After Dark

Wilkie Collins

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PREFACE TO "AFTER DARK."

I have taken some pains to string together the various stories contained in this Volume on a single thread of interest, which, so far as I know, has at least the merit of not having been used before.

The pages entitled "Leah's Diary" are, however, intended to fulfill another purpose besides that of serving as the frame-work for my collection of tales. In this part of the book, and subsequently in the Prologues to the stories, it has been my object to give the reader one more glimpse at that artist-life which circumstances have afforded me peculiar opportunities of studying, and which I have already tried to represent, under another aspect, in my fiction, "Hide-and-Seek." This time I wish to ask some sympathy for the joys and sorrows of a poor traveling portrait-painter—presented from his wife's point of view in "Leah's Diary," and supposed to be briefly and simply narrated by himself in the Prologues to the stories. I have purposely kept these two portions of the book within certain limits; only giving, in the one case, as much as the wife might naturally write in her diary at intervals of household leisure; and, in the other, as much as a modest and sensible man would be likely to say about himself and about the characters he met with in his wanderings. If I have been so fortunate as to make my idea intelligible by this brief and simple mode of treatment, and if I have, at the same time, achieved the necessary object of gathering several separate stories together as neatly-fitting parts of one complete whole, I shall have succeeded in a design which I have for some time past been very anxious creditably to fulfill.

Of the tales themselves, taken individually, I have only to say, by way of necessary explanation, that "The Lady of Glenwith Grange" is now offered to the reader for the first time; and that the other stories have appeared in the columns of *Household Words*. My best thanks are due to Mr. Charles Dickens for his kindness in allowing me to set them in their present frame-work.

I must also gratefully acknowledge an obligation of another kind to the accomplished artist, Mr. W. S. Herrick, to whom I am indebted for the curious and interesting facts on which the tales of "The Terribly Strange Bed" and "The Yellow Mask" are founded.

Although the statement may appear somewhat superfluous to those who know me, it may not be out of place to add, in conclusion, that these stories are entirely of my own imagining, constructing, and writing. The fact that the events of some of my tales occur on foreign ground, and are acted out by foreign personages, appears to have suggested in some quarters the inference that the stories themselves might be of foreign origin. Let me, once for all, assure any readers who

may honor me with their attention, that in this, and in all other cases, they may depend on the genuineness of my literary offspring. The little children of my brain may be weakly enough, and may be sadly in want of a helping hand to aid them in their first attempts at walking on the stage of this great world; but, at any rate, they are not borrowed children. The members of my own literary family are indeed increasing so fast as to render the very idea of borrowing quite out of the question, and to suggest serious apprehension that I may not have done adding to the large book-population, on my own sole responsibility, even yet.

LEAVES FROM LEAH'S DIARY.

26th February, 1827.—The doctor has just called for the third time to examine my husband's eyes. Thank God, there is no fear at present of my poor William losing his sight, provided he can be prevailed on to attend rigidly to the medical instructions for preserving it. These instructions, which forbid him to exercise his profession for the next six months at least, are, in our case, very hard to follow. They will but too probably sentence us to poverty, perhaps to actual want; but they must be borne resignedly, and even thankfully, seeing that my husband's forced cessation from work will save him from the dreadful affliction of loss of sight. I think I can answer for my own cheerfulness and endurance, now that we know the worst. Can I answer for our children also? Surely I can, when there are only two of them. It is a sad confession to make, but now, for the first time since my marriage, I feel thankful that we have no more.

17th.—A dread came over me last night, after I had comforted William as well as I could about the future, and had heard him fall off to sleep, that the doctor had not told us the worst. Medical men do sometimes deceive their patients, from what has always seemed to me to be misdirected kindness of heart. The mere suspicion that I had been trifled with on the subject of my husband's illness, caused me such uneasiness, that I made an excuse to get out, and went in secret to the doctor. Fortunately, I found him at home, and in three words I confessed to him the object of my visit.

He smiled, and said I might make myself easy; he had told us the worst.

"And that worst," I said, to make certain, "is, that for the next six months my husband must allow his eyes to have the most perfect repose?"

"Exactly," the doctor answered. "Mind, I don't say that he may not dispense with his green shade, indoors, for an hour or two at a time, as the inflammation gets subdued. But I do most positively repeat that he must not *employ* his eyes. He must not touch a brush or pencil; he must

not think of taking another likeness, on any consideration whatever, for the next six months. His persisting in finishing those two portraits, at the time when his eyes first began to fail, was the real cause of all the bad symptoms that we have had to combat ever since. I warned him (if you remember, Mrs. Kerby?) when he first came to practice in our neighborhood."

"I know you did, sir," I replied. "But what was a poor traveling portrait-painter like my husband, who lives by taking likenesses first in one place and then in another, to do? Our bread depended on his using his eyes, at the very time when you warned him to let them have a rest."

"Have you no other resources? No money but the money Mr. Kerby can get by portrait-painting?" asked the doctor.

"None," I answered, with a sinking at my heart as I thought of his bill for medical attendance.

"Will you pardon me?" he said, coloring and looking a little uneasy, "or, rather, will you ascribe it to the friendly interest I feel in you, if I ask whether Mr. Kerby realizes a comfortable income by the practice of his profession? Don't," he went on anxiously, before I could reply—"pray don't think I make this inquiry from a motive of impertinent curiosity!"

I felt quite satisfied that he could have no improper motive for asking the question, and so answered it at once plainly and truly.

"My husband makes but a small income," I said. "Famous London portrait-painters get great prices from their sitters; but poor unknown artists, who only travel about the country, are obliged to work hard and be contented with very small gains. After we have paid all that we owe here, I am afraid we shall have little enough left to retire on, when we take refuge in some cheaper place."

"In that case," said the good doctor (I am so glad and proud to remember that I always liked him from the first!), "in that case, don't make yourself anxious about my bill when you are thinking of clearing off your debts here. I can afford to wait till Mr. Kerby's eyes are well again, and I shall then ask him for a likeness of my little daughter. By that arrangement we are sure to be both quits, and both perfectly satisfied."

He considerately shook hands and bade me farewell before I could say half the grateful words to him that were on my lips. Never, never shall I forget that he relieved me of my two heaviest anxieties at the most anxious time of my life. The merciful, warm-hearted man! I could almost have knelt down and kissed his doorstep, as I crossed it on my way home.

18th.—If I had not resolved, after what happened yesterday, to look only at the cheerful side of things for the future, the events of to-day would have robbed me of all my courage, at the very outset of our troubles. First, there was the casting up of our bills, and the discovery, when the amount of them was balanced against all the money we have

saved up, that we shall only have between three and four pounds left in the cash-box, after we have got out of debt. Then there was the sad necessity of writing letters in my husband's name to the rich people who were ready to employ him, telling them of the affliction that had overtaken him, and of the impossibility of his executing their orders for portraits for the next six months to come. And, lastly, there was the heart-breaking business for me to go through of giving our landlord warning, just as we had got comfortably settled in our new abode. If William could only have gone on with his work, we might have stopped in this town, and in these clean, comfortable lodgings for at least three or four months. We have never had the use of a nice empty garret before, for the children to play in; and I never met with any landlady so pleasant to deal with in the kitchen as the landlady here. And now we must leave all this comfort and happiness, and go—I hardly know where. William, in his bitterness, says to the workhouse; but that shall never be, if I have to go out to service to prevent it. The darkness is coming on, and we must save in candles, or I could write much more. Ah, me! what a day this has been. I have had but one pleasant moment since it began; and that was in the morning, when I set my little Emily to work on a bead purse for the kind doctor's daughter. My child, young as she is, is wonderfully neat-handed at stringing beads; and even a poor little empty purse as a token of our gratitude, is better than nothing at all.

19th.—A visit from our best friend—our only friend here—the doctor. After he had examined William's eyes, and had reported that they were getting on as well as can be hoped at present, he asked where we thought of going to live? I said in the cheapest place we could find, and added that I was about to make inquiries in the by-streets of the town that very day. "Put off those inquiries," he said, "till you hear from me again. I am going now to see a patient at a farmhouse five miles off. (You needn't look at the children, Mrs. Kerby, it's nothing infectious—only a clumsy lad, who has broken his collarbone by a fall from a horse.) They receive lodgers occasionally at the farmhouse, and I know no reason why they should not be willing to receive you. If you want to be well housed and well fed at a cheap rate, and if you like the society of honest, hearty people, the farm of Appletreewick is the very place for you. Don't thank me till you know whether I can get you these new lodgings or not. And in the meantime settle all your business affairs here, so as to be able to move at a moment's notice." With those words the kind-hearted gentleman nodded and went out. Pray heaven he may succeed at the farmhouse! We may be sure of the children's health, at least, if we live in the country. Talking of the children, I must not omit to record that Emily has nearly done one end of the bead purse already.

20th.—A note from the doctor, who is too busy to call. Such good news! They will give us two bedrooms, and board us with the family at Appletreewick for seventeen shillings a week. By my calculations, we

shall have three pounds sixteen shillings left, after paying what we owe here. That will be enough, at the outset, for four weeks' living at the farmhouse, with eight shillings to spare besides. By embroidery-work I can easily make nine shillings more to put to that, and there is a fifth week provided for. Surely, in five weeks' time—considering the number of things I can turn my hand to—we may hit on some plan for getting a little money. This is what I am always telling my husband, and what, by dint of constantly repeating it, I am getting to believe myself. William, as is but natural, poor fellow, does not take so lighthearted view of the future as I do. He says that the prospect of sitting idle and being kept by his wife for months to come, is something more wretched and hopeless than words can describe. I try to raise his spirits by reminding him of his years of honest hard work for me and the children, and of the doctor's assurance that his eyes will get the better, in good time, of their present helpless state. But he still sighs and murmurs—being one of the most independent and high spirited of men—about living a burden on his wife. I can only answer, what in my heart of hearts I feel, that I took him for Better and for Worse; that I have had many years of the Better, and that, even in our present trouble, the Worse shows no signs of coming yet!

The bead purse is getting on fast. Red and blue, in a pretty striped pattern.

21st.—A busy day. We go to Appletreewick to-morrow. Paying bills and packing up. All poor William's new canvases and painting-things huddled together into a packing-case. He looked so sad, sitting silent with his green shade on, while his old familiar working materials were disappearing around him, as if he and they were never to come together again, that the tears would start into my eyes, though I am sure I am not one of the crying sort. Luckily, the green shade kept him from seeing me: and I took good care, though the effort nearly choked me, that he should not hear I was crying, at any rate.

The bead purse is done. How are we to get the steel rings and tassels for it? I am not justified now in spending sixpence unnecessarily, even for the best of purposes.

22d.——-

23d. *The Farm of Appletreewick.*—Too tired, after our move yesterday, to write a word in my diary about our journey to this delightful place. But now that we are beginning to get settled, I can manage to make up for past omissions.

My first occupation on the morning of the move had, oddly enough, nothing to do with our departure for the farmhouse. The moment breakfast was over I began the day by making Emily as smart and nice-looking as I could, to go to the doctor's with the purse. She had her best silk frock on, showing the mending a little in some places, I am afraid, and her straw hat trimmed with my bonnet ribbon. Her father's neck-

scarf, turned and joined so that nobody could see it, made a nice mantilla for her; and away she went to the doctor's, with her little, determined step, and the purse in her hand (such a pretty hand that it is hardly to be regretted I had no gloves for her). They were delighted with the purse—which I ought to mention was finished with some white beads; we found them in rummaging among our boxes, and they made beautiful rings and tassels, contrasting charmingly with the blue and red of the rest of the purse. The doctor and his little girl were, as I have said, delighted with the present; and they gave Emily, in return, a workbox for herself, and a box of sugar-plums for her baby sister. The child came back all flushed with the pleasure of the visit, and quite helped to keep up her father's spirits with talking to him about it. So much for the highly interesting history of the bead purse.

Toward the afternoon the light cart from the farmhouse came to fetch us and our things to Appletreewick. It was quite a warm spring day, and I had another pang to bear as I saw poor William helped into the cart, looking so sickly and sad, with his miserable green shade, in the cheerful sunlight. "God only knows, Leah, how this will succeed with us," he said, as we started; then sighed, and fell silent again.

Just outside the town the doctor met us. "Good luck go with you!" he cried, swinging his stick in his usual hasty way; "I shall come and see you as soon as you are all settled at the farmhouse." "Good-by, sir," says Emily, struggling up with all her might among the bundles in the bottom of the cart; "good-by, and thank you again for the work-box and the sugar-plums." That was my child all over! she never wants telling. The doctor kissed his hand, and gave another flourish with his stick. So we parted.

How I should have enjoyed the drive if William could only have looked, as I did, at the young firs on the heath bending beneath the steady breeze; at the shadows flying over the smooth fields; at the high white clouds moving on and on, in their grand airy procession over the gladsome blue sky! It was a hilly road, and I begged the lad who drove us not to press the horse; so we were nearly an hour, at our slow rate of going, before we drew up at the gate of Appletreewick.

24th February to 2d March.—We have now been here long enough to know something of the place and the people. First, as to the place: Where the farmhouse now is, there was once a famous priory. The tower is still standing, and the great room where the monks ate and drank—used at present as a granary. The house itself seems to have been tacked on to the ruins anyhow. No two rooms in it are on the same level. The children do nothing but tumble about the passages, because there always happens to be a step up or down, just at the darkest part of every one of them. As for staircases, there seems to me to be one for each bedroom. I do nothing but lose my way—and the farmer says, drolling, that he must have sign-posts put up for me in every corner of the house

from top to bottom. On the ground-floor, besides the usual domestic offices, we have the best parlor—a dark, airless, expensively furnished solitude, never invaded by anybody; the kitchen, and a kind of hall, with a fireplace as big as the drawing-room at our town lodgings. Here we live and take our meals; here the children can racket about to their hearts' content; here the dogs come lumbering in, whenever they can get loose; here wages are paid, visitors are received, bacon is cured, cheese is tasted, pipes are smoked, and naps are taken every evening by the male members of the family. Never was such a comfortable, friendly dwelling-place devised as this hall; I feel already as if half my life had been passed in it.

Out-of-doors, looking beyond the flower-garden, lawn, back yards, pigeon-houses, and kitchen-gardens, we are surrounded by a network of smooth grazing-fields, each shut off from the other by its neat hedgerow and its sturdy gate. Beyond the fields the hills seem to flow away gently from us into the far blue distance, till they are lost in the bright softness of the sky. At one point, which we can see from our bedroom windows, they dip suddenly into the plain, and show, over the rich marshy flat, a strip of distant sea—a strip sometimes blue, sometimes gray; sometimes, when the sun sets, a streak of fire; sometimes, on showery days, a flash of silver light.

The inhabitants of the farmhouse have one great and rare merit—they are people whom you can make friends with at once. Between not knowing them at all, and knowing them well enough to shake hands at first sight, there is no ceremonious interval or formal gradation whatever. They received us, on our arrival, exactly as if we were old friends returned from some long traveling expedition. Before we had been ten minutes in the hall, William had the easiest chair and the snuggest corner; the children were eating bread-and-jam on the window-seat; and I was talking to the farmer's wife, with the cat on my lap, of the time when Emily had the measles.

The family numbers seven, exclusive of the indoor servants, of course. First came the farmer and his wife—he is a tall, sturdy, loud-voiced, active old man—she the easiest, plumpest and gayest woman of sixty I ever met with. They have three sons and two daughters. The two eldest of the young men are employed on the farm; the third is a sailor, and is making holiday-time of it just now at Appletreewick. The daughters are pictures of health and freshness. I have but one complaint to make against them—they are beginning to spoil the children already.

In this tranquil place, and among these genial, natural people, how happily my time might be passed, were it not for the saddening sight of William's affliction, and the wearing uncertainty of how we are to provide for future necessities! It is a hard thing for my husband and me, after having had the day made pleasant by kind words and friendly offices, to feel this one anxious thought always forcing itself on us at

night: Shall we have the means of stopping in our new home in a month's time?

3d.—A rainy day; the children difficult to manage; William miserably despondent. Perhaps he influenced me, or perhaps I felt my little troubles with the children more than usual: but, however it was, I have not been so heavy-hearted since the day when my husband first put on the green shade. A listless, hopeless sensation would steal over me; but why write about it? Better to try and forget it. There is always to-morrow to look to when to-day is at the worst.

4th.—To-morrow has proved worthy of the faith I put in it. Sunshine again out-of-doors; and as clear and true a reflection of it in my own heart as I can hope to have just at this time. Oh! that month, that one poor month of respite! What are we to do at the end of the month?

5th.—I made my short entry for yesterday in the afternoon just before tea-time, little thinking of events destined to happen with the evening that would be really worth chronicling, for the sake of the excellent results to which they are sure to lead. My tendency is to be too sanguine about everything, I know; but I am, nevertheless, firmly persuaded that I can see a new way out of our present difficulties—a way of getting money enough to keep us all in comfort at the farmhouse until William's eyes are well again.

The new project which is to relieve us from all uncertainties for the next six months actually originated with *me!* It has raised me many inches higher in my own estimation already. If the doctor only agrees with my view of the case when he comes to-morrow, William will allow himself to be persuaded, I know; and then let them say what they please, I will answer for the rest.

This is how the new idea first found its way into my head:

We had just done tea. William, in much better spirits than usual, was talking with the young sailor, who is jocosely called here by the very ugly name of "Foul-weather Dick." The farmer and his two eldest sons were composing themselves on the oaken settles for their usual nap. The dame was knitting, the two girls were beginning to clear the tea-table, and I was darning the children's socks. To all appearance, this was not a very propitious state of things for the creation of new ideas, and yet my idea grew out of it, for all that. Talking with my husband on various subjects connected with life in ships, the young sailor began giving us a description of his hammock; telling us how it was slung; how it was impossible to get into it any other way than "stern foremost" (whatever that may mean); how the rolling of the ship made it rock like a cradle; and how, on rough nights, it sometimes swayed to and fro at such a rate as to bump bodily against the ship's side and wake him up with the sensation of having just received a punch on the head from a remarkably hard fist. Hearing all this, I ventured to suggest that it must be an immense relief to him to sleep on shore in a good, motionless,

solid four-post bed. But, to my surprise, he scoffed at the idea; said he never slept comfortably out of his hammock; declared that he quite missed his occasional punch on the head from the ship's side; and ended by giving a most comical account of all the uncomfortable sensations he felt when he slept in a four-post bed. The odd nature of one of the young sailor's objections to sleeping on shore reminded my husband (as indeed it did me too) of the terrible story of a bed in a French gambling-house, which he once heard from a gentleman whose likeness he took.

"You're laughing at me," says honest Foul-weather Dick, seeing William turn toward me and smile.—"No, indeed," says my husband; "that last objection of yours to the four-post beds on shore seems by no means ridiculous to *me,* at any rate. I once knew a gentleman, Dick, who practically realized your objection."

"Excuse me, sir," says Dick, after a pause, and with an appearance of great bewilderment and curiosity; "but could you put 'practically realized' into plain English, so that a poor man like me might have a chance of understanding you?"—"Certainly!" says my husband, laughing. "I mean that I once knew a gentleman who actually saw and felt what you say in jest you are afraid of seeing and feeling whenever you sleep in a four-post bed. Do you understand that?" Foul-weather Dick understood it perfectly, and begged with great eagerness to hear what the gentleman's adventure really was. The dame, who had been listening to our talk, backed her son's petition; the two girls sat down expectant at the half-cleared tea-table; even the farmer and his drowsy sons roused themselves lazily on the settle—my husband saw that he stood fairly committed to the relation of the story, so he told it without more ado.

I have often heard him relate that strange adventure (William is the best teller of a story I ever met with) to friends of all ranks in many different parts of England, and I never yet knew it fail of producing an effect. The farmhouse audience were, I may almost say, petrified by it. I never before saw people look so long in the same direction, and sit so long in the same attitude, as they did. Even the servants stole away from their work in the kitchen, and, unrebuked by master or mistress, stood quite spell-bound in the doorway to listen. Observing all this in silence, while my husband was going on with his narrative, the thought suddenly flashed across me, "Why should William not get a wider audience for that story, as well as for others which he has heard from time to time from his sitters, and which he has hitherto only repeated in private among a few friends? People tell stories in books and get money for them. What if we told our stories in a book? and what if the book sold? Why freedom, surely, from the one great anxiety that is now preying on us! Money enough to stop at the farmhouse till William's eyes are fit for work again!" I almost jumped up from my chair as my thought went on shaping itself in this manner. When great men make

wonderful discoveries, do they feel sensations like mine, I wonder? Was Sir Isaac Newton within an ace of skipping into the air when he first found out the law of gravitation? Did Friar Bacon long to dance when he lit the match and heard the first charge of gunpowder in the world go off with a bang?

I had to put a strong constraint on myself, or I should have communicated all that was passing in my mind to William before our friends at the farmhouse. But I knew it was best to wait until we were alone, and I did wait. What a relief it was when we all got up at last to say good-night!

The moment we were in our own room, I could not stop to take so much as a pin out of my dress before I began. "My dear," said I, "I never heard you tell that gambling-house adventure so well before. What an effect it had upon our friends! what an effect, indeed, it always has wherever you tell it!"

So far he did not seem to take much notice. He just nodded, and began to pour out some of the lotion in which he always bathes his poor eyes the last thing at night.

"And as for that, William," I went on, "all your stories seem to interest people. What a number you have picked up, first and last, from different sitters, in the fifteen years of your practice as a portrait-painter! Have you any idea how many stories you really do know?"

No: he could not undertake to say how many just then. He gave this answer in a very indifferent tone, dabbing away all the time at his eyes with the sponge and lotion. He did it so awkwardly and roughly, as it seemed to me, that I took the sponge from him and applied the lotion tenderly myself.

"Do you think," said I, "if you turned over one of your stories carefully in your mind beforehand—say the one you told to-night, for example—that you could repeat it all to me so perfectly and deliberately that I should be able to take it down in writing from your lips?"

Yes: of course he could. But why ask that question?

"Because I should like to have all the stories that you have been in the habit of relating to our friends set down fairly in writing, by way of preserving them from ever being forgotten."

Would I bathe his left eye now, because that felt the hottest to-night? I began to forbode that his growing indifference to what I was saying would soon end in his fairly going to sleep before I had developed my new idea, unless I took some means forthwith of stimulating his curiosity, or, in other words, of waking him into a proper state of astonishment and attention. "William," said I, without another syllable of preface, "I have got a new plan for finding all the money we want for our expenses here."

He jerked his head up directly, and looked at me. What plan?

"This: The state of your eyes prevents you for the present from following your profession as an artist, does it not? Very well. What are you to do with your idle time, my dear? Turn author! And how are you to get the money we want? By publishing a book!"

"Good gracious, Leah! are you out of your senses?" he exclaimed.

I put my arm round his neck and sat down on his knee (the course I always take when I want to persuade him to anything with as few words as possible).

"Now, William, listen patiently to me," I said. "An artist lies under this great disadvantage in case of accidents—his talents are of no service to him unless he can use his eyes and fingers. An author, on the other hand, can turn his talents to account just as well by means of other people's eyes and fingers as by means of his own. In your present situation, therefore, you have nothing for it, as I said before, but to turn author. Wait! and hear me out. The book I want you to make is a book of all your stories. You shall repeat them, and I will write them down from your dictation. Our manuscript shall be printed; we will sell the book to the public, and so support ourselves honorably in adversity, by doing the best we can to interest and amuse others."

While I was saying all this—I suppose in a very excitable manner—my husband looked, as our young sailor-friend would phrase it, quite *taken aback.* "You were always quick at contriving, Leah," he said; "but how in the world came you to think of this plan?"

"I thought of it while you were telling them the gambling-house adventure downstairs," I answered.

"It is an ingenious idea, and a bold idea," he went on, thoughtfully. "But it is one thing to tell a story to a circle of friends, and another thing to put it into a printed form for an audience of strangers. Consider, my dear, that we are neither of us used to what is called writing for the press."

"Very true," said I, "but nobody is used to it when they first begin, and yet plenty of people have tried the hazardous literary experiment successfully. Besides, in our case, we have the materials ready to our hands; surely we can succeed in shaping them presentably if we aim at nothing but the simple truth."

"Who is to do the eloquent descriptions and the striking reflections, and all that part of it?" said William, perplexedly shaking his head.

"Nobody!" I replied. "The eloquent descriptions and the striking reflections are just the parts of a story-book that people never read. Whatever we do, let us not, if we can possibly help it, write so much as a single sentence that can be conveniently skipped. Come! come!" I continued, seeing him begin to shake his head again; "no more objections, William, I am too certain of the success of my plan to endure them. If you still doubt, let us refer the new project to a competent arbitrator. The doctor is coming to see you to-morrow. I will tell him all

that I have told you; and if you will promise on your side, I will engage on mine to be guided entirely by his opinion."

William smiled, and readily gave the promise. This was all I wanted to send me to bed in the best spirits. For, of course, I should never have thought of mentioning the doctor as an arbitrator, if I had not known beforehand that he was sure to be on my side.

6th.—The arbitrator has shown that he deserved my confidence in him. He ranked himself entirely on my side before I had half done explaining to him what my new project really was. As to my husband's doubts and difficulties, the dear good man would not so much as hear them mentioned. "No objections," he cried, gayly; "set to work, Mr. Kerby, and make your fortune. I always said your wife was worth her weight in gold—and here she is now, all ready to get into the bookseller's scales and prove it. Set to work! set to work!"

"With all my heart," said William, beginning at last to catch the infection of our enthusiasm. "But when my part of the work and my wife's has been completed, what are we to do with the produce of our labor?"

"Leave that to me," answered the doctor. "Finish your book and send it to my house; I will show it at once to the editor of our country newspaper. He has plenty of literary friends in London, and he will be just the man to help you. By-the-by," added the doctor, addressing me, "you think of everything, Mrs. Kerby; pray have you thought of a name yet for the new book?"

At that question it was my turn to be "taken aback." The idea of naming the book had never once entered my head.

"A good title is of vast importance," said the doctor, knitting his brows thoughtfully. "We must all think about that. What shall it be? eh, Mrs. Kerby, what shall it be?"

"Perhaps something may strike us after we have fairly set to work," my husband suggested. "Talking of work," he continued, turning to me, "how are you to find time, Leah, with your nursery occupations, for writing down all the stories as I tell them?"

"I have been thinking of that this morning," said I, "and have come to the conclusion that I shall have but little leisure to write from your dictation in the day-time. What with dressing and washing the children, teaching them, giving them their meals, taking them out to walk, and keeping them amused at home—to say nothing of sitting sociably at work with the dame and her two girls in the afternoon—I am afraid I shall have few opportunities of doing my part of the book between breakfast and tea-time. But when the children are in bed, and the farmer and his family are reading or dozing, I should have at least three unoccupied hours to spare. So, if you don't mind putting off our working-time till after dark—"

“There’s the title!” shouted the doctor, jumping out of his chair as if he had been shot.

“Where?” cried I, looking all round me in the surprise of the moment, as if I had expected to see the title magically inscribed for us on the walls of the room.

“In your last words, to be sure!” rejoined the doctor. “You said just now that you would not have leisure to write from Mr. Kerby’s dictation till *after dark.* What can we do better than name the book after the time when the book is written? Call it boldly, *After dark.* Stop! before anybody says a word for or against it, let us see how the name looks on paper.”

I opened my writing-desk in a great flutter. The doctor selected the largest sheet of paper and the broadest-nibbed pen he could find, and wrote in majestic round-text letters, with alternate thin and thick strokes beautiful to see, the two cabalistic words

AFTER DARK.

We all three laid our heads together over the paper, and in breathless silence studied the effect of the round-text: William raising his green shade in the excitement of the moment, and actually disobeying the doctor’s orders about not using his eyes, in the doctor’s own presence! After a good long stare, we looked round solemnly in each other’s faces and nodded. There was no doubt whatever on the subject after seeing the round-text. In one happy moment the doctor had hit on the right name.

“I have written the title-page,” said our good friend, taking up his hat to go. “And now I leave it to you two to write the book.”

Since then I have mended four pens and bought a quire of letter-paper at the village shop. William is to ponder well over his stories in the daytime, so as to be quite ready for me “after dark.” We are to commence our new occupation this evening. My heart beats fast and my eyes moisten when I think of it. How many of our dearest interests depend upon the one little beginning that we are to make to-night!

PROLOGUE TO THE FIRST STORY.

Before I begin, by the aid of my wife's patient attention and ready pen, to relate any of the stories which I have heard at various times from persons whose likenesses I have been employed to take, it will not be amiss if I try to secure the reader's interest in the following pages, by briefly explaining how I became possessed of the narrative matter which they contain.

Of myself I have nothing to say, but that I have followed the profession of a traveling portrait-painter for the last fifteen years. The pursuit of my calling has not only led me all through England, but has taken me twice to Scotland, and once to Ireland. In moving from district to district, I am never guided beforehand by any settled plan. Sometimes the letters of recommendation which I get from persons who are satisfied with the work I have done for them determine the direction in which I travel. Sometimes I hear of a new neighborhood in which there is no resident artist of ability, and remove thither on speculation. Sometimes my friends among the picture-dealers say a good word on my behalf to their rich customers, and so pave the way for me in the large towns. Sometimes my prosperous and famous brother-artists, hearing of small commissions which it is not worth their while to accept, mention my name, and procure me introductions to pleasant country houses. Thus I get on, now in one way and now in another, not winning a reputation or making a fortune, but happier, perhaps, on the whole, than many men who have got both the one and the other. So, at least, I try to think now, though I started in my youth with as high an ambition as the best of them. Thank God, it is not my business here to speak of past times and their disappointments. A twinge of the old hopeless heartache comes over me sometimes still, when I think of my student days.

One peculiarity of my present way of life is, that it brings me into contact with all sorts of characters. I almost feel, by this time, as if I had painted every civilized variety of the human race. Upon the whole, my experience of the world, rough as it has been, has not taught me to think unkindly of my fellow-creatures. I have certainly received such treatment at the hands of some of my sitters as I could not describe without saddening and shocking any kind-hearted reader; but, taking one year and one place with another, I have cause to remember with gratitude and respect—sometimes even with friendship and affection—a very large proportion of the numerous persons who have employed me.

Some of the results of my experience are curious in a moral point of view. For example, I have found women almost uniformly less delicate in asking me about my terms, and less generous in remunerating me for

my services, than men. On the other hand, men, within my knowledge, are decidedly vainer of their personal attractions, and more vexatiously anxious to have them done full justice to on canvas, than women. Taking both sexes together, I have found young people, for the most part, more gentle, more reasonable, and more considerate than old. And, summing up, in a general way, my experience of different ranks (which extends, let me premise, all the way down from peers to publicans), I have met with most of my formal and ungracious receptions among rich people of uncertain social standing: the highest classes and the lowest among my employers almost always contrive—in widely different ways, of course, to make me feel at home as soon as I enter their houses.

The one great obstacle that I have to contend against in the practice of my profession is not, as some persons may imagine, the difficulty of making my sitters keep their heads still while I paint them, but the difficulty of getting them to preserve the natural look and the every-day peculiarities of dress and manner. People will assume an expression, will brush up their hair, will correct any little characteristic carelessness in their apparel—will, in short, when they want to have their likenesses taken, look as if they were sitting for their pictures. If I paint them, under these artificial circumstances, I fail of course to present them in their habitual aspect; and my portrait, as a necessary consequence, disappoints everybody, the sitter always included. When we wish to judge of a man's character by his handwriting, we want his customary scrawl dashed off with his common workaday pen, not his best small-text, traced laboriously with the finest procurable crow-quill point. So it is with portrait-painting, which is, after all, nothing but a right reading of the externals of character recognizably presented to the view of others.

Experience, after repeated trials, has proved to me that the only way of getting sitters who persist in assuming a set look to resume their habitual expression, is to lead them into talking about some subject in which they are greatly interested. If I can only beguile them into speaking earnestly, no matter on what topic, I am sure of recovering their natural expression; sure of seeing all the little precious everyday peculiarities of the man or woman peep out, one after another, quite unawares. The long, maundering stories about nothing, the wearisome recitals of petty grievances, the local anecdotes unrelieved by the faintest suspicion of anything like general interest, which I have been condemned to hear, as a consequence of thawing the ice off the features of formal sitters by the method just described, would fill hundreds of volumes, and promote the repose of thousands of readers. On the other hand, if I have suffered under the tediousness of the many, I have not been without my compensating gains from the wisdom and experience of the few. To some of my sitters I have been indebted for information which has enlarged my mind—to some for advice which has lightened

my heart—to some for narratives of strange adventure which riveted my attention at the time, which have served to interest and amuse my fireside circle for many years past, and which are now, I would fain hope, destined to make kind friends for me among a wider audience than any that I have yet addressed.

Singularly enough, almost all the best stories that I have heard from my sitters have been told by accident. I only remember two cases in which a story was volunteered to me, and, although I have often tried the experiment, I cannot call to mind even a single instance in which leading questions (as the lawyers call them) on my part, addressed to a sitter, ever produced any result worth recording. Over and over again, I have been disastrously successful in encouraging dull people to weary me. But the clever people who have something interesting to say, seem, so far as I have observed them, to acknowledge no other stimulant than chance. For every story which I propose including in the present collection, excepting one, I have been indebted, in the first instance, to the capricious influence of the same chance. Something my sitter has seen about me, something I have remarked in my sitter, or in the room in which I take the likeness, or in the neighborhood through which I pass on my way to work, has suggested the necessary association, or has started the right train of recollections, and then the story appeared to begin of its own accord. Occasionally the most casual notice, on my part, of some very unpromising object has smoothed the way for the relation of a long and interesting narrative. I first heard one of the most dramatic of the stories that will be presented in this book, merely through being carelessly inquisitive to know the history of a stuffed poodle-dog.

It is thus not without reason that I lay some stress on the desirableness of prefacing each one of the following narratives by a brief account of the curious manner in which I became possessed of it. As to my capacity for repeating these stories correctly, I can answer for it that my memory may be trusted. I may claim it as a merit, because it is after all a mechanical one, that I forget nothing, and that I can call long-passed conversations and events as readily to my recollection as if they had happened but a few weeks ago. Of two things at least I feel tolerably certain beforehand, in meditating over the contents of this book: First, that I can repeat correctly all that I have heard; and, secondly, that I have never missed anything worth hearing when my sitters were addressing me on an interesting subject. Although I cannot take the lead in talking while I am engaged in painting, I can listen while others speak, and work all the better for it.

So much in the way of general preface to the pages for which I am about to ask the reader's attention. Let me now advance to particulars, and describe how I came to hear the first story in the present collection. I begin with it because it is the story that I have oftenest "rehearsed," to

borrow a phrase from the stage. Wherever I go, I am sooner or later sure to tell it. Only last night, I was persuaded into repeating it once more by the inhabitants of the farmhouse in which I am now staying.

Not many years ago, on returning from a short holiday visit to a friend settled in Paris, I found professional letters awaiting me at my agent's in London, which required my immediate presence in Liverpool. Without stopping to unpack, I proceeded by the first conveyance to my new destination; and, calling at the picture-dealer's shop, where portrait-painting engagements were received for me, found to my great satisfaction that I had remunerative employment in prospect, in and about Liverpool, for at least two months to come. I was putting up my letters in high spirits, and was just leaving the picture-dealer's shop to look out for comfortable lodgings, when I was met at the door by the landlord of one of the largest hotels in Liverpool—an old acquaintance whom I had known as manager of a tavern in London in my student days.

"Mr. Kerby!" he exclaimed, in great astonishment. "What an unexpected meeting! the last man in the world whom I expected to see, and yet the very man whose services I want to make use of!"

"What, more work for me?" said I; "are all the people in Liverpool going to have their portraits painted?"

"I only know of one," replied the landlord, "a gentleman staying at my hotel, who wants a chalk drawing done for him. I was on my way here to inquire of any artist whom our picture-dealing friend could recommend. How glad I am that I met you before I had committed myself to employing a stranger!"

"Is this likeness wanted at once?" I asked, thinking of the number of engagements that I had already got in my pocket.

"Immediately—to-day—this very hour, if possible," said the landlord. "Mr. Faulkner, the gentleman I am speaking of, was to have sailed yesterday for the Brazils from this place; but the wind shifted last night to the wrong quarter, and he came ashore again this morning. He may of course be detained here for some time; but he may also be called on board ship at half an hour's notice, if the wind shifts back again in the right direction. This uncertainty makes it a matter of importance that the likeness should be begun immediately. Undertake it if you possibly can, for Mr. Faulkner's a liberal gentleman, who is sure to give you your own terms."

I reflected for a minute or two. The portrait was only wanted in chalk, and would not take long; besides, I might finish it in the evening, if my other engagements pressed hard upon me in the daytime. Why not leave my luggage at the picture-dealer's, put off looking for lodgings till night, and secure the new commission boldly by going back at once with the landlord to the hotel? I decided on following this course almost as soon as the idea occurred to me—put my chalks in my pocket, and a sheet of

drawing paper in the first of my portfolios that came to hand—and so presented myself before Mr. Faulkner, ready to take his likeness, literally at five minutes' notice.

I found him a very pleasant, intelligent man, young and handsome. He had been a great traveler; had visited all the wonders of the East; and was now about to explore the wilds of the vast South American Continent. Thus much he told me good-humoredly and unconstrainedly while I was preparing my drawing materials.

As soon as I had put him in the right light and position, and had seated myself opposite to him, he changed the subject of conversation, and asked me, a little confusedly as I thought, if it was not a customary practice among portrait-painters to gloss over the faults in their sitters' faces, and to make as much as possible of any good points which their features might possess.

"Certainly," I answered. "You have described the whole art and mystery of successful portrait-painting in a few words."

"May I beg, then," said he, "that you will depart from the usual practice in my case, and draw me with all my defects, exactly as I am? The fact is," he went on, after a moment's pause, "the likeness you are now preparing to take is intended for my mother. My roving disposition makes me a great anxiety to her, and she parted from me this last time very sadly and unwillingly. I don't know how the idea came into my head, but it struck me this morning that I could not better employ the time, while I was delayed here on shore, than by getting my likeness done to send to her as a keepsake. She has no portrait of me since I was a child, and she is sure to value a drawing of me more than anything else I could send to her. I only trouble you with this explanation to prove that I am really sincere in my wish to be drawn unflatteringly, exactly as I am."

Secretly respecting and admiring him for what he had just said, I promised that his directions should be implicitly followed, and began to work immediately. Before I had pursued my occupation for ten minutes, the conversation began to flag, and the usual obstacle to my success with a sitter gradually set itself up between us. Quite unconsciously, of course, Mr. Faulkner stiffened his neck, shut his month, and contracted his eyebrows—evidently under the impression that he was facilitating the process of taking his portrait by making his face as like a lifeless mask as possible. All traces of his natural animated expression were fast disappearing, and he was beginning to change into a heavy and rather melancholy-looking man.

This complete alteration was of no great consequence so long as I was only engaged in drawing the outline of his face and the general form of his features. I accordingly worked on doggedly for more than an hour—then left off to point my chalks again, and to give my sitter a few minutes' rest. Thus far the likeness had not suffered through Mr.

Faulkner's unfortunate notion of the right way of sitting for his portrait; but the time of difficulty, as I well knew, was to come. It was impossible for me to think of putting any expression into the drawing unless I could contrive some means, when he resumed his chair, of making him look like himself again. "I will talk to him about foreign parts," thought I, "and try if I can't make him forget that he is sitting for his picture in that way."

While I was pointing my chalks Mr. Faulkner was walking up and down the room. He chanced to see the portfolio I had brought with me leaning against the wall, and asked if there were any sketches in it. I told him there were a few which I had made during my recent stay in Paris; "In Paris?" he repeated, with a look of interest; "may I see them?"

I gave him the permission he asked as a matter of course. Sitting down, he took the portfolio on his knee, and began to look through it. He turned over the first five sketches rapidly enough; but when he came to the sixth, I saw his face flush directly, and observed that he took the drawing out of the portfolio, carried it to the window, and remained silently absorbed in the contemplation of it for full five minutes. After that, he turned round to me, and asked very anxiously if I had any objection to part with that sketch.

It was the least interesting drawing of the collection—merely a view in one of the streets running by the backs of the houses in the Palais Royal. Some four or five of these houses were comprised in the view, which was of no particular use to me in any way; and which was too valueless, as a work of art, for me to think of selling it. I begged his acceptance of it at once. He thanked me quite warmly; and then, seeing that I looked a little surprised at the odd selection he had made from my sketches, laughingly asked me if I could guess why he had been so anxious to become possessed of the view which I had given him?

"Probably," I answered, "there is some remarkable historical association connected with that street at the back of the Palais Royal, of which I am ignorant."

"No," said Mr. Faulkner; "at least none that *I* know of. The only association connected with the place in *my* mind is a purely personal association. Look at this house in your drawing—the house with the water-pipe running down it from top to bottom. I once passed a night there—a night I shall never forget to the day of my death. I have had some awkward traveling adventures in my time; but *that* adventure—! Well, never mind, suppose we begin the sitting. I make but a bad return for your kindness in giving me the sketch by thus wasting your time in mere talk."

"Come! come!" thought I, as he went back to the sitter's chair, "I shall see your natural expression on your face if I can only get you to talk about that adventure." It was easy enough to lead him in the right direction. At the first hint from me, he returned to the subject of the

house in the back street. Without, I hope, showing any undue curiosity, I contrived to let him see that I felt a deep interest in everything he now said. After two or three preliminary hesitations, he at last, to my great joy, fairly started on the narrative of his adventure. In the interest of his subject he soon completely forgot that he was sitting for his portrait—the very expression that I wanted came over his face—and my drawing proceeded toward completion, in the right direction, and to the best purpose. At every fresh touch I felt more and more certain that I was now getting the better of my grand difficulty; and I enjoyed the additional gratification of having my work lightened by the recital of a true story, which possessed, in my estimation, all the excitement of the most exciting romance.

This, as I recollect it, is how Mr. Faulkner told me his adventure:

THE TRAVELER'S STORY OF A TERRIBLY STRANGE BED.

Shortly after my education at college was finished, I happened to be staying at Paris with an English friend. We were both young men then, and lived, I am afraid, rather a wild life, in the delightful city of our sojourn. One night we were idling about the neighborhood of the Palais Royal, doubtful to what amusement we should next betake ourselves. My friend proposed a visit to Frascati's; but his suggestion was not to my taste. I knew Frascati's, as the French saying is, by heart; had lost and won plenty of five-franc pieces there, merely for amusement's sake, until it was amusement no longer, and was thoroughly tired, in fact, of all the ghastly respectabilities of such a social anomaly as a respectable gambling-house. "For Heaven's sake," said I to my friend, "let us go somewhere where we can see a little genuine, blackguard, poverty-stricken gaming with no false gingerbread glitter thrown over it all. Let us get away from fashionable Frascati's, to a house where they don't mind letting in a man with a ragged coat, or a man with no coat, ragged or otherwise." "Very well," said my friend, "we needn't go out of the Palais Royal to find the sort of company you want. Here's the place just before us; as blackguard a place, by all report, as you could possibly wish to see." In another minute we arrived at the door, and entered the house, the back of which you have drawn in your sketch.

When we got upstairs, and had left our hats and sticks with the doorkeeper, we were admitted into the chief gambling-room. We did not find many people assembled there. But, few as the men were who looked up at us on our entrance, they were all types—lamentably true types—of their respective classes.

We had come to see blackguards; but these men were something worse. There is a comic side, more or less appreciable, in all blackguardism—here there was nothing but tragedy—mute, weird tragedy. The quiet in the room was horrible. The thin, haggard, long-haired young man, whose sunken eyes fiercely watched the turning up of the cards, never spoke; the flabby, fat-faced, pimply player, who pricked his piece of pasteboard perseveringly, to register how often black won, and how often red—never spoke; the dirty, wrinkled old man, with the vulture eyes and the darned great-coat, who had lost his last *sou,* and still looked on desperately, after he could play no longer—never spoke. Even the voice of the croupier sounded as if it were strangely dulled and thickened in the atmosphere of the room. I had entered the place to laugh, but the spectacle before me was something to weep over. I soon found it necessary to take refuge in excitement from the depression of spirits which was fast stealing on me. Unfortunately I

sought the nearest excitement, by going to the table and beginning to play. Still more unfortunately, as the event will show, I won—won prodigiously; won incredibly; won at such a rate that the regular players at the table crowded round me; and staring at my stakes with hungry, superstitious eyes, whispered to one another that the English stranger was going to break the bank.

The game was *Rouge et Noir*. I had played at it in every city in Europe, without, however, the care or the wish to study the Theory of Chances—that philosopher's stone of all gamblers! And a gambler, in the strict sense of the word, I had never been. I was heart-whole from the corroding passion for play. My gaming was a mere idle amusement. I never resorted to it by necessity, because I never knew what it was to want money. I never practiced it so incessantly as to lose more than I could afford, or to gain more than I could coolly pocket without being thrown off my balance by my good luck. In short, I had hitherto frequented gambling-tables—just as I frequented ball-rooms and opera-houses—because they amused me, and because I had nothing better to do with my leisure hours.

But on this occasion it was very different—now, for the first time in my life, I felt what the passion for play really was. My success first bewildered, and then, in the most literal meaning of the word, intoxicated me. Incredible as it may appear, it is nevertheless true, that I only lost when I attempted to estimate chances, and played according to previous calculation. If I left everything to luck, and staked without any care or consideration, I was sure to win—to win in the face of every recognized probability in favor of the bank. At first some of the men present ventured their money safely enough on my color; but I speedily increased my stakes to sums which they dared not risk. One after another they left off playing, and breathlessly looked on at my game.

Still, time after time, I staked higher and higher, and still won. The excitement in the room rose to fever pitch. The silence was interrupted by a deep-muttered chorus of oaths and exclamations in different languages, every time the gold was shoveled across to my side of the table—even the imperturbable croupier dashed his rake on the floor in a (French) fury of astonishment at my success. But one man present preserved his self-possession, and that man was my friend. He came to my side, and whispering in English, begged me to leave the place, satisfied with what I had already gained. I must do him the justice to say that he repeated his warnings and entreaties several times, and only left me and went away after I had rejected his advice (I was to all intents and purposes gambling drunk) in terms which rendered it impossible for him to address me again that night.

Shortly after he had gone, a hoarse voice behind me cried: "Permit me, my dear sir—permit me to restore to their proper place two napoleons which you have dropped. Wonderful luck, sir! I pledge you my word of

honor, as an old soldier, in the course of my long experience in this sort of thing, I never saw such luck as yours—never! Go on, sir—*Sacre mille bombes!* Go on boldly, and break the bank!"

I turned round and saw, nodding and smiling at me with inveterate civility, a tall man, dressed in a frogged and braided surtout.

If I had been in my senses, I should have considered him, personally, as being rather a suspicious specimen of an old soldier. He had goggling, bloodshot eyes, mangy mustaches, and a broken nose. His voice betrayed a barrack-room intonation of the worst order, and he had the dirtiest pair of hands I ever saw—even in France. These little personal peculiarities exercised, however, no repelling influence on me. In the mad excitement, the reckless triumph of that moment, I was ready to "fraternize" with anybody who encouraged me in my game. I accepted the old soldier's offered pinch of snuff; clapped him on the back, and swore he was the honestest fellow in the world—the most glorious relic of the Grand Army that I had ever met with. "Go on!" cried my military friend, snapping his fingers in ecstasy—"Go on, and win! Break the bank—*Mille tonnerres!* my gallant English comrade, break the bank!"

And I *did* go on—went on at such a rate, that in another quarter of an hour the croupier called out, "Gentlemen, the bank has discontinued for to-night." All the notes, and all the gold in that "bank," now lay in a heap under my hands; the whole floating capital of the gambling-house was waiting to pour into my pockets!

"Tie up the money in your pocket-handkerchief, my worthy sir," said the old soldier, as I wildly plunged my hands into my heap of gold. "Tie it up, as we used to tie up a bit of dinner in the Grand Army; your winnings are too heavy for any breeches-pockets that ever were sewed. There! that's it—shovel them in, notes and all! *Credie!* what luck! Stop! another napoleon on the floor! *Ah! sacre petit polisson de Napoleon!* have I found thee at last? Now then, sir—two tight double knots each way with your honorable permission, and the money's safe. Feel it! feel it, fortunate sir! hard and round as a cannon-ball—*Ah, bah!* if they had only fired such cannon-balls at us at Austerlitz—*nom d'une pipe!* if they only had! And now, as an ancient grenadier, as an ex-brave of the French army, what remains for me to do? I ask what? Simply this: to entreat my valued English friend to drink a bottle of Champagne with me, and toast the goddess Fortune in foaming goblets before we part!"

Excellent ex-brave! Convivial ancient grenadier! Champagne by all means! An English cheer for an old soldier! Hurrah! hurrah! Another English cheer for the goddess Fortune! Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!

"Bravo! the Englishman; the amiable, gracious Englishman, in whose veins circulates the vivacious blood of France! Another glass? *Ah, bah!*—the bottle is empty! Never mind! *Vive le vin!* I, the old soldier, order another bottle, and half a pound of bonbons with it!"

"No, no, ex-brave; never—ancient grenadier! *Your* bottle last time; *my* bottle this. Behold it! Toast away! The French Army! the great Napoleon! the present company! the croupier! the honest croupier's wife and daughters—if he has any! the Ladies generally! everybody in the world!"

By the time the second bottle of Champagne was emptied, I felt as if I had been drinking liquid fire—my brain seemed all aflame. No excess in wine had ever had this effect on me before in my life. Was it the result of a stimulant acting upon my system when I was in a highly excited state? Was my stomach in a particularly disordered condition? Or was the Champagne amazingly strong?

"Ex-brave of the French Army!" cried I, in a mad state of exhilaration, "*I* am on fire! how are *you?* You have set me on fire! Do you hear, my hero of Austerlitz? Let us have a third bottle of Champagne to put the flame out!"

The old soldier wagged his head, rolled his goggle-eyes, until I expected to see them slip out of their sockets; placed his dirty forefinger by the side of his broken nose; solemnly ejaculated "Coffee!" and immediately ran off into an inner room.

The word pronounced by the eccentric veteran seemed to have a magical effect on the rest of the company present. With one accord they all rose to depart. Probably they had expected to profit by my intoxication; but finding that my new friend was benevolently bent on preventing me from getting dead drunk, had now abandoned all hope of thriving pleasantly on my winnings. Whatever their motive might be, at any rate they went away in a body. When the old soldier returned, and sat down again opposite to me at the table, we had the room to ourselves. I could see the croupier, in a sort of vestibule which opened out of it, eating his supper in solitude. The silence was now deeper than ever.

A sudden change, too, had come over the "ex-brave." He assumed a portentously solemn look; and when he spoke to me again, his speech was ornamented by no oaths, enforced by no finger-snapping, enlivened by no apostrophes or exclamations.

"Listen, my dear sir," said he, in mysteriously confidential tones —"listen to an old soldier's advice. I have been to the mistress of the house (a very charming woman, with a genius for cookery!) to impress on her the necessity of making us some particularly strong and good coffee. You must drink this coffee in order to get rid of your little amiable exaltation of spirits before you think of going home—you *must,* my good and gracious friend! With all that money to take home to-night, it is a sacred duty to yourself to have your wits about you. You are known to be a winner to an enormous extent by several gentlemen present to-night, who, in a certain point of view, are very worthy and excellent fellows; but they are mortal men, my dear sir, and they have their amiable weaknesses. Need I say more? Ah, no, no! you understand

me! Now, this is what you must do—send for a cabriolet when you feel quite well again—draw up all the windows when you get into it—and tell the driver to take you home only through the large and well-lighted thoroughfares. Do this; and you and your money will be safe. Do this; and to-morrow you will thank an old soldier for giving you a word of honest advice."

Just as the ex-brave ended his oration in very lachrymose tones, the coffee came in, ready poured out in two cups. My attentive friend handed me one of the cups with a bow. I was parched with thirst, and drank it off at a draught. Almost instantly afterwards, I was seized with a fit of giddiness, and felt more completely intoxicated than ever. The room whirled round and round furiously; the old soldier seemed to be regularly bobbing up and down before me like the piston of a steam-engine. I was half deafened by a violent singing in my ears; a feeling of utter bewilderment, helplessness, idiocy, overcame me. I rose from my chair, holding on by the table to keep my balance; and stammered out that I felt dreadfully unwell—so unwell that I did not know how I was to get home.

"My dear friend," answered the old soldier—and even his voice seemed to be bobbing up and down as he spoke—"my dear friend, it would be madness to go home in *your* state; you would be sure to lose your money; you might be robbed and murdered with the greatest ease. *I* am going to sleep here; do *you* sleep here, too—they make up capital beds in this house—take one; sleep off the effects of the wine, and go home safely with your winnings to-morrow—to-morrow, in broad daylight."

I had but two ideas left: one, that I must never let go hold of my handkerchief full of money; the other, that I must lie down somewhere immediately, and fall off into a comfortable sleep. So I agreed to the proposal about the bed, and took the offered arm of the old soldier, carrying my money with my disengaged hand. Preceded by the croupier, we passed along some passages and up a flight of stairs into the bedroom which I was to occupy. The ex-brave shook me warmly by the hand, proposed that we should breakfast together, and then, followed by the croupier, left me for the night.

I ran to the wash-hand stand; drank some of the water in my jug; poured the rest out, and plunged my face into it; then sat down in a chair and tried to compose myself. I soon felt better. The change for my lungs, from the fetid atmosphere of the gambling-room to the cool air of the apartment I now occupied, the almost equally refreshing change for my eyes, from the glaring gaslights of the "salon" to the dim, quiet flicker of one bedroom-candle, aided wonderfully the restorative effects of cold water. The giddiness left me, and I began to feel a little like a reasonable being again. My first thought was of the risk of sleeping all night in a gambling-house; my second, of the still greater risk of trying

to get out after the house was closed, and of going home alone at night through the streets of Paris with a large sum of money about me. I had slept in worse places than this on my travels; so I determined to lock, bolt, and barricade my door, and take my chance till the next morning.

Accordingly, I secured myself against all intrusion; looked under the bed, and into the cupboard; tried the fastening of the window; and then, satisfied that I had taken every proper precaution, pulled off my upper clothing, put my light, which was a dim one, on the hearth among a feathery litter of wood-ashes, and got into bed, with the handkerchief full of money under my pillow.

I soon felt not only that I could not go to sleep, but that I could not even close my eyes. I was wide awake, and in a high fever. Every nerve in my body trembled—every one of my senses seemed to be preternaturally sharpened. I tossed and rolled, and tried every kind of position, and perseveringly sought out the cold corners of the bed, and all to no purpose. Now I thrust my arms over the clothes; now I poked them under the clothes; now I violently shot my legs straight out down to the bottom of the bed; now I convulsively coiled them up as near my chin as they would go; now I shook out my crumpled pillow, changed it to the cool side, patted it flat, and lay down quietly on my back; now I fiercely doubled it in two, set it up on end, thrust it against the board of the bed, and tried a sitting posture. Every effort was in vain; I groaned with vexation as I felt that I was in for a sleepless night.

What could I do? I had no book to read. And yet, unless I found out some method of diverting my mind, I felt certain that I was in the condition to imagine all sorts of horrors; to rack my brain with forebodings of every possible and impossible danger; in short, to pass the night in suffering all conceivable varieties of nervous terror.

I raised myself on my elbow, and looked about the room—which was brightened by a lovely moonlight pouring straight through the window—to see if it contained any pictures or ornaments that I could at all clearly distinguish. While my eyes wandered from wall to wall, a remembrance of Le Maistre's delightful little book, "Voyage autour de ma Chambre," occurred to me. I resolved to imitate the French author, and find occupation and amusement enough to relieve the tedium of my wakefulness, by making a mental inventory of every article of furniture I could see, and by following up to their sources the multitude of associations which even a chair, a table, or a wash-hand stand may be made to call forth.

In the nervous unsettled state of my mind at that moment, I found it much easier to make my inventory than to make my reflections, and thereupon soon gave up all hope of thinking in Le Maistre's fanciful track—or, indeed, of thinking at all. I looked about the room at the different articles of furniture, and did nothing more.

There was, first, the bed I was lying in; a four-post bed, of all things in the world to meet with in Paris—yes, a thorough clumsy British four-poster, with the regular top lined with chintz—the regular fringed valance all round—the regular stifling, unwholesome curtains, which I remembered having mechanically drawn back against the posts without particularly noticing the bed when I first got into the room. Then there was the marble-topped wash-hand stand, from which the water I had spilled, in my hurry to pour it out, was still dripping, slowly and more slowly, on to the brick floor. Then two small chairs, with my coat, waistcoat, and trousers flung on them. Then a large elbow-chair covered with dirty-white dimity, with my cravat and shirt collar thrown over the back. Then a chest of drawers with two of the brass handles off, and a tawdry, broken china inkstand placed on it by way of ornament for the top. Then the dressing-table, adorned by a very small looking-glass, and a very large pincushion. Then the window—an unusually large window. Then a dark old picture, which the feeble candle dimly showed me. It was a picture of a fellow in a high Spanish hat, crowned with a plume of towering feathers. A swarthy, sinister ruffian, looking upward, shading his eyes with his hand, and looking intently upward—it might be at some tall gallows at which he was going to be hanged. At any rate, he had the appearance of thoroughly deserving it.

This picture put a kind of constraint upon me to look upward too—at the top of the bed. It was a gloomy and not an interesting object, and I looked back at the picture. I counted the feathers in the man's hat—they stood out in relief—three white, two green. I observed the crown of his hat, which was of conical shape, according to the fashion supposed to have been favored by Guido Fawkes. I wondered what he was looking up at. It couldn't be at the stars; such a desperado was neither astrologer nor astronomer. It must be at the high gallows, and he was going to be hanged presently. Would the executioner come into possession of his conical crowned hat and plume of feathers? I counted the feathers again —three white, two green.

While I still lingered over this very improving and intellectual employment, my thoughts insensibly began to wander. The moonlight shining into the room reminded me of a certain moonlight night in England—the night after a picnic party in a Welsh valley. Every incident of the drive homeward, through lovely scenery, which the moonlight made lovelier than ever, came back to my remembrance, though I had never given the picnic a thought for years; though, if I had *tried* to recollect it, I could certainly have recalled little or nothing of that scene long past. Of all the wonderful faculties that help to tell us we are immortal, which speaks the sublime truth more eloquently than memory? Here was I, in a strange house of the most suspicious character, in a situation of uncertainty, and even of peril, which might seem to make the cool exercise of my recollection almost out of the