes, but from a design peculiarly and conscientiously my own. Thus armed at all

points, I determined to make my wife believe that I was suddenly smitten with a passion for the stage. In this, I succeeded to a miracle; and to every question or suggestion found myself at liberty to reply in my most frog-like and sepulchral tones with some passage from the tragedy—any portion of which, as I soon took great pleasure in observing, would apply equally well to any particular subject. It is not to be supposed, however, that in the delivery of such passages I was found at all deficient in the looking asquint—the showing my teeth—the working my knees—the shuffling my feet—or in any of those unmentionable graces which are now justly considered the characteristics of a popular performer. To be sure they spoke of confining me in a strait-jacket—but, good God! they never suspected me of having lost my breath.

Having at length put my affairs in order, I took my seat very early one morning in the mail stage for —, giving it to be understood, among my acquaintances, that business of the last importance required my immediate personal attendance in that city.

The coach was crammed to repletion; but in the uncertain twilight the features of my companions could not be distinguished. Without making any effectual resistance, I suffered myself to be placed between two gentlemen of colossal dimensions; while a third, of a size larger, requesting pardon for the liberty he was about to take, threw himself upon my body at full length, and falling asleep in an instant, drowned all my guttural ejaculations for relief, in a snore which would have put to blush the roarings of the bull of Phalaris. Happily the state of my respiratory faculties rendered suffocation an accident entirely out of the question.

As, however, the day broke more distinctly in our approach to the outskirts of the city, my tormentor, arising and adjusting his shirt-collar, thanked me in a very friendly manner for my civility. Seeing that I remained motionless

(all my limbs were dislocated and my head twisted on one side), his apprehensions began to be excited; and arousing the rest of the passengers, he communicated, in a very decided manner, his opinion that a dead man had been palmed upon them during the night for a living and responsible fellow-traveller; here giving me a thump on the right eye, by way of demonstrating the truth of his suggestion.

Hereupon all, one after another (there were nine in company), believed it their duty to pull me by the ear. A young practising physician, too, having applied a pocket-mirror to my mouth, and found me without breath, the assertion of my persecutor was pronounced a true bill; and the whole party expressed a determination to endure tamely no such impositions for the future, and to proceed no farther with any such carcasses for the present.

I was here, accordingly, thrown out at the sign of the "Crow" (by which tavern the coach happened to be passing), without meeting with any farther accident than the breaking of both my arms, under the left hind wheel of the vehicle. I must besides do the driver the justice to state that he did not forget to throw after me the largest of my trunks, which, unfortunately falling on my head, fractured my skull in a manner at once interesting and extraordinary.

The landlord of the "Crow," who is a hospitable man, finding that my trunk contained sufficient to indemnify him for any little trouble he might take in my behalf, sent forthwith for a surgeon of his acquaintance, and delivered me to his care with a bill and receipt for ten dollars.

The purchaser took me to his apartments and commenced operations immediately. Having cut off my ears, however, he discovered signs of animation. He now rang the bell, and sent for a neighboring apothecary with whom to consult in the emergency. In case of his suspicions with regard to my existence proving ultimately correct, he,

in the meantime, made an incision in my stomach, and removed several of my viscera for private dissection.

The apothecary had an idea that I was actually dead. This idea I endeavored to confute, kicking and plunging with all my might, and making the most furious contortions—for the operations of the surgeon had, in a measure, restored me to the possession of my faculties. All, however, was attributed to the effects of a new galvanic battery, wherewith the apothecary, who is really a man of information, performed several curious experiments, in which, from my personal share in their fulfillment, I could not help feeling deeply interested. It was a course of mortification to me, nevertheless, that although I made several attempts at conversation, my powers of speech were so entirely in abeyance, that I could not even open my mouth; much less, then, make reply to some ingenious but fanciful theories of which, under other circumstances, my minute acquaintance with the Hippocratic pathology would have afforded me a ready confutation.

Not being able to arrive at a conclusion, the practitioners remanded me for farther examination. I was taken up into a garret; and the surgeon's lady having accommodated me with drawers and stockings, the surgeon himself fastened my hands, and tied up my jaws with a pocket-handkerchief—then bolted the door on the outside as he hurried to his dinner, leaving me alone to silence and to meditation.

I now discovered to my extreme delight that I could have spoken had not my mouth been tied up with the pocket-handkerchief. Consoling myself with this reflection, I was mentally repeating some passages of the "Omnipresence of the Deity," as is my custom before resigning myself to sleep, when two cats, of a greedy and vituperative turn, entering at a hole in the wall, leaped up with a flourish a la Catalani, and alighting opposite one another on my visage, betook themselves to indecorous contention for the paltry consideration of my nose.

But, as the loss of his ears proved the means of elevating to the throne of Cyrus, the Magian or Mige-Gush of Persia, and as the cutting off his nose gave Zopyrus possession of Babylon, so the loss of a few ounces of my countenance proved the salvation of my body. Aroused by the pain, and burning with indignation, I burst, at a single effort, the fastenings and the bandage. Stalking across the room I cast a glance of contempt at the belligerents, and throwing open the sash to their extreme horror and disappointment, precipitated myself, very dexterously, from the window. This moment passing from the city jail to the scaffold erected for his execution in the suburbs. His extreme infirmity and long continued ill health had obtained him the privilege of remaining unmanacled; and habited in his gallows costume—one very similar to my own,—he lay at full length in the bottom of the hangman's cart (which happened to be under the windows of the surgeon at the moment of my precipitation) without any other guard than the driver, who was asleep, and two recruits of the sixth infantry, who were drunk.

As ill-luck would have it, I alit upon my feet within the vehicle. immediately, he bolted out behind, and turning down an alley, was out of sight in the twinkling of an eye. The recruits, aroused by the bustle, could not exactly comprehend the merits of the transaction. Seeing, however, a man, the precise counterpart of the felon, standing upright in the cart before their eyes, they were of (so they expressed themselves,) and, having communicated this opinion to one another, they took each a dram, and then knocked me down with the butt-ends of their muskets.

It was not long ere we arrived at the place of destination. Of course nothing could be said in my defence. Hanging was my inevitable fate. I resigned myself thereto with a feeling half stupid, half acrimonious. Being little of a cynic, I had all the sentiments of a dog. The hangman, however, adjusted the noose about my neck. The drop fell.



I forbear to depict my sensations upon the gallows; although here, undoubtedly, I could speak to the point, and it is a topic upon which nothing has been well said. In fact, to write upon such a theme it is necessary to have been hanged. Every author should confine himself to matters of experience. Thus Mark Antony composed a treatise upon getting drunk.

I may just mention, however, that die I did not. My body was, but I had no breath to be, suspended; and but for the knot under my left ear (which had the feel of a military stock) I dare say that I should have experienced very little inconvenience. As for the jerk given to my neck upon the falling of the drop, it merely proved a corrective to the twist afforded me by the fat gentleman in the coach.

For good reasons, however, I did my best to give the crowd the worth of their trouble. My convulsions were said to be extraordinary. My spasms it would have been difficult to beat. The populace encored. Several gentlemen swooned; and a multitude of ladies were carried home in hysterics. Pinxit availed himself of the opportunity to retouch, from a sketch taken upon the spot, his admirable painting of the “Marsyas flayed alive.”

When I had afforded sufficient amusement, it was thought proper to remove my body from the gallows;—this the more especially as the real culprit had in the meantime been retaken and recognized, a fact which I was so unlucky as not to know.

Much sympathy was, of course, exercised in my behalf, and as no one made claim to my corpse, it was ordered that I should be interred in a public vault.

Here, after due interval, I was deposited. The sexton departed, and I was left alone. A line of Marston’s “Malcontent”-

Death’s a good fellow and keeps open house—  
struck me at that moment as a palpable lie.

I knocked off, however, the lid of my coffin, and stepped out. The place was dreadfully dreary and damp, and I became troubled with ennui. By way of amusement, I felt my way among the numerous coffins ranged in order around. I lifted them down, one by one, and breaking open their lids, busied myself in speculations about the mortality within.

"This," I soliloquized, tumbling over a carcass, puffy, bloated, and rotund—"this has been, no doubt, in every sense of the word, an unhappy—an unfortunate man. It has been his terrible lot not to walk but to waddle—to pass through life not like a human being, but like an elephant—not like a man, but like a rhinoceros.

"His attempts at getting on have been mere abortions, and his circumgyratory proceedings a palpable failure. Taking a step forward, it has been his misfortune to take two toward the right, and three toward the left. His studies have been confined to the poetry of Crabbe. He can have no idea of the wonder of a pirouette. To him a pas de papillon has been an abstract conception. He has never ascended the summit of a hill. He has never viewed from any steeple the glories of a metropolis. Heat has been his mortal enemy. In the dog-days his days have been the days of a dog. Therein, he has dreamed of flames and suffocation—of mountains upon mountains—of Pelion upon Ossa. He was short of breath—to say all in a word, he was short of breath. He thought it extravagant to play upon wind instruments. He was the inventor of self-moving fans, wind-sails, and ventilators. He patronized Du Pont the bellows-maker, and he died miserably in attempting to smoke a cigar. His was a case in which I feel a deep interest—a lot in which I sincerely sympathize.

"But here,"—said I—"here"—and I dragged spitefully from its receptacle a gaunt, tall and peculiar-looking form, whose remarkable appearance struck me with a sense of unwelcome familiarity—"here is a wretch entitled to no

earthly commiseration." Thus saying, in order to obtain a more distinct view of my subject, I applied my thumb and forefinger to its nose, and causing it to assume a sitting position upon the ground, held it thus, at the length of my arm, while I continued my soliloquy.

-“Entitled,” I repeated, “to no earthly commiseration. Who indeed would think of compassioning a shadow? Besides, has he not had his full share of the blessings of mortality? He was the originator of tall monuments–shot-towers–lightning-rods–Lombardy poplars. His treatise upon “Shades and Shadows” has immortalized him. He edited with distinguished ability the last edition of “South on the Bones.” He went early to college and studied pneumatics. He then came home, talked eternally, and played upon the French-horn. He patronized the bagpipes. Captain Barclay, who walked against Time, would not walk against him. Windham and Allbreath were his favorite writers,–his favorite artist, Phiz. He died gloriously while inhaling gas–levique flatu corruptitur, like the fama pudicitae in Hieronymus. He was indubitably a”-

“How can you?–how-can-you?”–interrupted the object of my animadversions, gasping for breath, and tearing off, with a desperate exertion, the bandage around its jaws–“how can you, Mr. Lackobreath, be so infernally cruel as to pinch me in that manner by the nose? Did you not see how they had fastened up my mouth–and you must know–if you know any thing–how vast a superfluity of breath I have to dispose of! If you do not know, however, sit down and you shall see. In my situation it is really a great relief to be able to open ones mouth–to be able to expatiate–to be able to communicate with a person like yourself, who do not think yourself called upon at every period to interrupt the thread of a gentleman’s discourse. Interruptions are annoying and should undoubtedly be abolished–don’t you think so?–no reply, I beg you,–one person is enough to be speaking at a time.–I shall be done by and by, and then you may begin.–

How the devil sir, did you get into this place?—not a word I beseech you—been here some time myself—terrible accident!—heard of it, I suppose?—awful calamity!—walking under your windows—some short while ago—about the time you were stage-struck—horrible occurrence!—heard of “catching one’s breath,” eh?—hold your tongue I tell you!—I caught somebody else’s!—had always too much of my own—met Blab at the corner of the street—wouldn’t give me a chance for a word—couldn’t get in a syllable edgeways—attacked, consequently, with epilepsy—Blab made his escape—damn all fools!—they took me up for dead, and put me in this place—pretty doings all of them!—heard all you said about me—every word a lie—horrible!—wonderful—outrageous!—hideous!—incomprehensible!—et cetera—et cetera—et cetera—et cetera—

It is impossible to conceive my astonishment at so unexpected a discourse, or the joy with which I became gradually convinced that the breath so fortunately caught by the gentleman (whom I soon recognized as my neighbor Windenough) was, in fact, the identical expiration mislaid by myself in the conversation with my wife. Time, place, and circumstances rendered it a matter beyond question. I did not at least during the long period in which the inventor of Lombardy poplars continued to favor me with his explanations.

In this respect I was actuated by that habitual prudence which has ever been my predominating trait. I reflected that many difficulties might still lie in the path of my preservation which only extreme exertion on my part would be able to surmount. Many persons, I considered, are prone to estimate commodities in their possession—however valueless to the then proprietor—however troublesome, or distressing—in direct ratio with the advantages to be derived by others from their attainment, or by themselves from their abandonment. Might not this be the case with Mr. Windenough? In displaying anxiety for the breath of which

he was at present so willing to get rid, might I not lay myself open to the exactions of his avarice? There are scoundrels in this world, I remembered with a sigh, who will not scruple to take unfair opportunities with even a next door neighbor, and (this remark is from Epictetus) it is precisely at that time when men are most anxious to throw off the burden of their own calamities that they feel the least desirous of relieving them in others.

Upon considerations similar to these, and still retaining my grasp upon the nose of Mr. W., I accordingly thought proper to model my reply.

“Monster!” I began in a tone of the deepest indignation—“monster and double-winded idiot!—dost thou, whom for thine iniquities it has pleased heaven to accurse with a twofold respimtion—dost thou, I say, presume to address me in the familiar language of an old acquaintance?—‘I lie,’ forsooth! and ‘hold my tongue,’ to be sure!—pretty conversation indeed, to a gentleman with a single breath!—all this, too, when I have it in my power to relieve the calamity under which thou dost so justly suffer—to curtail the superfluities of thine unhappy respiration.”

Like Brutus, I paused for a reply—with which, like a tornado, Mr. Windenough immediately overwhelmed me. Protestation followed upon protestation, and apology upon apology. There were no terms with which he was unwilling to comply, and there were none of which I failed to take the fullest advantage.

Preliminaries being at length arranged, my acquaintance delivered me the respiration; for which (having carefully examined it) I gave him afterward a receipt.

I am aware that by many I shall be held to blame for speaking in a manner so cursory, of a transaction so impalpable. It will be thought that I should have entered more minutely, into the details of an occurrence by which—and this is very true—much new light might be thrown upon a highly interesting branch of physical philosophy.

To all this I am sorry that I cannot reply. A hint is the only answer which I am permitted to make. There were circumstances—but I think it much safer upon consideration to say as little as possible about an affair so delicate—so delicate, I repeat, and at the time involving the interests of a third party whose sulphurous resentment I have not the least desire, at this moment, of incurring.

We were not long after this necessary arrangement in effecting an escape from the dungeons of the sepulchre. The united strength of our resuscitated voices was soon sufficiently apparent. Scissors, the Whig editor, republished a treatise upon “the nature and origin of subterranean noises.” A reply—rejoinder—confutation—and justification—followed in the columns of a Democratic Gazette. It was not until the opening of the vault to decide the controversy, that the appearance of Mr. Windenough and myself proved both parties to have been decidedly in the wrong.

I cannot conclude these details of some very singular passages in a life at all times sufficiently eventful, without again recalling to the attention of the reader the merits of that indiscriminate philosophy which is a sure and ready shield against those shafts of calamity which can neither be seen, felt nor fully understood. It was in the spirit of this wisdom that, among the ancient Hebrews, it was believed the gates of Heaven would be inevitably opened to that sinner, or saint, who, with good lungs and implicit confidence, should vociferate the word “Amen!” It was in the spirit of this wisdom that, when a great plague raged at Athens, and every means had been in vain attempted for its removal, Epimenides, as Laertius relates, in his second book, of that philosopher, advised the erection of a shrine and temple “to the proper God.”

LYTTLETON BARRY.

The End