

Buck Hawk, Detective

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or

The Messenger Boy's Fortune

by Edward L. Wheeler

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CHAPTER I.

AN ARTFUL DODGER.

“Can you furnish me with a trusty messenger boy for a couple of hours— one, mind you, who is reliable in every sense of the word, and quick-strung, in the bargain?”

This question was addressed to the clerk at the receiving window of a branch office of the Western Union Telegraph Co. in Philadelphia, one morning previous to the opening of the Bi-Centennial celebration in the Quaker City.

The inquirer was a portly man of perhaps fifty years, well-dressed, and the possessor of a short-cropped gray beard, steely-gray eyes, of hawkish intensity, and hair to match his beard.

He had the appearance of being a man who was well-to-do, and who had no cause to complain at the way the world used him.

“All our messengers are out, but if you will wait a moment, probably some of them will be in, and I can supply your wants,” the clerk said, gazing at the inquirer through a pair of green goggles.

In the course of ten minutes a messenger-boy entered.

He was a strong, sturdy lad of fifteen, with an open, honest face, a shrewd peering pair of eyes, and wore an expression of good humor.

He was attired in the neat regulation uniform of a W. U. messenger boy, and was rather dashing looking, with his cap cocked a little to one side of his curly head.

“Hillo, Billy!” he cried, tossing his book to the clerk. “What’s the next racket? Made a quarter out o’ last trip. Jest connect me wi’ another sech a job, ef ye please.”

The clerk looked over at the man who was waiting.

“Here’s a boy that will be likely to suit you, sir.” be said; whereupon the gentleman came forward, and gave the boy a criticising glance.

“What’s your name?” he asked, sharply.

“Turk, sir,” was the prompt answer.

“Turk?” the gentleman exclaimed, in surprise. “Turk what?”

“Dunno. Reckon nothin’ but Turk, from Black-cat Alley. Never was called anything else.”

“Strange name. Well, my boy, I am about to engage your services for a little while, providing you know where Jerome St. Clair lives, on North Seventeenth street.”

“Dunno. Give’s the number, and I can root out the rest.”

“Very well. What will be the charges, clerk?”

The clerk named the amount, which was promptly paid, after which Turk and his employer left the office, and proceeded to Walnut street, near Eighth.

Here, numerous rows of houses have for years been converted into offices, which are occupied by perhaps as many different trades and professions as there are rooms.

Into the second story front room of one of these buildings, the gentleman ushered Turk, and bade him be seated, until he returned; after which he went down-stairs.

The apartment was meagerly furnished, the floor being covered with oilcloth, and a desk, several office chairs, a few pictures on the wall forming the remainder of the furniture.

Having nothing else to do, Turk amused himself with looking at the pictures, which were of men whose faces were anything but to their credit.

“Sporters, or I’m a shad!” the boy muttered. “That feller wi’ the eyes cut bias, looks like Skin the Slugger, who got ninety in Moya, for liftin’ pocketbooks. Wonder what sort of a rooster keeps this ranch? Must be ‘quaint wi’ the rascals o’ Phila.”

Jerome St. Clair, as he had introduced himself to the boy, soon returned.

“Well, I’m ready for you,” he said, handing a sealed letter to Turk. “You are to take that letter to my residence, and deliver it to my daughter. If she is not in, you can give it to some one of the servants, who will give you a package, which you are to hasten back with, and deliver to me at the Broad street depot. You will find me there in the waiting-room. Be spry, now, and I will make you a present on your return.”

“But give us yer directions,” demanded Turk. “Got a number, hain’t ye?”

“Certainly. Here is my card, which will enable you to find my residence without trouble. Here is some money for street-car fare. Now, then, be off.”

And Turk needed no second warning.

Already gigantic air-castles were building before his mind’s eye in anticipation of the promised reward for alacrity.

The card read:

JEROME ST CLAIR. DIAMOND MERCHANT,

No.— N’t 17th Street,

(Private House.) ♦ Philad’a, Pa.

And it is needless to say that the messenger boy was not long in landing in front

of the imposing mansion which bore the diamond-dealer's name upon the door-plate.

Accustomed to ringing door-bells, he gave the knob a tremendous pull, which speedily brought a frowsy-beaded Irish-woman, with a red, freckled face, to the door.

"Phat the loikes of yez m'ane by pullin' so hard av of the dure-bell?" she cried angrily.

"Oh, go refrigerate yourself!" Turk retorted. "I want to see the boss's darter."

"Yez can't see her, ye omadhaun. It's not in she is, at all."

"Bah! ye can't stuff me. I've got a message for her."

"Let me have it thin."

"Like blazes! The boss sent me, and said I was to wait until his gal came in."

"Thin come along wid ye an' wait on the cheer in the hall till the young miss returns; an' mind, lad, I'll have an eye kept onto yez."

"Kerect, Biddy. But ain't you goin' to ax me into the parlor?"

"Not a bit of it. Sit yez right forninst the cheer in the hall, and if yez stir an inch I'll send the nagur up to bounce yez."

Presuming that Miss St. Clair was in the house, Turk took possession of the proffered chair in the richly-furnished hall, and with a parting nod of warning Biddy retired to the domestic quarters.

Turk had not waited long when a young woman, or, more appropriately, a girl, of about the boy's own age, came down the winding stairs.

She was neatly, yet rather plainly attired, but this fact did not detract from her exquisite beauty. A perfect mold of face and petite figure, with soft, dreamy, blue eyes, a tempting mouth, and rare health-tinted complexion, made her at once an object for attraction and admiration.

She uttered a little cry at sight of Turk, who was staring at her in wondering admiration.

“Great guns! ain’t she a stunner? Ef my bank account were a little larger I’d go fer her, regular Cupid style,” were his unuttered thoughts as he paused at the foot of the stairs in evident astonishment.

“What are you doing here?” she asked.

“Sittin’ down,” Turk replied, with a grin. “The Irish stew sed as how I should wait here; didn’t ax me into the parlor.”

“Oh! you are a telegraph boy?”

“Not much. I’m a telegraph young man, if you please,” Turk declared with self-conscious pride.

“Oh, why yes! Pray excuse my mistake,” the young lady said, amusedly. “Have you a message to deliver?”

“Yes, I’ve got a letter here fer Miss Aurelia St. Clair, what her gov’nor sent, and sed I was to hurry back with a package what you would give.”

“I have not the good fortune to be Miss St. Clair,” the girl replied quickly and in a half scornful way, Turk fancied. “I am Etta Evelyn, Mr. St. Clair’s niece. Miss St. Clair has gone riding in the Park, and will not be back for a couple of hours.”

Turk scratched his head.

“Dunno what a feller’s goin’ to do?” he asked. “The boss sed I could deliver the letter to one of the servants, who would give me the package to fetch to him.”

“If that is so, I can perhaps act for my cousin,” Etta said, “though I know very little about uncle’s affairs. Come in here.”

She led the way into the grand parlor, and bade Turk be seated while she received from him the letter, and gave it a hasty perusal.

“What kind of a looking man gave you this?” she asked, as she finished.

Turk gave a rapid, minute description of the person in his off-hand way.

“That’s uncle, to a dot,” Miss Evelyn declared. “I can’t imagine who is to purchase those costly diamonds, though.”

“Diamonds!” echoed the messenger lad.

“Why, of course. Uncle has sent for the hundred-thousand-dollar set of diamonds, which he has tried so long to dispose of. I guess it will be all the same if I give them to you. Wait!”

She left the parlor, and Turk heard her tripping up the stairs for the jewels.

“It’s a shame,” he muttered, “how sum folks can waste their cash on gew-gaws, while the rest o’ us have to dig like fun to get enuff ter eat! Wish I were rich as Jay Gould! I’d pop the question to Miss Etta, sure!”

Wishing had never made Turk rich yet, and so he knew there was no use for him to consider such a thing.

Miss Evelyn soon returned and handed Turk a jewel-case, wrapped up in paper.

“There! You are to take that direct to Mr. St. Clair,” she enjoined, “and be very careful that you don’t lose it, or make a mistake whom you give it to, for if you should, mercy only knows what they would do with us.”

“Oh, never you fear! He’ll get this box all hunky, if I don’t get struck wi’ lightning,” was his confident assertion. “I suppose ye’ll reckonise a feller, ef I should happen to meet ye, at the Bi-Centen?”

“Of course I shall,” responded the young lady, as she ushered him out. “Be careful of the diamonds.”

“But I will!” Turk replied, as he strode away down the street, whistling merrily, and wishing he was a millionaire.

At the Broad Street Station of the Pennsylvania Railroad, Turk found the man who had employed him for the errand pacing to and fro in the waiting-room, as if in great impatience.

His face lightened, however, when he saw Turk and the package.

“Well! you’re back at last, eh?” he said, seizing the package “You were unreasonably long. I have barely time to catch the train.”

And with these reproving words he turned, and was about to move off, but Turk was not to be bluffed in this way.

“I say! hold up!” he cried, catching the man’s coat sleeve. “You’re kinder forgetful, ain’t ye!”

“What do you want??

“Why, ye was goin’ ter whack out a present weren’t ye, if I beat Goldsmith Maid’s time?”

“Oh! I forgot! Yes, here is a dime.”

And tossing the coin to the astonished messenger-boy, the diamond merchant disappeared among the crowd.

“Well, sell me out fer a huckster if that ain’t cheek,” Turk muttered, turning away in disgust. “Ten cents fer a hundred thousand dollar job. I wasn’t half-smart, or I’d ‘a’ collected before delivery. Never mind. I’ll see the old chap ag’in, sometime.”

And dismissing the matter from his mind, he went back to the office and resumed his messenger duties for the day.

They were not few.

He was considered one of the smartest and most trustworthy boys on the force, and messages of special importance were generally intrusted to him, besides errands which frequently took him out of his own district; so that when six P. M. came, he was invariably pretty tired, and not loth to seek his quarters in Black-cat Alley.

To-night, especially, he found himself nearly fagged out, as with his dinner basket on his arm, he left the office in company with another messenger. Pat Murphy by name.

“There’ll be a divil of a row to-morrow,” Pat observed, as they trudged along.

“What kind of a row?” Turk asked, rather disinterestedly.

“Och! sure it’s some one o’ the messenger boys will get bounced.”

“Humph! what for?”

“Robbery, be jabers— an’ one of the cutest, too. Jest heard of it up on Seventeenth.”

“Seventeenth?” Turk echoed, his heart sinking within him.

“Yes it seems that some chap applied at one o’ the district offices, and hired a messenger to go an errand, an’ represinted hisself to be Jerome St. Clair, the diamond merchant. He sent the messenger to the St. Clair residence, bearin’ a letter to Miss St. Clair, orderin’ her to deliver the messenger a box of diamonds. Miss St. Clair wasn’t in, but recognizin’ the writin’, as she supposed, St. Clair’s niece delivered up the diamonds. Awhile arter old St. Clair came home and the swindle was ‘sploded. Jeminetta! but I bet there was fun!”

Turk was white as a sheet, but managed to maintain composure.

“How did you drop onto this? Are the police onto it?”

“No; et’s goin’ to be kept mum, and be worked up on the quiet by Jack Grimes, the detective. He told me and paid me fat to learn ef any of the boys at our office went the errand.”

This was a stunner to Turk and he at once made up his mind not to let Black-cat Alley know him that night.

CHAPTER II.

HOW A TRUE GIRL RESENTS AN INSULT.

As soon as he could do so without arousing suspicion, Turk left the company of young Murphy, whom he had never liked any too well, and whom he must now necessarily consider an enemy.

Full well the boy realized that he was in a desperate position, to say the least.

A daring robbery had been committed, and he was the tool that had been used to secure the plunder. If it were discovered that it was he who had gone on the errand, he would be arrested, and like enough be sent up, charged with being in the plot.

The thought was horrifying to him, for not only was he working himself up to a high standard in the favor of the company, but he was also hoping that, by steady application, he would ere long be offered an office, as he was already a thorough operator.

Any such trouble as promised to result from his unfortunate errand that day would be a serious dampener to his prospects for promotion, even if it did not secure his summary discharge from the employ of the company.

It is, therefore, little wonder that he felt decidedly blue after what young Murphy had told him.

“I can’t go back to Black-cat Alley to-night— nor at all, for that matter,” he muttered; “◆‘cause that hawk, Jack Grimes, would durned soon find me out, the hound! I know that feller, I do; and he knows I know of some of his smart games. It’s me an’ him fer it now, and best one is goin’ to win.”

Not knowing what else to do, he wandered down to the Delaware wharves, and watched the stream of people surging in the direction of the ferries.

But, though his gaze rested upon them, his mind was upon the trouble which loomed up before him like a grim giant.

“I reckon about the best thing I kin do is to go and surrender,” he muttered— “but I’ll be dashed if I’ll do that, either! Every one fer hisself; an’ ef I don’t keep an eye peeled fer Turk, durned ef any one else will. Jeremity! I bet that niece of St. Clair’s got a tongue-lashin’ when the old gent got home and found his diamonds gone!

Mechanically, he turned and wended his way toward his tenement lodgings in Black-cat Alley, and succeeded in reaching his bleak, cheerless third-story room without any one being the wiser for it.

Old Mother McFadden ran the establishment, her tenants being bootblacks, newsboys, and the like, who had no other home, and who were glad to turn in the better share of their earnings for the shelter of the McFadden roof and a very meager allowance of provender.

Such had been the case with Turk ever since he could first remember; but he realized that he must now bid adieu to the classic precinct of Black-cat Alley, and that without delay.

Hastily divesting himself of his regulation messenger attire, he donned a neat new Sunday suit, which he had recently purchased, and a hat in place of his cap; then placing his few effects in a sachel, he quietly took his departure, and made his way toward the southern part of the city, where he found a cheap boarding-house in a retired street, and paid his board two weeks in advance, explaining that he was looking for a job.

After being assigned a room, and securing his supper, he started forth, and mechanically wandered toward the district office where he had been employed—for he now no longer considered himself one of the employees of the company.

A glance into the office through the glass door satisfied him that there was nothing of excitement about the place, which gave him a deal of relief.

Bill Jones, of the receiving-window, had been relieved by the night-clerk, and, knowing where his lodgings were, Turk at once turned his footsteps toward them.

“There’s barely one chance,” he mused, as he hurried along. “Bill ain’t always exactly honest with the company, and don’t always turn in an account when he sends us fellers out on errands, for which he knocks down the cash. Don’t like a feller to be dishonest; but I hope to gracious he’s made no account o’ my trip to-day.”

Jones occupied a room in a block on Market street, third-story back, and usually got his meals at a restaurant

Although he had been in the company’s employ for a long time, he had not yet sown the full measure of his wild oats, and knowing his failing, Turk was not surprised to find him “half the seas over” on reaching his room.

“Hillo! Sultan! jest in time, old feller. Got some prime stomach bitters here,” Jones cried, at sight of the boy.

“Much obliged, Billy; I don’t drink. You’d be better off if you wouldn’t.”

“Nonsense, what’s the harm of a fellow having a little cheer, after getting out of prison? I believe in work when you work and smile when you play. What fetched you up from Black-cat, Turk?”

“Oh! I came to see you on business, Bill.”

“Bah! business be hanged. No more business for me till eight to-morrow morning.”

“But I say yes,” Turk declared, firmly. “There’s a big row goin’ to be kicked up, and you’re the chap that can stop it. Did you turn in the cash for my errand to-day?”

The question seemed to have an electric effect upon Jones, and to dissipate all the effects of the liquor he had imbibed.

“To be sure I did,” he flustered, appearing to feel highly indignant at the question. “What do you take me for, you young Arab?”

“Oh! I only wanted to see if you were prepared to prove your part of the transaction, in case there’s trouble,” Turk returned, eying the clerk.

Jones flushed and grew fidgety.

“What the blazes are you driving at?” he demanded, sharply. “Explain.”

“There isn’t much to explain, more than that you’re liable to get tripped. Ye didn’t turn the cash for that errand to-day.”

“Curse it. Does the company know? Have you been squealin’ on me, Turk?”

“The company knows nothing. I know of several hits of cash that the company never saw.”

“You sharp-eyed rascal. I’ve always been suspicious of you. Jack told me to look

out for you once.”

“Jack Grimes?”

“No. Jack Freitcher.”

“That’s a lie,” Turk inwardly commented. “But let it pass. I must work this wire for all it’s worth, since I hold the key.”

Aloud, he said:

“Yes, Billy, if I choose, I can cause your discharge, but I don’t propose to do it if we can agree. No one connected with the office, aside from ourselves, knew of that errand to-day, eh?”

“Of course not. There was no one about, and so I made up my mind I might as well make an extra day’s wages as not, and no one would be the wiser for it.”

“Then I am safe so far, thank Heaven!” Turk exclaimed. “You dare not now own up the errand, as it would show you up in a dishonest light, and will necessarily force me to expose you.”

“But what’s the matter? What danger are you in?”

Turk proceeded to relate the circumstances attending and resulting from his trip for the bogus St. Clair.

Jones listened with heightened interest, for he had by this time fully shaken off the effects of the liquor.

“Well, by thunder, that’s a case, for a fact. But you can rest easy, so far as I am concerned. I’ll never give you away.”

“Then I will also keep mum about your game; but you’d better drop on it, or some o’ the boys will jump onto you, and won’t mind their own biz like the Sultan o’ Turkey.”

“I reckon you’re right. What! ain’t a-goin’, eh?”

“Yes. Do you know, I’m goin’ to nose into this cafe and recover them diamonds?

Goin' ter turn sort o' detective, ye see; and see what fer luck I have at the biz."

Turk had not long left the operator's room, when Bill Jones had another visitor—a tall, well-formed, and rather good-looking young man of six or seven and twenty, dressed in the best of clothes, with the additions of a silk hat, kid gloves, and gold-headed cane.

A not over-abundant mustache was waxed out at either end; and the habitual steely glitter in his black eyes indicated the existence of evil in his heart.

This man was Jack Grimes, the detective, who was considered one of the most successful private experts in the city.

"Hello! is it you?" Billy Jones exclaimed, as the sleuth entered. "What the blazes are ye after! I was just preparing to sail off into a good sleep."

"So I see" Grimes smiled, taking a seat.

"New job?"

"Yes. Mighty big one, too. Got it all to myself. Fortune in it, if I win."

"What is it?"

"Oh! it's a secret. Don't know but I can tell you, if you're mum."

"Humph! guess you know me?"

"Well, it's true you never went back on me, so I'll let you in. You see, old St. Clair the diamond dealer, has been skinned out of a valuable lot of diamonds, and this is the way it happened."

He then narrated practically the same story of the robbery that Turk had done a short time before.

"And, now, what I'm after is to find out first of all, who this messenger was. I've visited several of the district offices, but obtained no satisfactory clew. How about your office?"

"No messenger sent on outside errands, to-day," Jones declared, deliberately.

“Are you sure?”

The eyes of the detective were fixed on him, searchingly.

“Of course I’m sure. Don’t you suppose I know what I’m about?”

“Seems strange that no messenger was sent from any of the offices, and yet one went on that errand!”

“Does look rather queer, I’ll admit, but you can search the cash list of my district, if you choose.”

“Perhaps you didn’t turn in the cash, nor make a memorandum?”

Jones flushed angrily.

“Well, you’re welcome to your own opinion,” he said, stiffly. “You can probably find by inquiry that my reputation is good for honesty with the company.”

“Pooh! honesty is but a convenience at best. There is not a parson in the world who wouldn’t look hungrily at a hundred thousand dollars, before passing it by. We detectives are necessarily the most honest class of people living, but I’m blamed sure if I saw a clever chance to rake in a hundred thousand, and get away with it, I’d do it.”

“I don’t doubt it. I never quite set you down as a saint.”

A silence ensued, during which Grimes seemed to be in deep meditation.

“Well, I’m bound to make a case out of this, somehow. You know, by the way, that I’ve been paying some considerable attention to St. Clair’s daughter lately, and the old gent fancies my suit. So he sends for me to take charge of this case, and slips a cool thousand dollars into my hands to start on, adding that he will give a bigger sum for the recovery of the diamonds. Oh! the old nut is really worked up about the affair, and it strikes me that there is more importance attached to the loss of the diamonds than their simple pecuniary value. Now, Jonesy, if you and I could put our heads together and recover the diamonds, we would be able to command a competency for our efforts.”

“Bah! I know nothing in regard to the matter, and will have nothing to do with it

— so that ends that!” Jones declared, emphatically.

“Then that, also, ends our interview,” and the detective arose and left the room.

He also left Billy Jones in rather an unpleasant frame of mind.

Jerome St. Clair, diamond merchant, had returned home, about five o’clock that evening, from town, and, fatigued with his day’s business, had sought his warm, cozy parlor, where he was soon after joined by his daughter, Aurelia.

Mr. St. Clair was a stout, ruddy Englishman, with short-cropped gray beard and hair, and an almost perfect counterpart of the man who had so successfully used Turk, the messenger boy as the tool of a stupendous robbery.

He was reputed to be wealthy, and did not conduct his business like other jewelers, in the city, but at his residence. He was well known among the leading families of the city, whom he dealt with almost exclusively.

His daughter, Aurelia, was a tall, slender brunette, with dark eyes, and a coldly pretty face, and was, because of her fine dress and educational accomplishments, a favorite in the best society.

Anything money could procure, that would enhance her chances of winning a desirable “catch,” was always placed at her command by her indulgent parent.

Petted and humored, from infancy, it was little wonder she had grown up a spoiled child, with a petulant tyrannical temperament, and a vain conceit that there was no one quite as good as herself.

And it might be added that she had also, in a measure, inherited some of these qualities from her father, who was not without an excellent and unbiased opinion of himself.

Miss St. Clair seemed much surprised to see her parent in the parlor— so much so, that she started back with a cry.

“Hello! what ails you?” St. Clair ejaculated, looking around. “Am I a bear, that you are frightened at me?”

“Oh! no! no! no! but I didn’t expect to see you here,” she said, coming forward

and kneeling by his side. “I thought you were in New York.”

“New York? What nonsense, child! How came such a thought ever to enter your mind?”

“Why, because you sent the messenger boy for the diamonds!”

“The what? I’ve sent for no diamonds. Which ones? Speak, explain!”

“The magnificent ones you have always treasured so highly, in the green satin case. A messenger boy came with a note from you, saying I was to deliver them to him to fetch to you.”

“And you did this!”

“No, for I was out riding. Your dear sister’s child, Henriette, performed the work!”

The banker was white with passion as he arose and paced to and fro across the carpet.

“Send for the girl,” he finally hissed, and Miss St. Clair seemed eager to ring for a servant to dispatch on the errand.

Miss Evelyn soon made her appearance, but an apprehensive expression came over her face as she saw the merchant.

“Young woman, who gave you authority to deliver my diamonds up to other people, open my daughter’s letters and the like of that?”

“There was no one at home, except the servants, sir, and seeing it was your writing, and the boy saying he was ordered to come right back, I didn’t suppose but what I would be doing you a favor, sir—”

“I never sent the letter nor the Boy. You are implicated in a conspiracy to defraud me; and you shall suffer the consequences! Hand over the letter to me.”

“No, sir, I cannot!” the girl said, bravely. “If you are disposed to think me so wicked that I could wish to cheat you, or abuse your confidence in me as your sister’s child, I shall keep the letter to defend myself with, before the courts.”

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW HOME.

The St. Clairs were surprised.

Such a sudden outburst of courage from Etta, was something entirely new of her, who was ever quiet and unobtrusive, often bearing many slights at the hands of her relatives without resentment. She was now old enough to keenly feel the fact she was a dependent upon her uncle for support, and to know that she must gracefully acquiesce in the wishes of her uncle and cousin; but of late, Miss St. Clair had appeared to grow constantly jealous of her pretty cousin, and did all in her power to make Etta's life miserable.

The early life of the latter was shrouded in mystery, and all that she knew was that she was Jerome St. Clair's niece, and that she was dependent on him for her livelihood.

But to be suspected of intentional complicity in a robbery, was more than her sense of honor would bear, and she resolved to stand up for her rights, cost what it might.

If she lost her home with the St. Clairs, she was able to work, and could not well find a more cheerless abode.

"What!" Jerome St. Clair cried, angrily, after recovery from his astonishment at her words. "Do you mean to defy me, you saucy chit?"

"I mean just what I said, and nothing more!" Etta answered. "Because I have been dependent upon you for my living, it does not follow that I will allow any one to make me out a thief, nor do I care to stand your daughter's insulting conduct much longer."

"Indeed! Perhaps it would cure you of some of your lofty importance to turn you out on the world for a time? That I shall certainly do if you do not deliver me up that paper!"

"Then, I will consider myself dismissed!" the girl retorted, with flashing eyes. "If I can see Captain Clyde I am sure he will help me to find a situation!"

“If you dare to speak to Captain Clyde, I will have you arrested!” Jerome St. Clair cried, while his daughter looked the jealous anger she felt.

“Oh! you are afraid, Mr. St. Clair, that the captain will hear of how you have treated me, and will not then realize so much pleasure in your daughter’s company. Perhaps you are right!”

And with a defiant laugh, Etta swept from the room, and set about preparing to leave the house.

She had a little money which she had saved from her monthly allotment, but it did not exceed ten dollars all told, and she knew she could not exist long on that amount without work.

It was yet early in the evening, and she was resolved to set forth that very night, but at the same time had no idea where she should go.

Packing her not extravagant wardrobe into her sachel, and wrapping herself up, she left the St. Clair residence, a feeling of freedom thrilling her with hope and ambition.

As quickly as possible she got out of the neighborhood, for she really believed that Jerome St. Clair would send the officers after her.

After an hour’s wandering, she found herself at the Broad street railway depot of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and feeling fatigued, she concluded to rest in the spacious waiting-room, until she read an evening paper she had purchased, hoping to see a situation advertised that would suit her fancy.

There were plenty of calls for girls to do housework, but having a good education, Etta felt that she was capable of filling some higher position than being a common servant.

As if to gratify her desire, her gaze directly fell upon the following advertisement, which was one of a number of others in the same column:

“Wanted— A well educated, respectable young lady as secretary and reader, for an old gentleman. Good salary to the right party. Apply at No.— North Tenth street.”

Poor Etta's heart bounded with joy as she read this, and she made up her mind to put in her application at once.

It could do no harm, at least, to try.

To think, with her, was to act, and leaving her sachel, at a near-by store, for safe-keeping, she went in search of the residence of the advertiser.

She found it, at length— a large, imposing edifice, with a marble-trimmed front, and ascending the steps she rung the bell, somewhat timidly,

A colored servant in livery answered the summons.

"I called in answer to an advertisement, sir," Etta explained, eagerly.

The "sir" seemed to banish the servant's chilliness of demeanor, for he opened the door still further, with a gracious bow.

"Walk right in, miss— walk right in. De boss is in de parlor 'xaminin' a lot ob gals dis berry minute."

And before she was scarcely aware of it, Etta found herself ushered into a grand reception-room, where an old gentleman and several young ladies were seated.

All of the latter were dressed much more expensively and stylishly than Etta, and she felt rather uncomfortable, as she became aware that their eyes were bent upon her, but a spirit of resolution caused her to show no trace of agitation or confusion.

The old gentleman was a fat, round-faced personage of sixty years, who had a very bald head, and a pair of pleasant eyes which rather agreeably lit up his ruddy, clean-shaven face.

He was seated in a comfortable chair, with one foot upon a cushioned stool, wrapped up with a plenitude of blankets and flannels, which was plain enough evidence that he was a sufferer from the gout.

He nodded to Etta, as she entered, and motioning her to a seat, turned to a haughty-appearing lady, who had previously been speaking.

“So ye think you’d fill the bill, do ye?” he queried, surveying her critically.

“I do,” was the reply. “I am proficient in all branches of study, and would like you to give me a trial.”

“Yas, I suppose so,” was the reply. “That’s what these other girls want, too, but they’ve all got fellers. I can’t have no gals about my place what has got feller on the brain. S’pose you’re like the rest, eh?”

“Certainly. But I don’t think you are doing right to interfere in a young lady’s private affairs.”

“Then we don’t agree. I pay a girl good wages to be ready for biz, when I want her. If I should want to hear the news read at two in the morning, I expect her to be ready to read it. If I see fit to give my amanuensis ten hours vacation out of twelve, that’s my business, too. Don’t think any of you girls will suit me, unless it is the last one. “What is your name, miss?”

“Etta Evelyn, sir.”

“D’ye know how to read and write and figger, correct?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Got any relations— poor ones?”

“No, sir.”

“Know how to play the peanner?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Got a beau?”

“No, sir.”

“That’ll do. Ye kin take off yer things, get yer supper in the dining-room, send Pom for your luggage, and then come in and write four letters, twixt now and bedtime. You other gals can go.”

Etta obeyed, wondering if this could all be true, that she way so lucky.

She was a keen reader of human character, and saw from the start that there was no way to get along with her employer, except to humor his whims.

In the dining-rooms, she met the housekeeper, a motherly spinster, and the two became friends, from the start, but Molly (as she gave her name), was not one of the communicative sort, and said very little in regard to the master of the house, whose name was Jason Titus.

After a bounteous supper, Etta dispatched the colored servant for her luggage, and then sought the parlor.

Jason Titus was half asleep, but aroused, when she entered.

“This blasted gout has nigh about worn me out, of late,” he growled. “Never had it, did ye?”

“No, sir,” Etta admitted, amusedly.

“S’pose not. Might ‘a’ know’d better. Get the paper, yonder, and see what stocks are doing, in New York.”

Etta complied with his request, and read for an hour, to him, on different subjects.

During the evening, a collector came for a sum of money, and it remained for Etta to wait upon him, she procuring the money from a safe, in the library.

Titus then had her bring forth his books, and in an hour she knew about all his business affairs, how much he was worth, and everything that concerned his plans.

His money he kept in his safe, at home, not having any faith in banks.

“Et’s all in yer charge, now, an ye can go on an’ do bizness same as tho’ I was able,” the old man announced. “I know you’re honest, or I wouldn’t trust ye. Your salary will be five dollars a day, an’ you are to take it out, o’ the cash drawer every day. That’s all. You’re at liberty for the rest of the evening. Help yourself to the pianner, if you want. Molly will show you your room, when you want to retire. Get up early to-morrow, for a morning drive with me.”

When Etta retired that night, she was wondering if it could all be true.

Seemingly, it had been a lucky happening for her which had been such a heavy loss to the St. Clairs.

Turk, the messenger boy, felt greatly relieved, on returning to his lodgings, that night, for he had cause to believe that he could depend upon Billy Jones's silence, which would insure him against immediate danger.

So he resolved to return to work the next morning.

On his arrival at the office, the superintendent informed him that he could take charge of an instrument, during the Bi-Centennial week, during each forenoon, to "spell" the different operators, and in the afternoons resume his messenger duties.

There being more money for him by the change, Turk went to work.

He was pretty well versed in telegraphy, and his first forenoon's work went off satisfactorily, and he continued in the capacity of an operator the balance of the week.

The next week was Bi-Centennial week, and there was an extra amount of messages to be received and transmitted.

Tuesday noon, just before he was about to yield his instrument to another operator, two messages came, which somewhat surprised him, as he transferred them to paper.

The longest one was directed to Jerome St. Clair and read as follows:

"I am coming to you for protection. There is no room for me, on the sea, any longer. Besides. I have had grave apprehensions about my child. Expect me at any time. I have no regular schedule.

"Uriah Evelyn."

"Must be the purty pal's dad comin' back," Turk muttered. "Thar's sumthin' secret 'bout that gal, an' I wouldn't mind knowin' it. Reckon I don't want to take no messages up there, though."

The other message came a few minutes later, and was addressed to “Fred St. Clair, No.— Market street, up-stairs.”

It was dated from New York, and ran as follows:

“FRED:— Cannot do anything with them here. Will bring them back. To-night, at the Social.”

There was no signature, but the fact that both messages were for St. Clair, rather aroused the young messenger’s curiosity.

“One is to the old boss, and t’other is to a young St. Clair,” he muttered. “Wonder ef the young and the old is related! and what it is the New York chap can’t do anything with, over there. Mebbe the diamonds!”

The idea struck him with force enough to leave a lasting impression upon his mind.

There was just a possibility, he thought, that he had struck a clew to the robbery, and there would be no harm in making a quiet investigation, clew or no clew.

As it was noon, he surrendered the instrument to Finch, the other operator, and took the Market street message to the delivery-clerk himself.

“Put that in an envelope, Chris,” he said; “I want to deliver that myself.”

“Got a sweetheart up there, eh?” Chris smiled, complying with his request.

“Oh, no! They don’t trouble me yet,” Turk replied. “Time enough for that hereafter.”

He took possession of the message and departed, wondering if he would be able to make a discovery.

At last he arrived at the number, and ascended a narrow staircase to the second floor of an old building, the lower floor of which was used as a harness shop.

There were several doors opening off from the hall, on one of which was a tin plate bearing the inscription:

“THE SOCIAL OF SEVEN.”

As none of the other doors had door-plates. Turk concluded to try the door of the “Social” in quest of Mr. Fred St. Clair.

His rap was unanswered; and after waiting a moment, he turned the knob of the door, and entered the room, which was handsomely furnished.

There was no one in it, however, with whom to leave the message, and so he concluded to wait a few minutes.

The room was fitted up as a parlor, with a fine carpet, sofa, furniture, and costly pictures, and other ornaments of an expensive nature.

A door opened from this into another room in the rear, but this was closed.

After about half an hour’s wait, the rear door opened and a man entered the parlor.

He was about thirty years of age, well built, richly dressed, and bore marks of dissipation upon his otherwise rather attractive face.

He seemed much surprised at sight of Turk, and not over-pleased.

“What d’ye want here?” he growled, looking at Turk sharply.

“Got a message fer Fred St. Clair. Enow such a chap around here?” Turk replied carelessly, producing his book.

“Yes; that’s my name. Let’s have the message, and then you skin out of here. We don’t allow boys here.”

“Don’t, eh? What kind of a ranch is it, ye’re so ‘fraid?”

“None of your business, you rascal. Give me the message.”

“Jest affix your handle to this book first, Frederick,” the ferret said coolly, “and pan out a quarter— then the message is yourn.”

St. Clair growlingly obeyed.

“Wait— see if there’s an answer!” he said, tearing open the envelope. “No; you can go.”

Turk left the room and descended into the busy street, with its swarms of sightseers.

Passing around the new public buildings, past the Pennsylvania depot, from which hundreds of people were pouring as fast as they were ushered into the city by huge train-loads, he suddenly felt a hand placed upon big shoulder, and faced about to find himself in the presence of a tall, lank individual, with thin, sharp features, a hook nose, bead-like black eyes, and a decidedly Frenchy mustache of a like color, waxed out at the ends.

His dress, however, was of the shabby-genteel order, and among almost any crowd he would have been classed a bum.

“Hello! what d’ye want?” Turk demanded, as he critically surveyed the man. “Don’t try none o’ your confidence dodges on me— I’m too salt!”

The hawkish man laughed.

“I just reckoned so,” he said, with a strange chuckle. “And you’re just the very chap I want.”

And as he spoke he turned aside his vest-collar, and exhibited a glittering gold detective badge.

CHAPTER IV.

TURK ON THE BEAT.

Surprised and alarmed, Turk instantly concluded that this detective had discovered him to be the same person who had procured the diamonds from the St. Clair Mansion.

“Don’t be scared,” the officer said, reading the boy’s thoughts. “It isn’t you I’m after, by a long shot. I’m wanting a wide-awake lad as an apprentice, and, judging by your physiognomy, you’re the boy I want. So come along with me.”

He did not say it invitingly, but authoritatively, and Turk hardly knew what to

say or do.

He had always longed to become a detective by profession, and here was a chance when he least expected it. Yet he knew that he would be losing his position in the office, and might not be able to do as well, should he not prove an expert in the detective line.

“I guess you’ll have to strike some other feller,” he demurred, shaking his head. “I’ve got a pretty good snap with the Western Union.”

“Pshaw! you can’t make your living at that. I’ll pay you good wages, and guarantee you a badge after a short trial. So come along. You can hand in your resignation to the company later.”

“What’ll you give? Money is what makes the mare go.”

“Ten dollars a week, and more when you earn it. Hurry along now, I’ve got some work ahead.”

“Guess I’ll try you a whack, anyhow,” Turk muttered. “Ten’s six bigger than totin’ messages around. Sail ahead.”

The detective was evidently no stranger in the city, for he led the way up Thirteenth street until they came to a quiet two-story brick dwelling, the door of which he unlocked, and they entered a plainly furnished front room which bore unmistakable indications of being a bachelor’s headquarters.

“This is my abode when I’m home,” the detective announced, motioning Turk to a seat. “My name is Buck Hawk. What’s yours?”

“Turk!”

“Turk? Is that all?” Hawk asked, with a grin.

“All I know of,” was the answer. “Guess it’s all required fer natural purposes.”

“Funny name. Know any of the city detectives?”

“Once in a while one. Know Hulflsh, Gray, Grimes and Mack.”

“Humph! Know any of the suspects?”

“Nuts, you mean— hard cases?”

“Yes.”

“You bet! I’ve got a heap of them chaps down fine, and know some of their hang-outs and fence-posts like a book.”

“Glad to hear it. It will help us along. I’m from New York, and not known to the professionals over here generally. But, as it happens, I’m looking for a chap— in fact several chaps— but one in particular. A visit to some of these dens may put me afloat. I’ll fix you up as a countryman, and we’ll take a turn in at Joe Burns’s.”

“The blazes! Ketch me in there. It’s a regular cut-throat den.”

“Don’t tell me what it is. But as long as I’m with you, you’re all right. All you’ve got to do is to put on ‘country jist come tew town to see the sights,’ and I’ll fence you about. I’m a thoroughbred, you understand, who is showing you the sights.”

If Turk had any misgivings Buck Hawk soon talked them away.

Out of a large stock of disguises which he hauled from a trunk he soon had Turk characteristically arrayed as a clumsy, loutish country boy from the back woods, and no one could have suspected that he was other than what he represented.

The detective then giving some slight change to his own make-up, the pair set out. Joe Burns’s notorious “Club House” was soon reached and entered.

Its proprietor eyed them suspiciously.

Advancing to the bar, Hawk ordered beer, and having drank it, set down his glass and glanced about the room.

“Polly been about town lately?” he finally asked, meaning one of the gang who had long been one of the expert pickpockets of the city.

“Not lately,” Burns replied, appearing a trifle less suspicious. “He’s been very

busy of late.”

“S’pose so. I’d like to see him. Don’t seem to meet any faces I know. Saw Scrogger up the street, tho’.”

“No? Didn’t know he was out. Got ninety awhile ago. Who’re you?”

“Scriver!”

“Humph! Heard Scrogger speak of you. Know Mike Kerrig, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“He’s doing well over on Market, fencin’ for a ‘Social!’ Rather hurting me— still I like to see the boy prosper.”

“What’s the number?”

“No.— Market street— up-stairs. Social of Seven. Nice place to play a game of cards— no one about.”

“Have to look it up. Think I’ve struck a ‘liner,’ but ain’t sure. How’s peelers ‘long here?”

“Solid, Per cent.— ten. No trouble.”

“All right. I’ll call again. Let’s all have another drink.”

The drink was had and paid for; then Hawk and his apprentice left, and returned to the house on Thirteenth street.

“I’ve struck one desirable point,” the detective declared. “I’ve found out where this ‘Social of Seven’ is, and my man is a member of it.”

“So do I know where it is,” Turk added. “I took a message to the room just before I met you.”

“Who to?”

“Fred St. Clair.”

With a low exclamation the detective became suddenly reflective and silent.

He was something of a conundrum to Turk who had taken to watching him keenly.

When they arrived at the detective's abode they entered, and Hawk produced some dried beef and cheese, and a bottle of wine, as he remarked:

"We'll have some better grub at the hotel after a while. I'm going to leave you to do as you please for a time, while I skylark about for points. By all means retain your rural disguise, and look to it you don't get trapped by sharks. In my desk yonder you'll find a roll of dirty, greasy money, which ten out of a thousand would not take as being counterfeit; yet it is. You can take some of that with you, and if any sharks try to fleece you load 'em up with that stuff. Kin ye play cards?"

"Bet I can; kin beat the feller what put the spots on 'em!"

"All right. You're not to know me if we meet."

And with this injunction the lean man took his departure.

"Durn me if I don't ruther wish I was back a-totin' messages," Turk muttered, after Hawk's departure. "Dunno how be expects to make a detective outen me, 'thout be tells me what the racket is he's on. S'pose I might tackle the diamond case. Might stir up some sort of a sensation, and git in jail in the bargain."

Toward night he tired of staying in the house, so arming himself with a pair of Hawk's revolvers which he found in the desk, and pocketing the roll of the counterfeit money, he set forth and made his way to the depot of the P. R. R., at Broad and Filbert streets, where he lounged about the waiting-room for several hours, watching the crowds of people who were flocking in by every train.

About dark he saw Fred St. Clair in the depot, strolling about, and occasionally accosting some of the strangers.

Turk was seated in one corner of the apartment, staring in the most gawky manner imaginable at the surroundings.

"Good-evening, Johnny!" St. Clair accosted, familiarly. "Come down to take in

the glorious Bi-Centennial?”

“I reckon, ef I don’t got tuk in myself,” Turk replied. “Kinder tired travelin’ around, an’ thort I’d take a rest.”

“Right. Excess of sightseeing makes it tiresome pleasure just now. Let me see, your face seems familiar. You’re from Perryville, are you not?”

“Lordy Jerusha! how’d ye ever guess that?” Turk ejaculated, with a grin of surprise.

“Oh! I’ve been through there, traveling for pleasure, and it somehow struck me I’d seen your face somewheres.”

“Yas, me an’ dad runs the Schoonover cheese factory there, an’ turns out the best cheese in the State, Dad be kicked like thunder when I set sail fur heer; but, durn it, I cum on my own hook. I couldn’t borry no stamps from him, so I jest sold my interest in the last makin’ o’ cheese, an’ heer I am. Since dad j’ined the church I’m gol-darned ef he don’t git tighter an’ tighter every day.”

“Come down to see the sights, I suppose?”

“Waal, I judge. Don’t know much about the city, but I guess I kin git my money’s wu’th. Didn’t cost a heap to cum. Got in wi’ a feller as was fetchin’ over a car-load o’ sheep.”

“Well, you want to take care of yourself. There’s a great abundance of rogues in the city laying for fat pocketbooks, and any one’s liable to get robbed.”

“Bet they won’t soap me! Carry all my spondulics in my shirt-pocket, ‘cept ‘bout a hundred dollars pin-money. The old woman posted me.”

“What a comfort it is to have some one to advise one,” St. Clair said. “But I guess I’ll journey up to the club,” he added. “Go along, if you’ve nothing more important on tap, and I’ll introduce you to some of the first young fellows about town, and we’ll have a quiet game of eucher.”

“Waal, I might go ‘long, sence we’ve met, but I don’t play much at keerds, ‘cept now an’ then a game o’ eucher.”

They then set out, and in due time arrived in the hallway outside the room occupied by the Social Seven.

Here the handsome sharp paused and said:

“I’ll just explain to you what otherwise might seem strange. This Social of ours was gotten up for mutual enjoyment, and we adopted several rules and regulations, among which was one that no one should enter the council-chamber, except in mask. No one of us knows the other. Membership is obtained thus: A person wishing to join, visits the room, during the day, and leaves a note stating that under the nom de plume of so-or-so, he will be present for initiation, that night. Among the members, now are Seven— The Murderer, The Smuggler, The Ghoul, The Blackmailer, The Burglar, The Kidnapper, and The Pickpocket!”

“Lord! Jerusha! I’m goin’ hum!” Turk gasped, in pretended alarm.

“No! no! You don’t understand. This is all fun, you know. Each member is of the best families, and perfectly honest and honorable. Just put on this mask, and I’ll introduce you as The Firebug.”

Fearing that he would arouse suspicion if he disobeyed, Turk put on the half-mask, St. Clair also masking himself, and then giving five peculiar taps on the door.

A cough was heard, whereupon St. Clair opened the door and they entered. The place was lit by a chandelier, and had undergone no little change, since Turk’s visit, earlier in the day, for in the center of the room was an elegant faro-table, about which were grouped six men, engaged at the game, while others were lounging about the room, smoking, chatting, and drinking, the refreshments being passed around by a negro.

St. Clair and Turk became seated, and maintained a silence.

About half an hour passed, when the six men at the faro-table arose and left the room.

The door was then locked by the negro, who retired to an adjoining apartment.

St. Clair then arose.

“Gents, in my heart rankles a spirit of revenge, since you cleaned me out of so much cash, last night. I propose to get even with you, by opening a little game of faro. “Will you make it interesting?”

The others agreed, and all hands gathered around the table.

Turk stood near at hand, and looked on.

The negro came from the adjoining room, and took the position of banker, and sold the checks to his masked confederates, as Turk knew they were.

Too old a lad he was, in the ways and wiles of city life, not to know that the faro game was only started in the hopes of attracting his money, of which he had purposely hinted to St. Clair that he had a considerable.

“A fine gang of sharks, and I’ll bet they represent the different professions that my friend claimed— in truth, instead of in fun. If they catch me, I’m destined to be sleepier than I am now.”

The game proceeded, and the betting ran high, in consequence of which St. Clair lost about fifty dollars.

“That breaks my bank,” he growled. “Curse me, if I only had an even fifty more, I’d scoop the crowd.”

A thought flashed across Turk’s mind.

“Tell ye what, boss. Give me sum’tin’ fer security, an’ I’ll put up fifty fer ye,” he said, stepping forward.

St. Clair caught readily at the bait.

“Thank you. Here’s my gold watch. Will that do?”

“Of course. Here’s your spends.”

And he took the roll of money from his pocket, and counted out three of the time-worn bills— two twenties and a ten.

The Social Seven exchanged glances, and the darky shoved the notes into the

cash drawer, giving St. Clair checks in return.

The others also invested, and the game was run.

Of course St. Clair won heavily, as Turk had expected, and redeemed his watch by paying fifty dollars from the gold which the banker had shoved over to him, and which Turk pocketed with quiet satisfaction.

“I believe I’ll try my luck on the consarned thing,” he said, giving the darky fifty dollars in greenbacks. “Never did hev much luck, tho’.”

He played and scooped in the checks.

Again he ventured, and again he was successful.

“Waal, I’ll go ye one more, an’ make that the last. Heer’s the last o’ the cheese money— three hundred dollar? I’ll bet the hull pile ag’in’ the backin’ of it.”

The men divided their moneys, and the stakes were put up and won— by St. Clair.

Turk was not disappointed, but pretended to be, boisterously.

“You’re a gol-durned set o’ skinnners” he growled. “I won’t play no more. I feel sick. Let me out o’ here.”

At a signal from one of the men, the negro opened the door.

Turk staggered toward it, acting as though he were somewhat intoxicated.

“I’m goin’ up to uncle’s. Come ‘long, pardner.”

“Better go with him!” one of the gamblers said to St. Clair, and that individual nodded, and followed Turk down-stairs, both taking off their masks in the hall.

To the sharper’s offer to accompany him to his stopping-place, Turk made no resistance, and feigned to be half stupid until they reached the house in Thirteenth street.

“Ef ye don’t mind, come in. No one’s up, I guess, an’ I know whar uncle keeps his bottle,” Turk declared.

He opened the door and entered, St. Clair following him.

Turk then lit a lamp, and at the same instant, Buck Hawk stepped into the room from the street.

A startled cry escaped him as he saw St. Clair, who started back with an oath.

Turk seeing a crisis instantly drew his revolvers, and covered the gambler.

“Boy, what is the meaning of this?” Hawk demanded. “How comes this rascal here, of all places in the world?”

“Oh! him and his set were trying to tap me, but I war too foxy for ‘em, an’ lured this feller here, so you could hev a look at him!”

Hawk whistled,

“I’m mighty glad. This is Slippery Fred, one of Murrell’s gang— a nabob sort of rascal, you know— big relations, you know— allus gets off Scot free.”

Hawk taking a pair of handcuffs from his big coat pocket, put them on the gambler’s wrists, without resistance. He next bound his feet together, and then gagged him so systematically, that he could utter no sound above a groan. This done he dragged him into a small dark apartment off the front room.

“There! You stay there for the present, and if you make any noise, I’ll break your head. You know the sort of a hairpin I am, and I reckon you’ve got sense enough to behave yourself.”

He then locked the door and turned to Turk.

“So far so good!” he said, triumphantly. “That catch is worth five thousand dollars, if you want to know it.”

Just then there came a rap at the door.

Hawk looked at Turk to enjoin silence.

The rap came again.

Hawk crept toward the door.

For the third time the rap came!

Turk was wondering what was next on the programme for the evening's entertainment. The show was becoming very interesting.

CHAPTER V.

TURK CUTS LOOSE.

Etta Evelyn was well pleased with her new home, the longer she remained in it. Her duties were light, and she had much of the time to herself, as old Jason Titus snored away the better part of each day, in the easy-chair.

Titus had a large daily income from a downtown manufacturing place, which it was one of her duties to collect, every afternoon, at three, rain or shine, and she always had a coupe at her command.

Then, there was the early morning drive, whenever it was pleasant in the Park, and all taken into consideration, Etta was rather doubtful if she could have ever found a more desirable situation.

The Titus turn-out was one of the nobbiest equipages seen in the Park, and Etta could not help feeling a little proud, when one morning they met Miss Aurelia St. Clair, who was out for a gallop.

The start and stare, when she saw her cousin in the barouche with old Jason, plainly expressed her astonishment.

After one of these morning drives, as Titus was examining his mail, he looked up at Etta rather queerly.

“Better put on some extra frizzes to your hair, to-day, gal,” he observed, “for I’m going to break my usual rule and have a friend to dinner. Smart young fellow too — about thirty, and got brilliant prospects, since he quit the ocean. If I do say it, Carl Clyde is a man, every inch of him.”

Poor Etta’s heart sunk within her.

Captain Clyde coming here to dinner!

What in the world should she do— how could she face him, Aurelia St. Clair's lover?

She had met him frequently at the St. Clair Mansion, and he had treated her with full as much cordiality as he had Aurelia, whom Dame Rumor said was to become his bride, somewhere along about the holidays.

If he came here, and saw and recognized her, he would likely inform Jason Titus of her former surroundings, and there was no telling how things would turn.

"I am sure you will kindly excuse me, Mr. Titus," she said, blushing. "I had rather not meet your company, if you can spare me. I had rather not make any acquaintances,"

"Pooh! Nonsense! I say yes, and that settles it. So, now, run down to town, and inquire at Drexels if the Panama is in port yet, and then return."

Seeing there was no way to get out of the dilemma, without offending him, Etta determined to "face the music," and make the best of the situation.

So she ordered the hack, and was driven downtown, where she made inquiries concerning the ship, Panama, and then stopped at Strawbridge and Clothiers to do some shopping.

While there, a man entered the store, and tapped her on the shoulder.

It was Jack Grimes, the detective!

Etta had seen him occasionally at her uncle's house, but further than knowing his professional calling, knew nothing about him.

She turned and gazed at him, haughtily.

"Sir!" she said, inquiringly.

"Excuse me," he said. "May I speak to you, privately, a moment?"

"No, sir," Etta replied. "I do not know you!" And she turned to the counter.

"But I insist!" he said. "I do not want to make you trouble, here!"

She understood, then.

His words implied a threat.

He was a detective. Had he come to arrest her, at the instance of Jerome St. Clair?

“My carriage is at the door. I shall be out directly,” she said.

He bowed, lifted his hat, politely, and made his way out of the store, by the Market street entrance.

Etta’s mind had been suddenly made up, on one thing. She must dodge this man, no matter what the results might be!

She quickly made a purchase, and left the store by the rear entrance, and hurried up Filbert street as far as Tenth street, thence down Tenth to Walnut.

She knew that the carriage would go home in case she did not return within a reasonable length of time; but what was she to do?

She took a Chestnut street car, and rode into West Philadelphia and back, her mind in a state of great anxiety.

What was she to do?

She had no place to go to.

Should she return to the Titus home, and run the risk if the results that might follow?

Yes. They could not prove anything of a criminal nature against her, and she might as well meet any charges brought against her at first as at last.

So she returned to Eighth and Market, and found the hack still waiting for her, but Jack Grimes was not to be seen.

Getting into the conveyance, she gave the order to drive home, which she soon reached, and she made her way to her room to take off her wraps.

On going down-stairs, she met Molly, who said:

“If you please, miss, the master wishes to see you in the parlor.”

Presuming that he desired to hear from the Panama, Etta accordingly hastened to the parlor, and entered.

She gave a faint gasp of surprise as she did so, for she beheld Jack Grimes seated there, in company with Mr. Titus, her employer.

The latter looked up with a nod, but the detective gave her only a passing glance, appearing not to recognize her.

“Gal,” old Jason said, in his bluff but hearty manner, “this is Carl Clyde, whom I was speakin’ about. Haven’t seen him before in three years, and he has changed somewhat in that time.”

Etta acknowledged the introduction as best she could, and then escaped to another portion of the parlor, in order that Titus might not notice the astonishment that was expressed upon her face.

What was Jack Grimes doing here, masquerading in the nom de plume of Carl Clyde? What villainous scheme had he on foot?

Poor Etta trembled.

She was well satisfied that he had some plot to further, and calculated to use her as the tool, depending upon his knowledge of her former circumstances to keep her quiet.

The very thought of such a thing made her so nervous, that she was heartily glad when Jason asked her to play something upon the piano.

She played several pieces, and then excused herself on the plea of a headache, and went to her room, where she threw herself upon the bed, and lay there, wondering what the result of Jack Grimes’s interview with Jason Titus would be.

When dinner-hour came she did not go down, but told Molly to take down the excuse of a headache.

The idea of facing Grimes, with the knowledge of the lie he was palming off on Jason Titus, was too repugnant to bear, and so she made up her mind to run the

risk of meriting her employer's displeasure.

Toward dusk, Molly brought her up a sealed letter, which she opened and read when the servant was gone.

It was from Grimes, and read:

“Dear Miss Evelyn:— Your generous employer has granted me the permission to escort you to the performance of Lotta as ‘Bob’ this evening. If you will kindly honor me with the pleasure of your company. It will also afford me an opportunity to explain much to you which may be puzzling you. Trusting you will believe I mean for your own welfare, I am,

Yours truly,

Carl Clyde.”

“The base impostor,” Etta murmured, tearing the missive into shreds. “He indeed means to use me as the stumbling-block to others. What shall I do? If I refuse to hear his explanation, he may influence my immediate discharge, if he does not work me greater harm. If I hear what he has to say, I may be better able to defend myself.”

Further deliberation strengthened her belief that she had better humor his request, and so procuring a slip of paper, she addressed it to him, and added:

“I will be ready at half-past seven.”

Let us return to Buck Hawk and his apprentice.

The third rap upon the door of their quarters in Thirteenth street was given loud and peremptory.

“The devil!” escaped from Hawk's lips, and cocking his revolver, he flung open the door, and there entered a woman some sixty years of age, who hobbled along with a cane, and was dressed in old and ragged attire. Her hair was unkempt and white, and her face wrinkled and withered, but her eyes, black as jet, had the fire and sparkle of youth.

She helped herself to a seat while Hawk was closing the door, and took a keen

survey of Turk, who was standing in the center of the room.

“Who have you got here. Buck?” she queried in a pleasant voice, which was hard at contrast with her appearance, and betrayed the fact that she had not always been in her present position in life.

“Oh, he’s a young rat I’ve picked up to help me,” Hawk replied. “Turk, this is my mother.”

Turk looked in surprise, and acknowledged the introduction with a bob of his head.

Hawk then lit a pipe, and seated himself, and gazed through the clouds of smoke at his mother.

“What brought you back from Boston?” he asked.

“A good reason. There is nothing we want there,” was the answer. “I’ve learned more since I came back than we’ve both found out in a year.”

“Humph! What?”

“I met Jerome St. Clair to day.”

Hawk whistled.

“Did he know you?”

“Not he. I was watching him unknown to him. When he walked on he dropped this, and I picked it up.”

She handed a telegraph message to Buck, who read it aloud.

It was the one from Uriah Evelyn to Jerome St. Clair, which Turk had received from the wire prior to his meeting with Hawk.

Buck scowled when he read it.

“It will be a question who wins the game now,” he said. “St. Clair has no longer possession of the girl. I learned to-night that she had skinned out, and her whereabouts are not known.”

The old woman groaned.

“More likely she’s been foully dealt with,” she said, anxiously.

“Not by St. Clair,” Buck cried fiercely. “He has too much value for his own safety to do anything like that, although I dare say he would not care it she were to die from natural causes.”

“Who’s that ye’r’ talkin’ ‘bout?” Turk asked, curiously. “Not Etta Evelyn!”

“Certainly. What do you know ‘bout her?”

“Oh, not much. Met her up at St. Clair’s, an’ made a mash wi’ her. ‘Spect to hitch on to her when I git promoted.”

Buck and his mother exchanged amused glances.

“So the gal ain’t at St. Clair’s, eh?” Turk went on, eagerly.

“No. Why do you ask? Do you know anything about her whereabouts?”

Turk scratched his head.

“No, I can’t say as I do, but you jest bet ef St. Clair has hurt that gal I’ll fix him, sure’s I’m elected governor in 1890. Bet I know what’s the reason the gal is gone.”

“You do? Then explain, for it is a matter of great importance to us.”

“Oh, it is. ‘Sposin’ you explain the whyfore to me first?”

“Indeed. You are cute, ain’t you? But I suppose you might as well know, as you are likely to be of use.”

And Hawk gave the old woman an inquiring glance.

“No! no!” she cried angrily; “tell the young monkey nothing. Boys can’t be depended on. If you’ll please me, you’ll send that fellow away, Buck; I don’t like him!”

“But, mother—”

“Send him away I say! Have nothing to do with him. Do you hear? Am I boss, or you?”

“You are unquestionably boss,” Buck said, meekly. “As my mother wills that I shall not keep you, I suppose you’ll have to go.”

“Kerect! Ef I ain’t wanted, you bet I won’t stay,” Turk declared, independently. “Kinder suspicioned I’d lose my, job, through doublin’ up wi’ you, but it don’t matter. Reckon I’ll hang to the detective biz— set up an opposition shop, like. Ef you want any p’int, jest call around and I’ll sell out fer ten dollars per p’int.”

And with this, the boy moved toward the door.

“Hold on!” Hawk cried. “Before you go you had better turn over the counterfeit money I gave you.”

“Oh, I guess not!” with a cool laugh. “If you want that, apply to the Social Seven. They were so accommodating as to give me gold for the better part of it. The gold I shall keep fer luck. Ta! ta! Tra-la-loo! The next time you employ a monkey, beware of the chimpanzee order, which know how to skin out of ordinary games. Good-by, Granny. Hi! hi! Buck!”

And with this mocking salute, Turk darted from the house and down the street.

It was quite late at night, and so he made his way to a cheap lodging-house on Market street, near the Schuylkill, and secured accommodations for the night.

Bright and early the next morning he repaired to a downtown clothing-house, and by expending fifty dollars, soon had himself arrayed in attire that was nobby, to say the least.

Knowing the balance of the money would keep him for a long time, he made no effort to secure work, but spent his time about town, dodging in and out the various resorts of criminals in hopes of meeting the diamond thief.

He also made it a point to saunter past the St. Clair dwelling, on Seventeenth street, each day; but the place was invariably closed, and there were no signs of life about it— a peculiarity connected with numerous Quaker City residences.

On the same Tuesday evening that Jack Grimes was to escort Etta Evelyn to the

theater, Turk chanced to be passing the Titus residence at about half-past seven o'clock.

A close carriage had just drawn up at the door, and a man leaped out, almost against Turk, as he was passing.

Hastily excusing himself, he ascended the steps and rung the bell, and then it was that Turk saw for the first time that it was Jack Grimes.

"Humph! I wonder what racket that son-of-a-gun is up to?" he mused. "Bet a cent he's up to some mischief!"

Curiosity impelled him to stop at the corner, a few steps further on, and wait to see what turned up.

In the course of ten minutes the door opened, and Grimes and Etta came out of the house.

As they did so, Turk made it his business to pass them; and his astonishment knew no bounds when he perceived who the young lady was.

Old Jason Titus stood in the doorway, and called out, as Jack was about helping her into the carriage:

"Take good care o' her, Captain Clyde, or I'll never trust her in your care ag'in!"

"All right!" Grimes responded.

Then he sprung in, and the carriage was driven away.

Turk had paused again, a short distance away, a decidedly puzzled expression upon his face.

"Well, here's a go!" he muttered. "Wonder what the girl is doing here? And Jack Grimes is known as Captain Clyde, eh? Phew! there's a bit of mystery all around."

He took a turn about the block, and came back to the Titus Mansion.

His brain had not been idle during his walk.

“I’m jest goin’ to find out where they’re bound fer. I’ll ask fer the captain, and likely they’ll tell where he is gone to.”

He ascended the steps and rung the bell, and the summons was answered by the negro servant, Pompey.

“Is Captain Clyde in?” Turk asked.

“No, sah! De captin done jest gone away wid de young leddy to de Ches’nut Street Opera House, sah, to see Lotta,” he said. “Jes’ gone, sah.”

Thanking him, Turk departed.

Taking a southward bound car, he was not long in reaching the Opera House on Chestnut street, where he purchased a balcony ticket, not wishing to go below, lest Grimes should discover and recognize him.

His sharp eyes were not long in discovering Grimes and Miss Evelyn, who had seats in the orchestra circle nearly on a line opposite him.

Twice during the evening he saw Grimes get up and go out, and during one of these periods of absence Turk caught the eye of Etta, and made a motion of caution with his hand.

She evidently neither understood it, or recognized him, for she turned her head and gazed haughtily away.

At last Lotta had romped and amused the audience to the time for closing, and the curtain went down, while the orchestra struck up a march.

At the first tap of the curtain bell, Turk made a step for the door, and was among the first out of the theater.

The carriage Grimes had come in, was among the long line in front of the theater, and Turk saw him and Miss Evelyn get in, and watched them drive off, downtown.”

“Goin’ the wrong way,” he mused. “That don’t look right. Mebbe goin’ arter a supper, tho’, in true nabob style. I’ve a notion that I’ll see what time they return hum.”

He accordingly hurried to the vicinity of the Titus residence, where he secreted himself in a dark alley between two houses across the street.

Two hours passed.

No carriage had yet come.

“Durn my cats if I ain’t afeard that shark has run the gal off whar she won’t be found soon,” the boy muttered, dubiously. “Somethin’ seemed to tell me that all wasn’t right.”

After a neighboring clock had chimed three, the door across the way opened.

Turk glided from the alley, and across the street.

Jason Titus, in his dressing-gown, stood upon the steps.

“Are you the gentleman of the house?” Turk asked, tipping his hat.

“Yas, I am. What d’ye want?” Jason growled, gruffly.

“I just wanted to ask if your gal had got home safe, sir!”

“No, she hasn’t. What do you know about her, and what are you hangin’ around for, at this time o’ night!”

“Beg pardon, sir, but if you’ll hear me, I’ll explain. I am afraid you let Miss Etta go out with the wrong customer. Shall I come in, sir?”

“Thunderation, yes, and mighty quick, too, if you know anything about this confounded business. I’ve been in a sweat these four hours!”

Turk followed the old gent into the cozy parlor, and he bade him be seated.

Then taking his own big chair, he said:

“Now go ahead, boy, and tell what ye know. Where’s Clyde and the girl?”

CHAPTER VI.

TURK TOUCHES BOTTOM.

The young ferret scratched his head a moment, and then answered:

“Well, I don’t know as I orter give it away, because ye see I’m in the detective bizness, and my tellin’ you might upset some of my plans. But I reckon you can be depended on.”

“Most assuredly. Go on.”

“Well, yer gal went out to the theater with Capt’in Clyde, not?”

“Exactly!”

“An’ hasn’t returned?”

“No! that’s what’s worrying me.”

“Well. I reckon you might as well drop on the worriment, and take it easy. The gal is a goner, for the present, but jest leave it to me and I’ll ferret out her whereabouts. ‘Spect ye know this Captain Clyde?”

“Indeed, yes. His father used to be in partnership with me, but died, and Carl went to sea. Used to get letters from him. Finally, three years ago, he left the sea and set up in New York, and this is his first visit to me.”

Turk whistled, and then screwed his face into a comical grin.

“Carl Clyde didn’t come to see you at all. The feller what’s been closin’ yer eye up, is a regular thoroughbred ripscallion, named Jack Grimes, an’ ye can bet yer bottle on it. I know that chap like a cross-eyed herring.”

“Ye don’t tell me. Curse my ignorance. I thought he didn’t look just like Carl.”

“You thought right. The girl— what was she to you, boss?”

“My amanuensis. I advertised, and she come. Mighty! I wouldn’t lose the girl for her weight in gold. She’s as honest and punctual as ever a gal could be.”

“Yas, she’s a squar’ gal. But, twixt you an’ me, boss, there’s a mystery, about the gal’s life, and out of pure interest in her, I’ve undertaken to ferret it out. There’s several persons that’s interested in the case, and several of the lot, if not all,

mean the girl evil.”

Jason arose and looked furious.

“Why curse it, boy, ef they dare to harm a hair of that girl’s head, I’ll fetch the law on ‘em in full strength!”

“Yes, but you’ve got to work up the case, first, an’ strike afterward. Jack Grimes has run that girl off. Jack Grimes is also a detective. Go tell the authorities that Grimes was concerned in such a scrape, and they’d laugh at ye, and you couldn’t prove nothin’.”

Jason Titus looked at his visitor admiringly.

“You’ve got a smart head on you, boy. What’s your name?”

“Only got one that I know of, and that is Turk. S’pose that answers all purposes, however.”

“Strange name— probably not your own. Have you parents or relatives living?”

“Nary a one that I know of. Been a messenger boy till lately, when I concluded I could live by my wits. Goin’ to find out this abduction case, if I bu’st.”

“How do you propose to do it?”

“Oh! I’ll root around till I strike a trail.”

“What do you know of the girl’s past?”

“Not much. Saw her first at the house of Jerome St. Clair—”

“What!” the old man interrupted, excitedly. “Where did you say?”

“At the house of Jerome St. Clair, where I took a message.”

“Great God! That is the first that I ever knew that man was in the city. What is his business?”

Turk explained, so far as he knew, and then also narrated the facts of the diamond robbery.

Jason Titus did not speak for several minutes and then his voice was husky.

“Where does this St. Clair live?” he finally asked.

“On Seventeenth street, No.—,” Turk replied,

“You are sure this girl lived there?”

“Reckon so. Stayin’ there, anyhow. Reckon she left, ‘cause they kicked up the diamond bizness into a fuss.”

“Does this man Grimes know them?”

“Yes. He’s the feller they’ve employed to hunt up the diamond thief.”

“Then perhaps it is on some such an account that he has abducted the girl?”

“P’raps. I’d quicker think some other way, though I don’t take no stock in Grimes. What do you know about the St. Clairs and Etta Evelyn, now?”

“I prefer to keep my own counsel yet, not being prepared to give an explicit answer. You go to work and find the girl, and fetch her safely back to me, and I’ll make you rich. You can go now. Call when necessary. I am tired and sleepy.”

The invitation to go was decidedly pointed, and so Turk took his departure, if anything more mystified than before.

The following morning he made around of the various livery stables in the heart of the city, and instituted some cautious inquiries among the hands in regard to whether any of the rigs had taken parties to and from the Opera House the previous night.

In none of the stables could he see a man resembling the driver of Grimes’s conveyance, who had red whiskers.

Toward evening he dropped into a saloon near the building where the quarters of the Social Seven was located, and purchased a cigar.

Several well-dressed, but otherwise rowdy-appearing fellows were lounging about the room and another was about leaving the saloon, as Turk entered.

“Did you say there was no one up in the room, Jim?” he asked of one of the others.

“No; nothing going on,” the other grunted.

“Well, then, I guess I’ll jump into town.”

“Be back in time. Important business.”

“All right. I may run across Fred.”

Then he took his departure.

Turk’s ears had been wide open.

To make an excuse for a longer tarry in the saloon, he ordered a lemonade.

“Cussed queer why Fred fails to show up,” one of the loungers growled. “Can’t be he’s sick.”

“Likely,” another responded, in a tone that seemed to have the instant effect of silencing conversation— which Turk judged was owing to his presence.

So, as soon as he got his lemonade, he took, his departure.

“There’s a part of the Social Seven— thoroughbred rascals, every one of them,” he mused, “and they’re going to have an important meeting, to-night. Wonder if I couldn’t attend?”

He crossed the street and gazed back over at the windows of the club-room. The curtains were down, and no sign of life visible about the upper part of the building.

Presently, the negro came down-stairs, and boarded an eastern bound car.

“Reckon the coast is clear now,” Turk muttered, “an’ I’m goin’ to visit them rooms, and see if I can’t find a nest where I can hide, and overhear the important business, to-night.”

Re-crossing the street, he dodged up the stairway, into the hall, above. Then he listened at the first door, only to find that silence reigned within.

Turning the knob, he cautiously opened the door, and after entering the club-room, closed it behind him.

All was dark, owing to the curtains being down.

It took but a glance to assure him that there was no place that he could conceal himself in the front room, so he proceeded to find out what show there was for him in the apartment adjoining.

It proved to be a much larger room, and was literally choked up with stored goods, including furniture, and packing-boxes. The faro-table was also there, and a shelf contained a number of bottles of liquor and glasses.

He discovered also, in one corner, a full kit of burglar's tools— bars, jimmies, picks, and other articles necessary to a rascal's profession, including various suits of clothes, all of which were pretty well worn.

There were several places behind boxes where Turk perceived that he could hide without much fear of discovery, one place in particular, where was a hole through the wainscoting from which a knot had fallen out.

By application of his ear to this hole, he could hear pretty plainly what was said in the next room.

So he turned off the gas, and settled himself into a watching position behind the huge packing-box.

He had full two hours to wait, ere any one entered the club-room, and then it was the darky, who immediately entered the rear room, and began sampling the drinks on the shelf.

Half an hour later six masked men entered the front room, became seated and called for drinks, which the negro served, afterward returning to the rear room, and closing the door.

The men in the front room then lit cigars, and were ready for business.

Turk, through the knot-hole, had an unobstructed view of them, and could hear as well.

His only fear was that the negro might desire to utilize the knot-hole too, in which case there was likely to be a row.

But Pompey evidently had too bright an eye for the row of bottles on the shelf to care for what was said in the next room.

“Well, let’s get to business,” one of the masked men said. “It’s some days since we compared notes, I believe. Have you learned nothing concerning The Blackmailer, Kidnapper?”

“Nothing,” Kidnapper replied. “It’s my opinion he’s been nabbed, and they’re holding him on account of expectation that he’ll squeal. I’d quicker think you’d squeal, Murderer, than he.”

“Think what you like, it cannot injure my reputation,” Murderer retorted. “My opinion is the same as yours, however, in regard to our missing member. Something’s up, and I reckon the sooner we wind up our meetings here the better we will be off.”

The others gave a grunt of approval, showing unanimity of sentiment.

“I was about to suggest the same thing myself,” Kidnapper remarked. “But where will we go, and what will we do with the goods?” And he gave a glance toward the back room.

“I can arrange with a young Jew to take them off our hands,” Murderer declared, “and work them off in the country. I’ve struck a new meeting-place, too, more safe than this.”

“At Mademoiselle Start’s?”

“Yes. She is a warm friend of mine, and an adroit ‘fence,’ in the bargain. None but well-recommended professionals can hide under her protection.”

“She’ll give us cover, then?”

“Oh! yes. I made arrangements all right to-day. So that, after to-night, we’ll adjourn to meet next at Stael’s, using letters instead of our present titles. For instance, I, the captain, will use the letter Z; you, Kidnapper, the letter Y, and the others in rotation backward. We will then be as a new organization. Now let’s

hear what news there is before we adjourn. Is there anything new in your line, Kidnapper?"

"Yes. I made a capture of the girl I was telling you there was a mystery about, and shall hold her till I can get a good ransom."

"Blackmailer knows something about what the mystery is about the girl, does he not?"

"I guess he don't know anything for a certainty. Anyhow the girl is the one who gave up the St. Clair diamonds, and she's better out of the way, until we get them disposed of."

"You are right. She may be a mint to us yet. Found anything of that messenger boy?"

"No— not for certain, although I have heard of him, and suspect that he is both watching and dodging me. He's left the telegraph offices and is said to be in the street every day."

The other members were questioned, and gave reports of dull business.

"Well, if there's nothing of special importance, we'd better adjourn. I'll turn the goods over to the Jew pawnbroker to-morrow, and our next meeting will be at Stael's."

The following instant there were sounds of a scuffle and angry words.

The captain sprung to the door of the inner room, whence the sounds emanated, and opened the door quickly.

"Help, boss! Dis nigger done gone cotched a burglar!"

In an instant all the members sprung to the rescue, and Turk was yanked out into the council chamber, where he stood puffing and panting from his struggle, but still defiant.

"A spy!" exclaimed Kidnapper.

"Yes, and the infernal messenger rat!" the captain cursed. "Didn't I warn you

we'd best look bright or we'd have a grate in front of us? This little devil is more dangerous than a dozen older sleuths, and we've got to put him out of the way this very night."

"Of course!" the others assented. "The best way is to sink him in the bottom of the Delaware!"

And the rascals gathered around the prisoner threateningly.

It looked as if it were all up with him just then.

CHAPTER VII.

TURK INVESTIGATES A NEW LEAD.

Game to the last, however, was Turk, when threatened by danger, and although his present situation was manifestly dubious, his grit was ample to cope with great odds.

"What d'ye mean by speakin' into our rooms and playin' eavesdropper?" the captain demanded, sternly, giving the young ferret a shake by the shoulder.

"None of yer bizness!" Turk responded, promptly. "Reckon I know what I am about."

"Oh! you do? Well, maybe you won't know quite so much about it directly. Did you purposely come here to overhear our interview?"

"Bet your faro chips I did! Didn't get left on it, neither."

"That remains to be told! Do you know what we're going to do with you?"

"Nix. Haven't any idea more'n the dog that couldn't ketch his tail."

"Well, I'll try to impress it on your mind, then, that we're going to get rid of you."

"You don't say! Didn't suppose you'd let me off that easy. What route are you going to send me off by?"

"The Delaware river route. Drowned kids never bleat!"

“Don’t fool yourself. They sometimes change inter mermaids, and cum back to life. Bet a jack-knife ag’in’ seven cents there ain’t a stun in Phila’ w’ot kin keep me under water.”

“We’ll see about that. I’m a pretty good hand at doin’ jobs of the kind,” the captain chuckled. “Dead men tell no tales arter I get through with ‘em,” and at that instant Turk received a stunning blow beside the head, and all consciousness left him.

When he recovered his senses the scene had entirely changed. Instead of being in the rooms of the Social Seven he found himself lying upon his back in the bottom of a small row-boat, which was being propelled upon the water by a roughly-dressed, grim-looking man, some forty-five years of age.

Turk instantly comprehended the situation. He was bound hand and foot and being rowed out upon the Delaware River, the bottom of which was designed by the Seven to be his grave.

With a slight effort he gained a sitting position and took in his surroundings.

The night was dark, and the river was comparatively free from shipping, except along the docks, and from their location Turk judged that the skiff had started out from the vicinity of Federal street docks.

He had time only to make these observations when his captor growled out:

“Lie down, there, you young monkey, before I club you over the head.”

“Say, now, lookee here. Cap,” said Turk, leaning forward, and peering into the man’s bearded face, “surely you ain’t mean enough to take a young feller’s life, like me, what never did you any harm?”

“Git out! O’ course I am. What the deuce do I keer, so long as the shekels come in! The world kicks me, an’ hain’t I a right to kick back?”

“But, if you can make more money doin’ a good turn, why not do it? It will pay you just as much to let me live. Now, you just put me ashore, and come along with me, an’ ill give you two hundred dollars!”

“Show up yer cash, or shet up!”

“Can’t show a red, now, ‘cause it’s all in my room at the hotel. It’s solid fer you, tho’! Heerd of Turk, the boy shadow, ain’t ye?”

“No!” contemptuously.

“Oh! you’re a stranger, then. My name is as notorious as Mayor King’s. Got a ripe old case on hand, too. Girl abducted. Savy? Stolen by same gang as hired you to spill me. Big reward, when I find the gal. Sev’ril parties want her. Sort o’ mystery about her. Fetch a fat price, you bet!”

The man only gave vent to a grunt of indifference, and rowed on.

Turk’s heart sunk within him. It was apparent that he had no mercy to expect from the ruffian. Must he then submit to the fate the Social Seven had prepared for him?

The thought was horrible!

A moment of silence ensued— then the man suddenly asked:

“What’s the gal’s name, boy?”

“Etta Evelyn!” Turk replied, a faint hope budding afresh, in his heart.

And his words resulted in causing him no little astonishment, for the man at the oars abruptly ceased rowing, and uttered an oath!

“What!” he gasped, leaning forward, his eyes glowing like coals of fire— “Etta Evelyn, did you say?”

“Jest exactly what I said!” Turk declared, excitedly. “And I bet a cent you are Uriah Evelyn!”

“Cuss my skin! how in blazes do you know that?”

The man’s surprise was great.

“Waal, I jest surmised,” Turk replied. “See’d yer message, when it cum fer Jerome St. Clair.

“And you tell me the girl has been stolen from St. Clair! And will you attempt to

find her, and deliver her up to me, if I spare your life?— will you swear to do this, and, more— to not cause my arrest?”

“Well, I reckon I hain’t at all particular about passin’ under the river, so I’ll agree to deliver up the girl to whoever she belongs to, providin’ it’s you.”

“Then I’ll spare you.”

He drew a knife, severed the cords that bound Turk, and then changed the course of the boat back toward Federal street wharf.

As they neared the wharf, Evelyn said:

“I am an old ocean pirate, and there’s a man here who is after me, with a warrant for my arrest. All I now desire is to get possession of my child, and seek some quiet place to pass the rest of my days in peace. Mind! you are to tell no one that I am here, but when you want me, you’ll find me hanging around the vicinity of Tenth and Callowhill streets.”

“Correct. I’ll set to work at once, in my attempts to find the girl,” Turk said, “and report to you, any time I have news. Tell me one thing— do you consider the St. Clairs enemies or friends?”

“Enemies!”

“And a woman— a Mrs. Hawk?”

Evelyn shuddered.

“The same,” he gasped.

Turk was tempted to question him concerning Mr. Titus, but something seemed to tell him not to do so.

They landed at the wharf, and Evelyn left the boat to drift whither it would. Evidently he had previously stolen it from some other dock.

They then walked up Federal to Fifth, and north on Fifth to Market street, where they separated, Turk going to the American Hotel and turning in for the night.

The boy's brain had little rest, however, for he lay awake nearly the balance of the night in perplexed thought.

At length morning came, and he was not sorry, for he felt wide awake and eager to get to work, rather than sleepy.

After a hearty breakfast he dropped over on Walnut street to a certain detective office, which he knew Jack Grimes occasionally frequented, and made inquiry for that worthy, but his whereabouts were not known. He did not belong to the regulars of the city, and therefore little track was kept of his movements.

A visit to the city agency brought the same result, and thus far Turk found himself baffled. He was resolved, however, to let no amount of failure discourage him, and accordingly did not feel disappointed.

During the forenoon he met Pat Murphy, the messenger-boy who had first apprised him of the diamond robbery.

"Hello!" Pat saluted, "phat the divil is the ailin' av yez, Tuurk? Why yez l'ave the offis so suddint?"

"Oh, I met an old pard, who took a fancy to my mug," Turk replied; "and so I don't have to work any more. Everything lovely with the boys?"

"Be jabbers, it is! An' it's a foine feller that detective is I was tellin' yez of."

"Indeed!"

"Yis. Ivery time I giv' him a whist o' news he slips a dollar into me hand."

"That's good. How you getting on with that case about the diamonds?"

"Divil a bit at all; but I manage to invint a bit av a sthory to make his nibs thenk it's on the trail I am."

"Humph! Better look out or he'll nab you at it. He's a snoozer, is Grimes. Where does he hang out?"

"No.— Walnut street, up-stairs."

Turk started, but did not betray it.

The number Pat had mentioned was the number of the building in which the young shadow had waited for the pseudo-Jerome St. Clair before making the trip for the diamonds.

Could this diamond-procuring gent and Jack Grimes be one and the same?

It looked to Turk as if it were more than possible.

As soon as possible, Turk left the young Hibernian, while he, himself, sauntered about town, finally bringing up at the front of the building on Walnut street, which Jack Grimes frequented, according to Pat's testimony.

Remembering that the room he had once visited had a glass door, through which one could look, from the hall, he went up-stairs.

A glance satisfied him that Grimes was not in the office, and so he entered, and found a young man seated at a table, engaged in counting over a number of packages of money.

He was rather a bleary-eyed, disagreeable looking person, and Turk at once judged that he belonged to the class which was composed of Grimes and his pals.

"Hillo!" he saluted, as the young ferret entered. "Anything I can do for you?"

"Perhaps," Turk replied, with a good-natured smile. "I just called to see if Y was in."

The clerk, for such he evidently was, looked at the ferret, suspiciously.

"I do not know who you mean," he said. "There's no such a party here."

"So I perceive, but he was here, not long ago, and you know who I mean."

"Well, he's not in, if I do." was the answer. "Started out something like an hour ago!"

"To the den?"

“Reckon not— to Stael’s, most likely.”

“Humph! Guess I’ll wait in the neighborhood until he returns.”

And with this declaration, Turk took his departure.

He did not remain in the vicinity, however, but wandered about, wondering where Stael’s could be.

If the Seven were to use Stael’s place as a “fence,” might not Etta Evelyn be confined there, too?

Later by a couple of hours he chanced to drop into the Devil’s Den, on South 17th street— a tumble-down rookery, for the sale of vile rum, which has in years past gained a notoriety as a place of curiosity, from the fact that in one corner of the small pen used as a bar-room, stands a full-sized and grotesque statue supposed to resemble Satan.

Turk knew that the proprietor, who is known as Old Mummy, was well posted on the various known and unknown resorts about town, for he had often carried cipher messages to him, from different parties who had a pretty tough criminal record. Therefore, he resolved to try and pump out of the old fellow the secret of Stael’s place.

Entering, he called for a glass of whisky, which he made a feint of drinking, but instead tossed upon the floor.

Taking out his former message book, he turned over several blank envelopes.

In the operation he managed to direct one, with a pencil, to “Mademoiselle Stael,” after which he handed it to the old man, saying:

“Know of such a crook, Mum? Dash me if I can find her, and it’s important, too.”

The old man adjusted his glasses, and looked at the name.

“Where’s your uniform?” he asked, next, regarding Turk and his attire, keenly.

“Hum, gettin’ sewed an’ washed,” Turk fibbed, well knowing that the old sinner

was suspicious of him. "Why do you ask?"

"Best to be sure," was the reply. "Stael's is No.—, Lombard St."

"Thanks. Might have searched an age if I hadn't thought of you."

And with this bit of praise, the boy took his departure.

A trip to Lombard street acquainted him with the location of Stael's place, which looked like a private house; but as it bore the appearance of being closed, he concluded not to pay a visit, until he had time to arrange careful plans.

On his return downtown, he passed the house of one of his former message mates, and saw a funeral just entering the carriages, which, on inquiry, he found was of his former companion.

There being one vacant carriage, he accepted an invitation to ride to the cemetery.

The place of burial was West Laurel Hill, and the cortege reached that beautiful city of the dead in due time, and the interment took place.

Turk was about re-entering the conveyance that had brought him, when he caught a glimpse of Hawk, the detective, in another part of the cemetery.

The sleuth's movements were so sly and dodging, that it instantly struck Turk that he was trailing some one, or something, and the boy resolved to try and learn what it was, knowing he could return to town by street cars, or Schuylkill steamers.

So he sauntered away in pursuit of Hawk, keeping monuments and bushes as much before him as possible, to avoid being discovered.

So sleuth-like and irregular were the detective's movements, that Turk found it difficult to keep him in sight; but at last the chase came to an end.

Ahead of him he saw Hawk standing in the concealment afforded by a large monument, around which he was peering.

Still further ahead Turk saw the door of a vault, which a young lady was either

trying to lock, or unlock— the latter, evidently, for the door soon opened, and she entered, and closed it behind her.

She was richly attired, and it was she that Hawk was shadowing.

“Wonder what kind of a racket this is?” Turk muttered. “Sornethin’ in it, or Hawky wouldn’t be after it. She must be fond o’ roamin’ about in the dark, among a lot o’ stiffes, sence she has shet herself in. Mebbe she’s a snatcher. Jinks! jest strikes me she’s mebbe connected wi’ the Seven!”

The thought aroused in him a greater interest in the case, and he watched the door of the vault, which was built in the side of the hill overlooking the river, full as eagerly as Hawk did.

An hour passed by, but no one came from the vault.

Hawk maintained his vigil rather uneasily. Turk had more patience.

Still another hour passed, but without bringing forth the visitor to the tomb.

Hawk then manifested his disgust by sneaking away as cautiously as he had come.

Not so with the young shadow. He was bent on seeing the thing through before he left.

What the woman could be doing in the vault so long, with the door shut, was a puzzler to him.

“I wouldn’t be afeard to bet my name ag’in, Mayor King’s, that there’s a gum game on fut, about that aire cadaver pen,” he mused. “No gal would stand the smells an’ grins o’ a lot o’ stiffes, ef thar wasn’t some peculiar inducement fer it. Ah! thar she is!”

As he was speaking the young woman left the vault, closed and locked the door, and came toward where he was crouching, rendering some quick dodging necessary.

As she passed near him he looked at her keenly, and studied her features shrewdly.

“Bet a stew that’s Jerome St. Clair’s daughter,” the boy mused when she was gone. “She luks suthin’ like the feller as hired me. Durned if I wouldn’t like to know what’s the rumble inside of that vault.”

“When he considered it was safe for him to do so he approached the door of the vault, but it was securely fastened with a padlock.

“No use of hangin’ around tere, I guess,” Turk concluded, as he noted that the day was well advanced. “Maybe I might make a further discovery by night, but I ain’t werry partial to wras’lin’ wi’ spooks. Think I’ll call again.”

Remembering the location of the vault, he caught a car on leaving the cemetery, and reached Sixth and Arch before dusk, where he left the car, and hurried away to the hotel for supper, for he meant to investigate *Mlle. Stael*’s place during the evening, if possible.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BAFFLED WOMAN.

In his parlor sat Jerome St. Clair, a little later that evening, in an easy-chair, drawn up to the grate, wherein crackled a cheery hickory fire.

His chin rested in the palms of his hands, and his eyes watched the flames with a stony sort of stare. His brows were also contracted, and it was apparent by his general aspect that his thoughts were not of a pleasant nature.

They were presently interrupted, however, by the entrance of his stately daughter, Miss Aurelia, who was attired for the street.

An expression of displeasure came over the diamond merchant’s face as he saw her.

“Where now, pray?” he said, snarlingly, “I am not in favor of these frequent nocturnal excursions of yours, girl.”

“Oh! you’re not?” Aurelia retorted, rather haughtily. “And why? Am I not capable of taking care of myself?”

“I am not sure about it. Tell me, why does not Captain Clyde call for the last few

days?”

“Oh! we had a lover’s spat. He will come to time after a bit.”

“Curse it, did I not command you not to let him escape your net?”

“Did you? Oh! well, I don’t know as I am obliged to be commanded. I don’t think he cares for me, and am not sure I care enough for him to tie myself to him.”

“Nonsense! You must— you shall! It is all important you should.”

“I fail to see why.”

“Because you do not understand everything.

“Then, it’s a good reason why I should know all, before I join in your schemes. In fact, I am not so sure but what I may be ousted out of a home at any minute, and it is well to be prepared. Bah! don’t look horror-struck. You know there’s a secret between the lives of Henrietta Evelyn and myself, and a deep secret, too, that might not be pleasant for you, were it revealed. I half believe that you and Jack Grimes know where the girl is!”

“Nonsense. You are wild. There is a secret, but it can never concern you, if you go back on me. Tame down that infernal temper of yours, or it may be the worse for you.”

Aurelia laughed mockingly and swept from the room.

Jerome St. Clair gritted his teeth as he heard her leave the house.

“A terrible change has come over her in a few days!” he muttered. “I’ve half a notion Jack Grimes is at the bottom of it— the infernal scamp! I don’t half trust him, even though he works well for me. Egad! if—”

He stopped abruptly, as Jack Grimes sauntered into the room.

Grimes laughed.

“If what?” he interrogated.

“If you have been successful, you’re a thousand dollars in!” St. Clair answered.

“Then I’m out, for I have not been successful.”

“No clew?”

“None. I’ll wager the diamonds are not in America.”

“You are not sanguine enough. Something tells me they are still in America— in — this very city. How’s the girl?”

“Gritty as a restive ghost.”

“Any signs that she knows where the jewels are?”

“No. Take my word, she’s as innocent as a lamb.”

“Well, keep her comfortable awhile longer, as I may want to use her. By the way, have you seen Titus since the abduction?”

“No. He keeps close in-doors, and it wouldn’t do for me to call. It keeps me pretty busy dodging the detectives he sent after me.”

“Have you seen Clyde?”

“No. I wrote him, under an assumed name, to lie low, as he was suspicioned of a crime. Was that right?”

“Yes. I didn’t want the fellow troubled. He’s a catch, only he don’t know it.”

“Well, I reckon he’ll keep shady. Miss Aurelia’s betrothed?”

“No! Not yet, but I desire to see them married. By the way, Grimes, did you find out anything about Fred?”

“No. There’s no two ways about it, he is locked up somewhere for some caper, but not in Philadelphia, I take it.”

“I fancy not myself, unless the Hawks know something about him. Have you learned anything about them? I am positive they know me of old.”

“They are both ‘shadows,’ I take it, and, so far as I can learn, are not long over from Scotland Yard, London. I should judge by their movements that they are hunting for some one.”

“For me, perhaps,” and the diamond merchant uttered a reckless laugh. “I hardly guess, though, I’m exactly the kind of game detectives hunt after.”

“Big-bugs sometimes come in for a grated dungeon,” Grimes suggested, arising. “I’ll bid you good-evening now, as I have some pressing business on hand.”

“Well, call again. In the mean time keep an eye out.”

“Of course,” Grimes assented, and then bowed himself out.

He made his way direct to Lombard street, and to the house occupied by Stael.

Admitting himself by a latch-key, he ascended a flight of stairs and entered a front room, which was furnished magnificently as a parlor.

The gas was turned low, leaving the room but dimly lighted; yet Grimes perceived that a young woman was seated in a luxurious easy-chair, while a guitar lay in her lap.

Turning on the gas, Grimes approached her, and seated himself on an ottoman at her feet.

“All alone, eh?” he said. “Why thus?”

“Because wearied with my work,” she replied in good English, her voice sweet and pleasing to the ear. “Monsieur’s friends have gone to the council-room.”

“Thanks. I will join them later. There is nothing much to do. Where is Pierre?”

“Out, I guess. My brother Pierre is very nervous. He is afraid, and says we shall go back to Paris.”

“Pshaw. He must be crazy. You are in no danger here.”

Grimes arose and paced the floor.

‘ Did you hear ever of the St. Clair diamonds, worth half a million francs

nearly?” he suddenly asked, turning upon her.

“No,” she said, her eyes betraying eagerness in their expression.

“Well, these diamonds were stolen recently, and are held in the anticipation of a fat reward. How would you like to have them?”

He took a large envelope from his pocket, and emptied its contents into her lap. There was a magnificent diamond necklace and brooch, a diamond-set bracelet, and four diamond rings, the settings of all of which were large and of great value.

Stael was a connoisseur of diamonds, and she uttered a cry of admiration at sight of the beautiful treasure.

“Oh, monsieur! what a prize!” she uttered, handling them nervously. “They are for me, are they not, my lover?”

A keen grimace from Grimes.

“Oh, yes; they are yours— but not until you are mine, my beauty. Go array yourself, and be waiting: here within half an hour, when I will return with a priest, and we will be married. When we are one, I will have the pleasure of presenting you with the diamonds, and you, I, and Pierre will start at once for la belle France.”

“◆ ‘Tis a bargain, then!” Stael assented, as this villainous agent of the law gathered up the jewels, “I shall be ready here when you return— in half an hour, monsieur.”

She then arose and glided from the parlor with the grace of a sylph, while Grimes donned his overcoat and hat and left the house.

As he hurried past an alleyway adjoining Stael’s house, a head popped out and a pair of eyes, as sharp as a lynx’s, peered after him.

“Wonder what’s the rip?” the owner of the head muttered, who was none other than Turk, the Ferret. “Bet there’s sumthin’ high goin’ on in the shebang to-night, and I’m goin’ to take in the soiree, if I get my head bu’sted. Mysterious place, an’ needs inwestigatin’.”

He passed back through the alley, which opened into a little yard in the rear of Shael's place. The gate was open, and he gained entrance without difficulty. Much to his satisfaction, he perceived that the rear portion of the house was darkened, but the shutters were not closed.

It was possible he might get into the house. He stood in the shadows for some minutes, making calculations as to how he could best effect an entrance, and what risk he would run of being discovered, captured, and handed over to the law.

A sort of summer kitchen was built against the rear portion of the dwelling, and from the roof of this the second-story windows could be reached, the curtains of which were up, showing that there was no light in the rear rooms.

The curtains of the third-story windows were down closely.

"Reckon a feller might get in, ef the windows ain't locked," Turk muttered, "and I might as well sail in and try, as to be cogitatin'. Jerimity! wouldn't I ketch it ef them gallus coves should ditch me!"

He was thoroughly set upon exploring the place, come what might, so it was not many minutes ere he succeeded in gaining the roof.

There were three windows that looked out upon it, and after pausing to judge whether he had been discovered or no, he crept toward the windows and cautiously peered through them.

The first opened into a room which was wholly unfurnished, the second into a hall, and the third into a bedroom, which at the time, apparently had no occupant.

In each instance darkness reigned supreme.

The windows of the hall and bedroom were fastened on the inside, but that of the unfurnished room yielded to Turk's attempt to raise it, and he gained access without trouble.

Here he paused to listen once more, and still he found no reason to suspect that he had been discovered.

Groping about, he found a door that opened readily into the hall. Along this he stole cautiously to the front of the house, until he came to the parlor, which a glance convinced him was not occupied.

Hearing a door open down-stairs, he dodged into the parlor, and hastily took refuge behind a large bookcase that stood across one corner of the room.

Here he was in no present danger of being discovered, and might be able to play the eavesdropper to some interesting conversation.

He was hardly ensconced in a comfortable position, when he heard two persons enter the room, and the voice of Jack Grimes said:

“Be seated, sir. My lady will be ready for the ceremony directly.”

Then silence reigned.

Turk puckered his mouth, and almost whistled.

“Hello!” he mused, “I’ll eat my shirt of ther ain’t goin’ to be a splicin’ set-to! Lucky I come, by jingo! Wonder if it’s Etta Evelyn goin’ to marry Grimesy? I’ll just yelp out and interrupt the banns. I’ll sp’ile Grimesey’s little game, ef he tries to force the gal to marry him.”

Unfortunately, the bookcase was so high that Turk could not see over the top of it; so he had to content himself with his acute sense of hearing.

“Wish they’d go ahead with the lark,” he muttered: “fer ef it’s Etta. I’ll make a racket, if I bu’st!”

Soon the rustling of a woman’s dress was heard by him, and then Grimes’s voice spoke up:

“Ah, at last, my dear! Brother Haley, this is my betrothed— Mademoiselle Stael — and we will be married at once. Are you ready, ma’m’selle?”

There was a low murmur of assent, and the pair took their position.

Turk’s curiosity was now at fever-heat, and he could no longer stand the agony of being able to hear without seeing.

So off came his shoes in a jiffy, and catching hold of the broad edge of the top of the bookcase, he drew himself up noiselessly to a seat on top.

A high molding ornamented the front of the case, and the young ferret was able to make this screen him from view when necessary.

Grimes and Stael had taken their positions, and the minister was reading the ceremony— a seedy-looking minister he was, too!

“Bet that feller ain’t no more a minister than old Maginniss’s dorg,” was Turk’s instant conclusion. “Looks like a put-up job to trick the gal. I’m a notion to squeal out and warn her—”

What he might have done is not certain, for just at that juncture, when the ceremony was near concluded, a man, in a sweeping beard, stepped into the parlor, and leveled a revolver at the bridal couple.

“Hold!” he cried. “I forbid this union!”

“Furies! What do you mean?” Grimes cried, taking a step forward. “I’ll—”

“Hold! the other ordered, sternly. “I forbid the banns. That woman is only marrying you for the diamonds, which are not yours. Hand them over to me, or I’ll shoot you down in your tracks!”

“Ze diamonds! They are mine— they are mine!” Stael cried, frantically, clinging to Grimes.

“Hand them over to me!” the stranger roared, menacing with his pistol. “Hesitate at the expease of your life!”

Grimes was white as a sheet.

He drew the envelope from an inner pocket, and cast it at the stranger’s feet, that personage picking it up with a quiet laugh.

“You can have Madam Pierre Stael, now, if you want her, and thank me you have not made a fool of yourself.”

He then backed from the room, and a moment later was heard descending the

stairs, two at a time.

Grimes turned to Stael, but she hurled him away!

“Go! coward, go!” she hissed. “Leave the house instantly!”

“Stop!” he cried, “Explain one thing— have you been deceiving me?”

“Of course, you fool! Pierre is my husband. Go! take your priest along!”

Giving her a terrible look, the baffled detective seized his hat and left the room, followed by the man he had brought, to perform the marriage.

In his concealment Turk was literally tearing his hair, because he could not break loose to follow either Grimes or the long-whiskered robber. He was not armed, or he would have made the attempt, as it was; for he was well satisfied that these diamonds, to-night, were the same that he had furnished the pseudo-Jerome St. Clair, at the Penn’a depot.

Furthermore, there could now be no doubt that Grimes it was who had personated the diamond merchant.

After Grimes was gone, Stael trod the floor with impatient step, for some moments, her manner extremely nervous, and her face flushed with passion.

“I will have revenge on him, now— I will strike him a blow, for offering me so magnificent a prize, and then daring to hand it over to another!”

She touched a bell, in the wall, and directly afterward a dapper little man of French physique and flashy attire, made his appearance.

“Well?” he said, surveying her.

“It is not well!” she hissed. “Ze devil is to pay. Is any of ze Seven in ze house?”

“No!” he replied, anxiously.

“Then we must fly, at once, and find another place.”

“Why?”

“I have quarreled with ze detective. Ze jig is up. We shall have to lie low, until I have revenge, and then go back to Paris.”

“But ze Seven!”

“Bah! they are all treacherous, and ze tools of Grimes. He is furious. So am I. We fly— now!”

“As you will. I willed it long ago!”

A few moments later, they left the parlor, and Turk heard them ascend to the third floor.

“Reckon this is a furnished house, kept by these rogues, and they’re going to skip. Wonder if I hadn’t better follow ‘em?”

To escape to the street, now, by the front way, required no special effort, and he waited in the alley, for them to come out.

CHAPTER IX.

A BRACE OF VULTURES.

Shortly after the visit of Jack Grimes, that evening, Jerome St. Clair had still another caller, who rather unceremoniously made his appearance in the diamond merchant’s parlor, and took a seat near the latter, who was engaged in writing.

This person was the rough-looking customer who had given his name to Turk the Ferret, as Uriah Evelyn, and he looked even more rough and dilapidated now than when Turk had seen him.

Jerome St. Clair looked up from his writing with an exclamation of astonishment, and surveyed his visitor, angrily.

“What the deuce—” he began; but Uriah interrupted him.

“Oh! nothing about the deuce, Jerome,” he protested, blandly. “We’ll leave that out of the question altogether. The question is, do you know me?”

“How should I know you! My acquaintance does not extend far among such

characters as you.”

“Oh! it don’t! Getting mighty high-toned, I suppose, livin’ in a big mansion, and slingin’ on airs. Couldn’t make a gentleman out of you, tho’, ef ye had a million dollars.”

“What do you mean, man, by your insulting presence. I’ll have you know I’m master here. Leave my premises, sir, at once, or I will make it the worse for you!”

“Oh, I guess not! I ain’t much on the skeer myself, and besides, I allow that you won’t go back on an old pard. Ha! ha! I’m rather salubrious thet ye wouldn’t dare go back on Uriah Evelyn!”

St. Clair leaped to his feet.

“You!” he gasped, whitening.

“You bet!” the other laconically replied. “S’prised ye didn’t reckegnize me at furst.”

“You have changed greatly. What in the name of furies brings you back to America?”

“Oh, peccoliar inducements, over which I have no control.”

“I can’t imagine why. I thought we settled up years ago.”

“Ye did, eh? Oh, no! I was not so extremely green as that. If a feller don’t look out for a rainy day he’s likely to get a soakin’; anyhow, that’s my logic. Where’s the gals?”

“The deuce only knows where yours is; she ran away the other day, and hasn’t turned up since.”

“The deuce you say! So you was abusin’ her, eh?”

He spoke angrily.

“By no means!” St. Clair hastily assured. “She has had some sulky spells of late,

because I could not afford to dress her as well as Aurelia, and she probably concluded to try to get a living on her own hook.”

“Humph! If I knew for sure that you ever spoke a cross word to her, I’d mop the floor with you. Where is the other gal?”

“My daughter is at the opera.”

“Indeed! You are bringing her up in style, I see. Nothin’ like that when one’s rich, with the prospect of being richer. Glad you are well heeled, too, for I’m dead broke.”

“And calculate you can make me your bank, I suppose?”

“Well, to a certain extent, yes, I know what a liberal heart you’ve got, so I’ve no fears but what you’ll come down, should I call upon you.

“You are quite liable to be deceived in that respect. I have no intentions of aiding you a cent’s worth!”

“Oh, well, time will show! By the way, please to hand over the diamonds. I can live like a prince on the worth of them.”

“You’ll not get them. They belong to Aurelia, and I shall keep them for her. You may hold a secret of mine, Uriah Evelyn, but I do not fear you. Old Sir Page is near to death’s door, and the estate comes into my hands, d’ye hear— mine! You never had any wit, Evelyn, or you would not have sold the lost heir to me for a song!”

“Wouldn’t I?” the pirate sneered, his peering eyes glowing greenishly. “You think I am an idiot then?”

“Nothing more nor less.”

“Well, I admire yer frankness, but let me tell you that a Gypsy is not necessarily a fool. You’ll find this out sooner or later. The diamonds will never do Aurelia any good.”

“Why not?”

“Because they are not in your possession, nor are you likely ever to recover them.”

“How know you this?”

“It matters not. Leave a Gypsy fool to find out such things. Another thing, your European correspondent has been literally sucking your blood— very naturally, through my instigation. He has kept you informed about Sir Page, who has not been in Europe for the last five years, but has been residing in this self-same city.”

“You lie!”

“Say so, if you like; I know the truth. I suppose you are aware that I am not your only acquaintance in this country?”

“You refer to the Hawks!”

“Yes, to be sure. They came over from Scotland Yard, London, in search of a notorious murderer named— well, no need to mention Gerald Hawk as being the man. St. Clair, I suppose, sounds more protective to you!”

The diamond merchant gnashed his teeth.

“Curse you, man, begone! Your presence is hateful to me!” he cried.

“Lightly— lightly, Jerome! Don’t let yer angry passions rise. I don’t care a durn how mad ye git, ‘cause I know I’ve got the clutch on the helm and can put a reef in yer canvas whenever I like. All I’ve got to do is to go whisper in the ear of Nancy Hawk that you are here, and she and Buckingham will make it interesting for you, and don’t forget it!”

“If you dare, I will murder you!”

“Ha! ha! ha! I’ll take my chances. I don’t propose to be hard on you, providin’ you don’t git too penurious. It’s this way— I’m goin’ to leave off hard work and speckilate like a gentleman. Ef you have got more sand to heave into my bank than Sir Page, why you’re my man. If not, vice versa. Plain as Scriptor, the logic o’ that, not?”

Jerome St. Clair, as we shall still continue to call him, looked as though he could have murdered his enemy with good heart just then.

His face was white and red by turns, and his eyes had a snakish glitter that spoke of the bitter venom which rankled in his heart.

“May the furies seize you!” he hissed. “If you think to bleed me, you will reckon without your host. I am not worth a cent, and, besides, Sir Page is where you will never find him, if, indeed, he is not in England.”

“You are wrong. I have not been a fool all this time, even though a wild Gypsy and you a scheming bailiff. If you are particular to know it, Sir Page resides in this very city, and I know where to lay my bands on him at an instant’s notice. He will pay a round sum for the real heir, if you will not!”

“But possession is three points of any law!” St. Clair sneered.

“And you have not even that!” It was Evelyn’s turn to chuckle. “You have not the real child you stole from Sir Page!”

“What? are you mad, man?”

“Not a bit. Just consider. Do you suppose I would have given you my child to abuse and knock about? Ha! ha! no! Knowing of the immense wealth of your kinsman, Sir Page, you one night attempted to burglarize his residence, using me as a sort of tool. You were unsuccessful— were recognized— and in escaping took refuge in our Gypsy camp, where you were kept in hiding for weeks. Mind, in escaping from the mansion, you murdered Lady Page, and this set the country wild. Finally, through our queen, Stael, and myself, you escaped to Liverpool, and thence to America, leaving behind your wife and son. Later ye wrote me, an’ proposed that I rob Sir Page of his diamonds and his child and bring them to you, when you would set me up in business and make me rich. I obeyed. I brought the diamonds and two children— one Sir Page’s and the other mine— and put them in your charge. The two at the time were very much alike in appearance, and so, looking out for the interest of my own child, I gave her to you as being Sir Page’s, while you knew Sir Page’s as mine!”

“You lie, you rascal, you lie like Satan,” the diamond merchant cried, savagely, making a move as though he would strike the pirate.

“No, I don’t. While you have made a lady of my daughter, Sir Page’s child you have allowed to escape!”

An evil glitter entered the merchant’s eyes at this, which Evelyn did not notice.

“So you see,” the latter went on, “if you don’t whack up, I’ll set the dogs at you, and eventually win Sir Page’s favor by restoring to him his long-lost daughter!”

“And I defy you to do your worst!” St. Clair cried, furiously.

CHAPTER X.

A TRIANGULAR CONFAB.

Our young ferret, Turk, could not really have explained his motive for dodging the movements of the Staels, but follow them he did, nevertheless, to a boarding-house in Barker street.

They were admitted by the landlady, and as they did not reappear within half an hour, he concluded that they had taken up quarters there, and he might as well seek his own.

“I’m shot ef I wouldn’t like to know who the galoot was who roped in the jewels,” he muttered. “Looks like there’ll be a rye old time recoverin’ ‘em, now. Jehosephat! Didn’t Grimesy nigh git took in, eh? Bet he won’t go fishin’ fer beauties again! I must get after him now, fer he hain’t got the gal, Etta, shet up in the Lombard street den, which, ‘pears like to me, was a counterfeiter’s crib. Several things I’ve got to investigate ter-morrer.”

The next morning he paid a visit to the Titus dwelling, and found the old speculator in the parlor, in company with another gentleman, at the sight of whom Turk started.

He was a handsome person, who in many respects strikingly resembled Jack Grimes, the detective.

Mr. Titus was greatly pleased to see our young ferret, and at once introduced his visitor as Captain Clyde.

“Glad ter meet you,” Turk said. “You’re the feller as looks like Grimesy?”

“Ah! yes. My friend, Uncle Titus, has been telling me how he was taken in by an impostor, and the serious results that have attended the matter. Think I look like this fellow, Grimes, eh?”

And the captain laughed good-naturedly.

“Yes— ‘bout as much as an oyster luks like a clam!” Turk declared. “Shook the fair Aurelia, eh?”

“What do you mean? I do not understand you.”

“No! Oh! well, I was just surmisin’, that’s all. Been up past Saint’s, but couldn’t get an eye on you.”

“You mustn’t be so inquisitive, boy,” Uncle Titus said, a little severely. “It’s not becoming in one so young.”

“Humph! how d’ye ‘spect a feller’s goin’ to be a detective ef he don’t ax questions?” Turk retorted. “That’s a part o’ the parfesh.”

“The boy is right,” Clyde observed, approvingly. “That is one strong point in the trade.”

“Yas, mebbe,” Mr. Titus allowed. “When I was a boy, I never was allowed to speak, except at proper times.”

“Guess that’s why you’re no detective,” Turk said so dryly that the others laughed.

“Perhaps you are right, lad— perhaps you are right. Anyhow, let us hear what success you have had. Captain Clyde, here, is deeply interested in the case of my late amanuensis, too.”

“What! not cultivatin’ another mash?” demanded Turk, quizzically.

“Well, yes. If you refer to any knowledge of my visits to the St. Clair Mansion, I’ll explain that the prime attraction was Miss Evelyn. Naturally I had to play the agreeable to the fair Aurelia, in order to get a chance to see Miss Evelyn.”

“Oh! I savy. Well, I haven’t found out where she’s concealed yet, but I’m

thinkin' I ain't fur off. Got onto a racket last night. Found out that Grimes and his pals had got a new hang-out at a place kept by a woman named Stael. Know her?"

And the boy's keen gaze sought Clyde's face in time to see him flush rather confusedly.

"Yes—that is, I have met her once," he replied, evasively.

"Well, I wormed around till I spotted her residence, and last night I took a notion to pay a quiet visit. So, it bein' the servant gal's night off, I helped myself in by a rear entrance, and ensconced myself behind a bookcase in the parlor. By-me-by, in cums Jack Grimes and a preacher, and the bossess, Stael, is trotted out to be j'ined to Grimes. The minister had got the knot 'most yanked tight when in waltzes a big-bearded, swell-head of a chap, an' forbids the banns, and invites Grimes to pony over the diamonds."

"The diamonds!" Jason Titus cried.

"The diamonds!" echoed Capt. Clyde.

"The diamonds, you bet!" Turk repeated, "an' as the bewhiskered chap flushed his hand wi' a loaded club containing several bullets, you can bet Grimesy 'passed' over the sparklers, an' the stranger 'went it alone down the stairs,' two steps at a time. 'Fore goin' he told Grimesy as how the gal Stael was married, which made his jiblets mad, and he sailed out. Pears be was goin' to give Stael the diamonds. After Grimes skipped, Stael called in another feller named Pierre, and they voted things were too numerous, and concluded to skip, also, which they did."

"Did you follow them?"

"Yas. Run 'em inter a boardin'-house an' left 'em. Allow they'll stay there till they get even wi' Grimes, when they're goin' to scoot for Paris!"

"You say you have seen this woman, Stael; how old is she?" Mr. Titus asked, addressing Clyde.

"She claims to be thirty, but looks even younger. There is large chances that she is older than she claims, as women rarely give their real ages."

“Bet on it she’s good fer thirty. There’s Maggie McGilligan, down in Black-cat Alley. She’s forty, luks like a Maryland free-stone peach, an’ allows she can mash any feller in Phila, at the tender age of sixteen— soft gloves, Queensbury rules!”

“This Stael must be the same I once saw!” Mr. Titus averred. “She was then the child-queen of a roving band of Gypsies that camped upon the moor. Jack Evelyn was one of these same!”

“Hello! d’ye know Jack?” Turk asked, pricking up his ears?”

“To my sorrow, I know of him!” was the sad reply. “Do you know him?”

“I should cough up a cat, if I don’t! Why, he tuk me out in a boat, the other night, an’ was goin’ to send me down tew carry a message to Neptune. Social o’ Seven hired him to git rid o’ me, ye see, but afore he got ready to chuck me over, I got tellin’ him about the inconsistency of the thing, ‘ca’se how I had a job o’ rescuin’ a gal named Evelyn, which must be done, an’ so forth, an’ so forth. Well, the result was he pricked up his ears, sed the gal was his’n, an’ consented to let me breathe for an indefinite period, if I would find and deliver the gal to him. So I promised, and got free!’

“You promised that?” Clyde cried.

“You bet— but sech promises don’t count, no more’n when an old maid promises to give her billy-goat oats, and he turns around and butts her for her kindness.”

“You’re, a young rascal, ‘pon my word,” Clyde said, laughing. “By the way, this Evelyn is a sea pirate, and I have a warrant for him. Do you know where he can be found?”

“I might, but I’m a sea cook ef I do,” Turk declared. “Don’t s’pose I’m goin’ to waste brains in workin’ up a case, an’ payin’ big fish-bills, do ye, only to give everything away? The boss, heer, engaged my perfessional services, an’ I never tackles two employers at once, ‘cept one is myself.”

“Perhaps,” Mr. Titus suggested, turning to Clyde, “it will be nothing to my detriment to let the boy into the story, as be seems to be a worthy young fellow, and has both energy and shrewdness beyond his years.”

“You are right. I would recommend that you lay the matter before him, and his gamin wit may enable him to make more out of it than we could.”

“Lookee here! don’t git so fresh and flatterin’— it don’t agree wi’ my constitution,” Turk demurred, with mock seriousness. “Besides, flattery knocks the spots off’n ennything. Once owned a hen, down in Black-cat Alley, what layed two eggs a day, an’ I got pettin’ her, and tellin’ her what a layer she was, an’ dashed if she didn’t—”

“Well, never mind the hen,” Mr. Titus interposed. “I will tell you about my case, of which you have not yet had a full outline. In the first place, I am not Jason Titus, in truth, but Sir Donald Page, an English gentleman!”

Turk puckered up his mouth into whistling shape, and looked his surprise.

“I used to reside in Surry, England,” Sir Page went on, “with my wife and child, upon my estate, which was large and valuable, and which I still own. I had a princely income, and also had an enemy— a kinsman whom I retained as my bailiff. He was jealous of my prosperity and happiness, and in an unguarded moment attempted to rob me, but was discovered and fled, first, however, murdering my young wife, Lady Page!

“You may know that I spared neither money nor pains to have him apprehended, but through the agency of a hand of Gypsies, he evaded every attempt to capture him, and escaped to this country. Later, by a couple of months, my only child was stolen from me, together with a most valuable collection of diamonds. Through the agency of detectives, I learned that the perpetrator of the deed was the same Gypsy Evelyn who assisted Hawk, my bailiff, to escape, but again was an attempt to capture frustrated by Evelyn’s escape to this country, where, I am now well-satisfied, he placed my child in the charge of Hawk, as I have since learned, through my friend here, and also that he had been an ocean pirate, for a number of years!”

Turk’s eyes were literally as big as saucers, when the narrator paused.

“Jehosephat John Rodgers!” he ejaculated.

“That’s like a meller-drama— ef it ain’t I’m a shad! Didn’t lose another kid, did ye, what might look like me?”

“Well, no!” Sir Page smiled. “Fortune never favored me with more than one child, which, until recently, I have given up all hopes of finding. Shortly after the kidnapping, I came to America, and through the aid of private detectives, prosecuted a thorough search— as I abhor publicity, more than anything else. Failure greeted every attempt, and I at last gave up in despair. But for the accidental coming of Etta Evelyn to my house and the developments that have since followed, I should probably never have expected or hoped to have my child restored to me.”

“Then you think Etta is yer gal, eh?”

“My heart seems to tell me so. While she remained a member of my household, I studied her narrowly, and the more I did so, the more my heart yearned toward her. Then, the very fact that she was a member of St. Clair’s household, is evidence in itself.”

“Dunno. I’ve bin tryin’ to git some o’ these p’int’s thru my noddle, an’ I can’t jest ‘spress my opinion as clear as I may be able to do, hereafter. Are ye sure St. Clair and Hawk are one and the same?”

“I am well satisfied on that point. My friend Clyde has given me a description of St. Clair that so corresponds with Gerald Hawk, I have no doubt he is the same.

“Descriptions don’t go very fur. Feller once hired me to carry a note to a certain number, while I was on the messenger force. Said she was tall, slim, wore good togs, and had a bright angelic smile. I tuk the message, and the one that answered the bell corresponded to the description— so I guv it to her. Met the feller, after, and he threatened to give me six 30’s at Moya. Sed I’d given the message to the chamber-maid instead of the young lady he had mashed in the Walnut street cars. Then, there’s another p’int. There’s an extra gal. This Evelyn is a smart Aleck— mebbe nobody don’t know which is which ‘twixt them gals. Did St. Clair or Hawk have a gal when he left Eng.?”

“No! He left a wife and son in London— the same that are in this city now!”

“I savy! Must look after ‘em to-day. Well, ef he hadn’t no gal, did Evelyn, the Gyp, have one?”

“I am of the impression that he did have a child, but am not certain.”

“Bad. That rooster’s got a head as long as a Jersey watermelon. He could have easily mixed things up in leavin’ the kids with St. Clair.”

Sir Page looked somewhat startled.

“How do you mean? Do you think he would give my child to St. Clair and claim that the other one was his, then afterward try to extort money from me by claiming that he had changed the children, and that Etta was his own child?”

“Well, a feller can’t tell how fur a frog can jump, you know. There’s blamed few things there ain’t a bare possibility of to-day, when rascals has got the tiller-rope.”

“However that may be, there is one way I can prove my own child, unless—”

“Unless the birth-mark has been counterfeited?” Captain Clyde interrogated.

“Exactly! She had a birth-mark, which I remember plainly, and I will not be convinced that Etta Evelyn is not my daughter until it is proven to me that she does not bear the mark, which it would be next to impossible to copy.”

“What is this mark?” Turk asked.

“I prefer to keep that a secret until I see the girl and find out the truth.”

“Well, boss, I’ll go ye a hundred eyesters fer news when I report ag’in. Got a kind o’ salubrious idea, ye know, that I kin find out where the gal is, ye know, an’ ef any electric light conclusions hit me, I’ll run into this dock and transfer ther cargo, as the sailors say. There’s one thing to consider, though.”

“And what is that?”

“This. If I should happen to scoop in ther affections of the gal you’ll not let the captain here interfere!”

“Consider that part of it settled,” Sir Page said, with a smile.

After a little further conversation, Turk took his departure and went back to the hotel, where he sat down at a table, lit a cigar, and gave himself up to thought.

There were several things that must needs be attended to.

First, the graveyard mystery concerning Aurelia St. Clair and the old vault.

Then Turk desired to get on track of what game the Hawks were after, also to get an interview with Jack Grimes, and most of all, to find out where Etta Evelyn was concealed.

All that he had heard at the Titus place had not served to throw any more light upon the whereabouts of Etta's place of concealment, and just how he was to go to work to find it out was a sorry puzzle to him.

The cemetery matter, he was aware, must needs be investigated at night, as during the day it was visited by large numbers of people.

What was the attraction within the vault for Miss Aurelia St. Clair was also a mystery, the exposure of which might bring a sudden revelation.

After dinner he donned a disguise, and carrying another one in a bundle, wrapped in a newspaper, he set out on a visit to the numerous thieves' dens in hopes of finding some tidings of Jack Grimes.

He was disappointed, however, and next sought the establishment of the noted pugilist, Arthur Chambers, on Ridge avenue, but could find nothing of Uriah Evelyn, nor did inquiries elicit news concerning him.

Satisfied that he might as well strike some other tack, the young ferret then roamed around town, waiting for night to approach, when it was his intention to visit the cemetery.

Soon after the last words of St. Clair, Uriah Evelyn took leave of the diamond-merchant, leaving that person in no enviable frame of mind, as may be supposed.

The following afternoon, as St. Clair was going to the Park in his open barouche, he saw a woman upon the street coming toward him, and his face expressed great astonishment.

"Stael, as I live!" he ejaculated, under his breath. "The very one I wanted to see."

The next minute he ordered the driver to stop, and when the barouche was halted he sprung to the pavement, just as the ex-Gypsy queen was passing.

“Mademoiselle Stael!” he exclaimed, stepping toward her.

She gave him a startled look at first, then an expression of recognition beamed upon her countenance.

“Monsieur Hawk— can it be possible?”

“Most assuredly, and of all persons I want to see, you are the one!”

“What for, monsieur?”

“On important business, for which, to both of us, there is a fortune.”

The mademoiselle’s eyes glittered.

“Ze monsieur is not laying ze snare?”

“By no means. You should judge better of me than that, for you know I was once your ardent admirer!”

“Well?”

“Where can I see you?”

“If you wish, I will come to your place.”

“Good! Get into my barouche and I will drive you there!”

“Many thanks. I will come around this evening.”

“Very well. Here is my present name and address,” and he gave her his card.

“Do not fail me.”

“I will not!”

And with a winning smile, which made her look years younger than she was, she swept on, while St. Clair entered his barouche and drove on his way.

“The key to victory is now within my grasp!” he chuckled, and he returned to his residence, to eagerly await the coming of Stael.

It was nearly nine o’clock ere she was ushered into the parlor, where the diamond merchant was waiting for her.

He helped her to a seat in a luxurious armchair, and then seated himself opposite her.

“Well, mademoiselle, at last we have met,” he said. “You, of all women, did I ever expect to meet in America!”

“Indeed?”

“Yes. I often thought of you as the bonny Gypsy queen, who aided me to escape from England. How has the world been using you, mademoiselle?”

“Oh! very hard, sir. I have drifted about here and there for several years, literally homeless.”

“Married?”

“Ah! no! I never yet met the man that could appreciate my talents or my beauty.”

“Except me, Stael. You know you had an ardent admirer in me. Times have changed, though, now. I am rich, where I once was poor.”

“Yes?”

“Oh! certainly. But ‘tis said a man is never satisfied with wealth until he wins love and revenge. I crave for both now. Once I get the revenue, I believe I can win the love. I have a bitter enemy, and I shall never rest easy until he is out of the way. Then, with my great wealth and a fair wife, methinks I would be content. I want you for my wife, Stael— I likewise want you to do the job!”

She looked at him angrily.

“What! I— commit murder, sir?”

“Well, not exactly; you see, you would only have to put a little poison in a cup of

tea!”

“You do me a terrible wrong, sir. I could never think of such a thing!”

“Not if I would marry you?”

“No! no!”

“What would hire you?”

“Five hundred thousand dollars would not!”

The merchant uttered a curse.

“You can go, then. You must have changed greatly. The woman who would not become the lady of Page Priory must be, indeed, mad!”

“Would you have me kill old Sir Donald Page?”

“Yes!”

“Then marry me first, and I will do the work you are too much of a coward to do!”

CHAPTER XI.

THE BOY FERRET’S GRAVEYARD SCENE.

When night had fallen over the city, Turk the Ferret jumped aboard a Ridge avenue car, and in due time was landed at Laurel Hill Cemetery, to which he was not long in gaining an entrance, without discovery.

It was certainly a spectral place to enter, with the dim moonlight gleaming over its thousands of marble slabs and monuments; but Turk had made up his mind not to allow any silly superstition to dissuade him from investigating the vault mystery.

“Never heerd o’ any one gittin’ hurt by spooks yet,” he soliloquized, as he kept a wary eye around him. “◆◆‘Spect et would make a feller’s hair rise, tho’, ef he was to git hugged by one o’ them.”

He was not long in reaching the vicinity of the vault, but found it locked, as usual, and no one in the vicinity.

This did not discourage Turk, for he was resolved to make a night of it, believing it would bring something of importance to light.

Concealing himself within easy range of vision from the vault, yet in a place where he was not likely to be discovered, he lit a cigar, and waited.

Hours dragged by, and barring the mournful rustle of the leaves and shrubs, a sepulchral silence reigned throughout the city of the dead.

So intense and lonely was this silence that it could but have had a weird effect upon any one seated within the cemetery, and Turk's hair began to feel more light at the ends as the minutes rolled by.

"Jeminetty!" he finally muttered. "I wish to blazes something would happen to stir up the monotony. An ordinary ghost would be welcome, during this blasted silence."

His wish was destined to be gratified.

Soon after, away ahead, he saw a white object in flowing robes, moving toward him, with majestic mien.

The nearer it came, the ferret perceived that it was marvelously tall, and that the flowing robe enveloped both head and body, providing it had any.

"Jerimity! Reckon that's a bonny-fied ghost, fer sure," the ferret mused, hugging closer to his concealment. "Hanged ef I don't tickle its ribs with a bullet, ef it comes fer me!"

The spectral-looking figure, however, did not approach him, but turned its course toward the vault, at the door of which it paused.

Like a spectral sentinel it stood there, before Turk's eyes, for a few moments; then unlocking the padlocked door the ghastly visitor pushed open the heavy door, and gazed backward as if in suspicion or fear. A moment thus it stood, then abruptly disappeared within the vault and the door was closed behind it.

After waiting several minutes, to see if there was to be any more ghostly visitants, Turk stole cautiously toward the arched receptacle of the dead.

“Jest bu’st me, ef I believe that was a ghost at all,” he muttered, “an’ I’m goin’ to sift the matter through, if there’s sech a thing in the almanac. ‘Spect mebbe I’ll have to use my revolver, but I’m goin’ to investigate, hit or miss.”

As he neared the vault, he drew and cocked his revolver, and held it ready for use, not knowing what emergency a moment might bring forth.

The door was not fastened on the inside, and stood a trifle open, and so Turk applied first his eye and then his ear to the crack, to learn if any one was moving about, within.

But all was silence, and darkness. Not a sound was heard.

“Jest like to know ef a feller’s liable to git his census taken, ef he should poke his head in there. Strikes me that there’s two rooms to the vault.”

His nerves drawn to their firmest tension, he put forth his hand and carefully pulled the door open, keeping out of sight himself.

If any one was within the vault proper, he felt sure he or she would come forward and shut the door. But no such a move was made.

Satisfied on that point, the young ferret stepped stealthily into the vault, and gazed around him, his eyes bulging out in anticipation of seeing some startling sight.

All he saw was on either side, brackets that supported a couple of tiers of coffins and caskets, in which probably reposed the bones of some of those who had formerly owned the vault.

No grinning skeletons, or spectral apparitions were visible, much to the ferret’s relief.

In the rear part of the vault, however, he saw a door, which evidently opened into some near underground apartment.

With cat-like tread, Turk approached this door, and examined it, and was

satisfied that there were no fastenings to it, unless they were on the other side.

Holding his revolver ready for instant use, he laid his hand on the latch of the door, cautiously raised it, and flung the portal open.

The sight that met his gaze was something entirely unexpected.

The inner vault was like the first, except that it was larger, and furnished with a couple of iron ornamental chairs, a rough table, and a Centennial cot bed.

A lighted candle burned upon the table, and upon one of the chairs sat Jack Grimes, partly wrapped in the robe of white.

Upon the other chair, bound, hand and foot, sat no one less than lost Etta Evelyn!

There were tears upon her cheek, and she looked the picture of misery.

The moment the door flew open, Jack Grimes sprung to his feet, with an oath, but Turk stood triumphantly on the threshold, his gleaming weapon bearing full upon the detective.

“Stand where you are, Jack Grimes, or I’ll put a bullet through you, Turk’s ringing voice cried out sternly. “I’ve got the drop on you, and I’d rather shoot you than not!”

For a moment Grimes was too enraged to speak.

“What do you mean?” he finally gasped, hoarsely. “Put away that pistol, or it will be the worse for you!”

“Nary a time, Grimesy! I’ve got you just where I want you, and if you attempt to escape, I’ll bore a hole in your noddle, what’ll take away what few brains you have got. Mind, I’m not fooling. You had no mercy on me, did ye, Mister Kidnapper? nor I won’t have any on you. I jest want ye to understand that I’m boss of this hyar situation, an’ am goin’ to be obeyed. Take yer knife and cut Miss Evelyn’s bonds. Dare to disobey, or hurt her, and I will perforate ye!”

“Shoot and be—!” Grimes cursed, furiously. “I never yet was known to take water from a boy!”

“You’ll find it’s the law as talks, now!” Turk cried, firmly, a determined glitter in his eyes. “I shall count one, two, three. One!”

An expression of bulldog defiance was upon the detective’s face. He evidently did not believe Turk would be courageous enough to put his threat into effect.

“Two!”

Turk’s voice had a steely ring.

Grimes looked less confident.

“Three!”

Perhaps a couple of seconds elapsed, then crack went Turk’s weapon, and Grimes clutched at his breast, and fell back upon the ground floor in a faint.

Turk quickly sprung forward, and examined the nature of the wound, and found that it was as he had meant it to be, merely a flesh wound, the bullet having passed nowhere near a vital part.

“He’ll be all right directly,” Turk said, looking at Etta, who appeared terrified at what she had seen. “I’ll release you, and then bind him!”

This he was not slow in doing, and Miss Evelyn was soon free, while Jack Grimes lay bound hand and foot.

“Now I’ll lock him up in here, and hurry you to a safe place, while I return with a cop, and have him taken to the station-house,” Turk said, and the poor girl was glad enough to let him be her director.

Securing the key from Grimes’s pocket, they left the vault, and Turk locked the door behind them.

They then made their escape from the cemetery. Putting her aboard a car, he directed her to go to the Titus Mansion, and he would follow her as soon as he had secured the arrest of Jack Grimes.

He next sought a policeman, and made known to him the necessary particulars of Grimes’s offense, and of his capture, whereupon the two entered the cemetery,

and proceeded to the vault.

On arrival there, what was their astonishment to find the door open, and the rascally detective gone!

It was at once evident that he had received relief from some of his outside confederates, and the escape had been made by the Schuylkill.

Turk was much disappointed, and arranging with the officer to keep an eye upon the cemetery, he boarded a car, and rode into town.

In due time he arrived at the Titus Mansion, and rung the bell.

It was answered by the servant, and without entering, Turk asked:

“Has Miss Etta arrived safely?”

“Yas, sah; just done come, a few minutes ago!”

“All right. I will call around in the morning.”

He then sought his hotel lodgings, and rest for the night, pretty well satisfied that he had been in luck in finding and releasing Miss Evelyn.

But the end was not yet.

Shortly after Turk and Etta escaped from the cemetery vault, Aurelia St. Clair stood within the vault and before Jack Grimes, who had recovered consciousness, and narrated what had just happened.

“Can it be possible that it has been discovered that I have been connected with you in this secret?” Miss St. Clair said, cutting his bonds.

“Of course!” Grimes lied. “I learned from the boy that everything has been exploded, and both yourself and your father will be arrested. It remains for us to let the old man look out for himself, while we make a break for cover until the wind blows over. We must, however, if possible, secure the girl.”

“No! no! let us escape from the city by the midnight train.”

Being scarcely able to walk, Grimes saw the necessity of obeying her

suggestion, and ere an hour more, they were aboard the train, speeding for New York.

That was the last ever seen of them in the Quaker City.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HAWK'S SWOOP.

A man had been prowling about the Titus residence, at the time Etta Evelyn had arrived and entered, and this man was none other than the old sea pirate, Evelyn, who had previously learned that Sir Page dwelt there.

When finally the house became quiet, and time enough had elapsed for its occupants to get asleep, he gained access to the rear yard, and producing a slender bar of iron, was not long in prying open a shutter.

It was nearly two in the morning, and he had little fear of being discovered. Yet he had hardly got the shutter open, when he felt something cold touch his cheek, and wheeling around, saw that the cold article was a revolver, held in the hands of Jerome St. Clair, who was also accompanied by Stael.

Evelyn recognized them both, and uttered an oath.

"What the devil do you want?" he growled.

"What do you want, in there?" Jerome St. Clair demanded, sternly.

"Money!" Evelyn growled, again.

"I believe you lie! Has the girl returned?"

"No— not as I knows on."

"Don't lie to me. Now, lookee here, Evelyn, you go into that house, chloroform the girl, and bring her to me, and I will give you a thousand dollars."

"Let's see yer swag."

"Bring the girl, and help me to take her to my house, and I will give you the money!"

“D’ye swear to this?”

“I swear to it!”

“Give us yer chloroform.”

The diamond merchant produced a bottle and a sponge, and handed them to the old pirate.

“Be lively, now, for I want to get out of the city, before morning.”

“Out of the city!”

“Yes. I met an old friend, to-night, and have hired him to take us down the bay in his steam tug. Once beyond the breakwater, we will land at some southern port, and I will send an envoy to collect a ransom from Sir Page. If he pays a big price, he can have her.

“D’ye ‘spect me to go along?”

“Yes!”

“An’ ye’ll whack up the ransom?”

“Yes. I’ve been preparing for this, and if you’re lively, we’ll leave South street, Schuylkill River, before day break!”

“All right. You’ll find me an ugly customer to deal with, if you don’t keep yer promises.”

This conversation was not conducted in an undertone, for owing to the lateness of the hour, it was not deemed necessary. Just outside the back yard fence, in the alley, a roughly dressed person had been crouching, in a listening attitude.

Dressed in overalls, slouch hat, shaggy beard, and hair, no one would ever have suspected that this cleverly disguised eavesdropper was Turk the Ferret.

To explain his presence here, he had been in the hotel an hour, when something seemed to tell him that danger was menacing Etta Evelyn.

So strong did the matter press upon his mind, that he arose and disguised

himself, and left the hotel, with the resolve to spend the night in the vicinity of the mansion.

He had arrived in the alley about the same instant that St. Clare and Stael had arrested Evelyn, in his burglarious act.

Consequently, he had overheard the conversation between the conspirators.

“Here’s a go,” he muttered. “Now it is for me to play my cards, and take the game. Ef I call the perlice, they’ll get the credit, an’ I none. I’ll just get passage on this ship, and rescue Etta in true style. Reckon old Sir Donald will come down handsome.”

His mind was made up.

Gliding from the alley by its rear course, he set out rapidly for South street, Schuylkill River—for rapidity was now essential.

Several times he passed policemen who eyed him suspiciously, but none of them offered to stop him.

In due time he reached the docks along the river, and found a steamer, such as is generally used for towing purposes, alongside the wharf, below the South street bridge. This craft, however, had an upper cabin, and was rigged for sailing in case of the engine giving out.

The steam was already up, and a man sat upon the rail smoking a pipe—a bewhiskered individual, dressed in sailor’s attire.

Turk passed along, paying no particular attention to the boat, rather expecting that he would be accosted—and he was not wrong.

“Hello, there!” the sailor sung out. “Where bound?”

“What of it?” Turk demanded, stopping and looking back.

“Oh, nothing much! Don’t want a fat job for a couple of weeks, eh?”

“What doin’?”

“Oh, helpin’ on board. Gwine to take a party on a trip, and want some one as knows how to mind their business and keep their mouth shet.”

“Struck the right man, then. What’s the salary?”

“Two dollars a day. Come on board, and I’ll explain.”

Turk obeyed, and the two descended into the engine-room and took a seat on the tool-boxes. Turk took a good look at the sailor then, and that worthy took a good look at Turk.

“I reckon you’re to be trusted,” he said; “your mug says so. D’ye know who I am?”

“No,” Turk replied.

“Well, I’m Buck Hawk, detective. Directly a party will come on board who desires to escape from the city. He is an old English criminal— moreover, my father. He—”

“Expects to bring a prisoner aboard?”

“How do you know?”

“I overheard the plot.”

“The deuce! Well, to make a long story short, I’m going to put this man aboard an English vessel, and take him back to England to expiate his crime.”

“And what of me?”

“You are to bring this tug back to this wharf. I chartered it only.”

“And the girl?”

“You are also to bring her back. She is a stolen child, and my father has hoped to reap a fortune out of her possession, but mother and I have devoted years to the thwarting of his plans.”

Then followed an explanation that Jerome St. Clair, alias Gerald Hawk, was Mrs. Hawk’s husband, and so forth, and so forth; and also the capture of gambler Fred

St. Clare, who, having “given away” all that was necessary for Buck to know about the whole conspiracy, had been permitted to leave for parts unknown.

About half an hour later, three persons approached the dock, and carried a bundled-up object between them, which Turk knew was Etta.

They were assisted aboard, and took possession of the cabin, where Mother Hawk, in disguise, arranged for their comfort and convenience.

As soon as possible, the tug was got under way, and steamed down the Schuylkill, the disguised Turk acting as fireman, and Buck Hawk as engineer, he instructing Turk how to manage the craft on returning.

Toward daybreak Mother Hawk appeared in the engine-room.

“Did you get the wine he ordered?” she asked.

“Yes: open the bottle lying on top of the case— it’s fixed,” Buck said.

About half an hour later he left the engine-room for a few minutes, and directed Turk how also to work the pilot-wheel.

“I’ve got three jail-birds in one bunch,” he said. “Uriah Evelyn, the pirate, the Gypsy, and the scoundrel; Gerald Hawk, the murderer of Lady Page; and Stael, the once-famous queen of English forgers. All bound and gagged, and ready to ship aboard the English vessel!”

During the remainder of the trip very little was said.

Buck Hawk had released Etta Evelyn who directly came and threw her arms affectionately around Turk, and thanked him heartily for what he had done.

Turk was surprised that she knew him, for he still wore his disguise.

“What ye mean?” he ejaculated. “Guess you’re mistaken.”

“Not a bit of it!” Buck Hawk exclaimed. “I recognized you, Master Turk, the moment you came aboard, and from what I can hear, you will get the rich reward you deserve, when you restore this estimable young lady to her father. My reward, I trust, will come from the English Government when I deliver up my

inhuman father.”

In due time daylight came, and shortly afterward they were alongside the English homeward-bound vessel, which was anchored in the Delaware, near the outlet of the Schuylkill.

Buck Hawk boarded her, and shortly after he had his prisoners transferred to the English vessel.

The manner in which he had made the capture made extradition papers unnecessary, and thus was the law of the United States baffled for once.

As soon as the transfer was made, Turk and his fair charge set out on their trip back to Philadelphia, which was made in good time and without incident.

What remains to be told can be told in a very few minutes, and equally few words.

Turk, our youthful ferret, gained all the honor of restoring Etta to her father, and a glad restoration it was, in which Sir Page, Etta, Captain Clyde and Turk figured.

Turk received a goodly sum of money for his brave deeds; but that was not all.

Sir Page, a couple of weeks later, received a cablegram from England charging him to appear against one Gerald Hawk, and Turk was offered a happy home if he would accompany the party.

So he naturally consented.

Before departure from America there was a grand wedding, and Captain Clyde and Lady Henrietta Page were the happy couple, Turk, in a handsome suit, acting as first groomsman.

After the ceremony Captain Clyde produced and adorned his bride with the magnificent Page diamonds, much to the surprise of all, for it was he who had demanded them from Jack Grimes that night in Stael's residence.

“Kinder ‘curred to me it might be them diamonds would turn up,” Turk said, with a grin. “Tell ye what. As fur as my ‘sperience goes villainy will allus get

left, sooner or later, and right will prevail like skippers on a yaller poodle. An' ef ye want everything to come out ge-lorious, thar ain't no antidote so good as to employ a young feller about the diagram of the Sultan o' Turk— eh?"

THE END