

## IN DISGUISE:

OR

## Mr. Marshal's Housekeeper.

"MIDDLE-AGED and respectable," eulogized Anne Bronson, letting the paper fall listlessly on her lap, as she finished reading the following advertisement in the morning paper:

WANTED.—A middle-aged, respectable woman, to go into the country, as a housekeeper. Apply from 12 to 1 at No. — Astor House.

Always those two indispensable middle-aged—and she went into a fit of musing.

"Here I have been for six months," she went on sadly—"looking for some honest employment, to keep body and soul together. My money is nearly gone,—and I never will return to my relatives—if I starve!" Her eyes flashed, and she rose hastily and walked the room.

"I shall never forgive their conduct to poor Harry," she went on musingly, "and now he's been dead six months, and I am nearly destitute."

She sat down again.

"Now, if I could only take this housekeeper's place,—I'm sure I could fill it, thanks to Aunt Jane's training—middle-aged!"

"I wonder," she began, after a long silence, "if a widow's cap and a pair of spectacles wouldn't make me look old; I'm sure I feel old enough. Another fit of musing."

"I mean to try it. If I can make myself look old enough without any positive disguise, I really believe I'll try for that place."

Her busy fingers were soon at work on some muslin and lace, and when the article was finished she took her luxuriant hair down, twisted it up in an unobtrusive knot as possible for such a quantity, and donned the cap, before the glass.

A burst of merry laughter followed.—"Well, it does add ten years to my face, and a pair of glasses will finish the matter. I'll try."

She then went to work to review her wardrobe, and soon selected a sober gray dress, carefully removing all ornaments from it. Long before twelve she was fully arrayed, and demure enough she looked, in her gray dress and white collar, with not so much as a ruffle or a bit of lace visible; and her widow's cap, green spectacles, and black mits to hide the delicacy and youth of her hands, completed the transformation, and when she presented herself before the eyes of the advertiser, no one would have thought her other than she seemed—a matronly maiden of about forty.

Mr. Marshal, after dismissing several disagreeable aspirants for the office of housekeeper, was delighted to see one who did not threaten to give him the nightmare, so he engaged her at once. She rushed home with only his last words in her mind, "I shall leave at six; be sure to be at the cars."

Annie dared not to allow herself time for reflection on the step she had taken. She felt glad to be at rest, and the prospect of a home was too tempting to the homeless, for her to inquire too closely how it was obtained.

She hastily packed her trunk, and at six met Mr. Marshal at the cars.

"When I get where his wife is," was her thought, chafing under her deceit, "I will confess and throw myself on her mercy. He seems so gentlemanly. I know that his wife must be a lady."

When they reached Mr. Marshal's house, a fine old mansion, a few miles from New York, he delivered his housekeeper into the hands of the old one, who only awaited her arrival to resign her keys and set up housekeeping for herself.

She introduced Annie to her rooms—two pleasant and sunny ones, overlooking the flower garden; and remained to chat with her as she took her tea.

"Is Mrs. Marshal an invalid?" Annie asked, by way of conversation.

"Mrs. Marshal! Why Mr. Marshal is a bachelor!"

The tea cup dropped from her hand.

"A bachelor?"

"Didn't you know that?" said the housekeeper, eyeing her sharply,—"well, you are a green one."

"Yes, this is my first place," Annie said, meekly, regaining her self-command—"I forgot to ask about the family."

"Well, I can tell you, Mrs. Bronson, you have got into a good place, by accident, it seems. Mr. Marshal is a gentleman, but but one of those called a woman hater. I think he had some trouble in his early life,—and at any rate he never speaks to one if he can help it; but in his household he is a perfect gentleman."

Much to the relief of her listener, the housekeeper was here called away.

Annie was aghast!—an old bachelor!—not so old either, not more than forty,—and she—a young widow—what would be thought if she should be discovered! But the comforts of the hospitable old mansion, and of being under the protection of some one, even as his housekeeper, had begun to creep into her lonely heart, and even if she could have found any excuse for leaving, she could not bear to think of it. So she firmly resolved that nothing should cause her to reveal herself. She would keep constant watch over herself, and he should never know that his housekeeper was under thirty-five.

Well—she was introduced into her duties—one of which she found was to preside at the tea board. This was pleasant, particularly as, under her ancient guise, and as a dependent, Mr. Marshal condescended to be very sociable, and finding her companionable he prolonged his meal and conversation, till soon this hour became the most interesting of the day to him—as well as to her.

Every body likes to talk to a good listener, and Mr. Marshal had travelled and read much, descriptions of men and things. He was not slow to discover that he had an extraordinary housekeeper, so the tea hour gradually lengthened into the whole evening, and it was not long before it was her constant habit to spend the evening in the library, with her sewing, while he talked or read to her. She was not sufficiently well informed about a housekeeper's position, to see the absurdity of a gentleman's devoting his evenings to her entertainment, and being accustomed to be treated like a lady, it never occurred to her that it was anything unusual.

Meantime, he was engaged in a new—to him—study.

Now, I know that the orthodox way of bringing about the catastrophe of the story would be to bring down my hero with some malignant disease, have all the servant fly, and his housekeeper alone nurse him through a dangerous illness, to be rewarded of course, with his hand—what was left of it—when he was able to sit up.

But I'm not cruel—and I haven't the heart to do it, and, besides, the facts—to which I confine myself—in a measure—will not bear me out in any such poetical fiction.

The facts then (a la Gradgrind) are these:

Annie's love of truth and honor had been waging continual warfare all this time with her dread of "The World" and "Poverty"—two grim and horrible monsters to unprotected womanhood, and it was not until a year had rolled around, that power and truth gained the victory. Annie in her serious meditations in her room finally resolved that she must seek a cause for leaving this home, which she sorrowfully admitted to herself, was becoming too pleasant for one who must fight with "The World" for her bread.

The catastrophe—which my readers have of course guessed before now,—else why indeed, should I tell the story?—finally happened in this wise:

One evening Annie went into the library, where he sat reading the papers, with heart and mind and was fully nerved up to her duty. He looked smilingly at her, as she appeared; and as she sank into a chair, quite unnerved by that look, he began himself:

"Mrs. Bronson," he said laying down the paper, and sitting himself in his easy chair, "would you mind leaving off that horrid widow's cap? I'm sure you have plenty of hair, and it is so suggestive of dead and buried perfections, that it is painful to me."

The color came and went in Annie's face. She tried to speak, but somehow she felt choked. It was hard, when he sat there so pleasant and genial when the world was so cold and hard, and his protection so dear, yes, that was the word—that was the frightful thought, that brought back strength to her voice, and she said hastily:

"Mr. Marshal, I must leave you."

"I tell you I won't have it. Did you not promise to stay two years, and have I not performed my part of the contract?"

She came now and stood before him.

"Mr. Marshal, I have deceived you."

"Have you?" he said, smiling: "what about?—the price of tea, or some peccadillo of the servants?"

"About myself," she went on hurriedly. "I'm not middle-aged, for I am but twenty-two, and I am not 'respectable' because I have descended to deceit. I'm not 'weak-eyed'—and she dashed the spectacles to the floor—"nor do I admire this cap," which she tore off, and with it her comb, letting down her abundant hair around her white and quivering face.

"There," she went on, the crimson coming into her cheeks, and the tears into her eyes, "thus I strip of all disguise, then I can walk out of this house in honesty," and she turned to go.

"Stay," he cried, "tell me who you are, you witch."

"I am Annie Bronson, the widow of Henry Bronson."

"Henry Bronson! the notorious?"

"Gambler," she said firmly. "He made my life a torture for six months, and then killed—himself!"—she hesitated.

"I married against the wishes of my friends, of course," she went on in a low tone, "and I was too proud to return; I had a little money; I sought employment a bitter six months before I saw your advertisement, and—"

"And then," he interrupted, "you thought of a harmless little deception by which you could procure a home."

"Mr. Marshal," she broke in, "I thought you had a family. I should never have ventured to come here, but I expected to find a Mrs. Marshal to whom I could confess myself, believe me."

"I do," he said, earnestly. "But when you got here, and found I was not so happy as to have a family, you could not bear to go out in the cold again. Was that it, Annie?" he asked tenderly.

"O, I was weak—as I am now," she said, sobbing, sinking back in her chair.

Annie, he said softly, "if I place a Mrs. Marshal here, will that obviate the difficulty? Will you stay then, if you are young and lovely?"

"Oh, no, no, no," she cried, "I must go."

"But I think you will like the lady I propose to place in that position."

Annie covered her face in agitation, for she began to see why she hated to leave, and why she could never live with Mr. Marshal's wife, and the discovery filled her with dismay. But he went on quietly:

"I've been thinking for some time,"—in a few moments he added mentally—that I ought to have a wife, but am so accustomed to you as a housekeeper, that I can't spare you. I can't indeed, Annie," he added after a pause.

His tone was so different that she hastily looked up. Something in his eyes brought a flush to her face, and she hurriedly rose to leave the room, but he caught her dress as she passed, and drew her gently and firmly to his side.

"Annie, can't I have my wife, and yet not lose my housekeeper?"

Of course he could, and he did, too. And so Annie had a pleasant home for her whole life.

## Becoming A Medium.

THE fascinating spiritual rapping is without a doubt gaining strength among us, and some very ludicrous incidents often grow out of it at times as well as more serious and deplorable ones.

A few nights since, within this week, a young male friend of ours, who from a sneering skeptic had become a devout believer, retired to rest, after having his nervous system partially destroyed by the information, that he would very soon become a very powerful medium. He was in his first comfortable snooze, when a clicking noise in the direction of the door awoke him. He listened intently; the noise was still going on—very like the raps of the spirits on the table, indeed!

"Who is there?" There was no answer, and the queer noise stopped. "Anybody there?" No answer.

"It must have been a spirit," he said to himself. "I must be a medium. I'll try. (A loud.) If there is a spirit in the room, will it signify the same by saying 'aye'—no, that's not what I mean. If there is a spirit in the room will it please rap three times?"

Three very distinct raps were given in the direction of the bureau.

"Is it the spirit of my sister?" No answer.

"Is it the spirit of my mother?" Three taps.

"Are you happy?" Nine taps.

"Shall I hear from you to-morrow?" Raps very loud again; this time in the direction of the door. "Shall I ever see you?"

The taps then came from the outside of the door. He waited long for an answer to his last question, but none came. The spirit had gone; and after thinking on the extraordinary visit, he turned over and fell asleep.

On getting up in the morning, he found that the spirit of his mother had carried off his watch and purse, his pants down stairs into the hall, and his great coat altogether.—*Boston Paper.*

## THE BURGLAR'S ESCAPE.

A SHORT TIME SINCE there died in a disreputable section of Boston, a man fully as notorious as the ward in which he had lived and where he died.

He was a bad man; yet even in those who are criminal and apparently lost to all moral influence, there often remains some good traits of character. So it was in his case. He was grateful for, and not unmindful of any favor done him. My business frequently brought me in contact with his person, and upon a certain occasion, having done him a slight act of kindness, he desired to express his appreciation of my consideration, and I accepted from him a rifle and a knife that had been carried and used during the recent Rebellion by a Union soldier, who had afterward boarded at his house, and who had given them to him.

I have been from boyhood a collector of curiosities, and having a large number of sporting friends, I have been enabled to get together quite a cabinet, and to which I added the rifle and knife. The recent death of him who presented them to me recalls to my mind an adventure in which the rifle played a conspicuous part.

I had been living during the summer at our cottage house a short distance from the city, and had just moved to new quarters in one of our lower wards for the winter of 18—. We were beginning to feel quite comfortable in our new home; and as the little ones were much improved in health, as was also my wife, all of whom had just recovered from a fever, I congratulated myself, when seated before a bright grate fire, that we were so well situated for the coming cold season, it then being early in December, and we had experienced sufficient cold to make it safe to predict a severe winter.

One night during that month, the wind blew fiercely, and on looking out of the window I saw that a storm was brewing. I became anxious for the return of my wife, who had been summoned to the sick bed of her sister, some distance away. The children were sleeping snugly in their own little bed-room, and I felt quite lonesome.

The house in which we had taken our rooms for the winter was a new one, and the only apartments occupied in it were those in which we lived, consisting of the first floor. It struck eleven, and my wife had not yet returned. I thought I heard footsteps in the hall, as if some one was passing as noiselessly as possible up the stairs. I listened attentively, and thought I detected the same noise overhead. I opened the door, but all was still. Had I not bolted the front door? I believed I had. I took the lamp, went to the front door, and found that it was not bolted, as I had supposed. It was shut, but upon a closer examination I saw footprints upon the stairs, the wet snow storm without having left visible marks. These I followed to the head of the stairway, where they ceased, the feet occasioning them having there been relieved of their coverings no doubt. Was I not foolish? Perhaps some person had taken the empty apartments, and was only availing him or herself of a shelter from the storm which they unluckily had been caught in. Yet I thought they need not be so fearful of disturbing their neighbors as to take off their shoes or boots. I took the light again, and went up stairs to find the rooms locked, no one there, came down again, and thought the affair at least a mystery. I lit a fresh cigar, placed myself before the fire, and took it easy, half-dozing until my wife's return, which was shortly after. But I could not get the thing off my mind. Some one went up stairs—where, I did not know, and for no good purpose I was satisfied.

My wife had left her sister quite ill, but somewhat easier. Her brother Billy had left her at the door, it being quite late and hurried toward home. I did not mention my suspicions, and was too much ashamed of my fears to call an officer and make further search, for the whole matter might prove nervousness, and create suspicions of too strong a cigar, and I be laughed at for my trouble.

We retired. My wife soon slept soundly. I did not. Perchance the foot-steps on the stairs were the commencement of a night mare for my especial benefit. Be that as it may, I distinctly heard a noise at the window in the children's room, and no mistake about it—a palpable shake of the sash—some one was trying to open it.

Our front room, over looking the street, we used as a parlor; then came a sleeping apartment, in which reposed the children my two little boys and infant daughter. The next room was occupied by myself and wife, a door from which led into the

children's. The back room was the kitchen. Out of each of the bed chambers was a window opening into the hall.

Yes, I distinctly heard a second attempt made to open the window of the children's room. I heard a pry at work, trying to force it open, that it might break off the button which held it and swing back on its hinges; for the window was a swinging sash, moving into the room when open, like a door, about four feet from the floor. Under this window was my little ones' bed.

It was time to act. I arose quietly, closed the door leading from my room to the children's quickly and noiselessly, lit the lamp, got the rifle I have mentioned from its place by the side of the cabinet, and examined the cap in as short a time almost as I have written it. Taking a position behind the door, I listened anxiously. I would wait, I thought, until I heard the window swing back, then suddenly throw open door and fire as the burglar entered, for by so doing, the light—now hid from his view by a thick curtain in my own room and the closet door leading to the children's—would be bright enough to aim correctly when the door opened.

I heard the window crack and fly open. I pushed back my own door, and brought up the rifle "handsomely." I handled "my stick," as the soldier boys say, before, and aimed for his head, as I saw my man, one of his legs dangling over the window sill, and in one hand a small bit of candle. He was evidently just about to slide down on the children!

If should ever see this sketch, which I hope he may, I would ask if my gentleman was not taken somewhat aback, when he opened that window? He looked so all events; with a light shining directly upon him, and a dead aim from the muzzle of a rifle four or five feet from the tip of his nose, was I am confident, far from his expectations. I could not see his features plain enough to identify him again, but I imagined he looked bewildered for a second or two at least.

I was about to fire when I saw him attempt to draw a pistol from his breast, as the villain sat perched up there like a "bird of prey" in the middle of the night, when a light touch on the shoulder caused me to turn suddenly, and reserve my fire, when, bang! went the rascal's pistol and then a drop to the hallway. My wife had arisen half unconsciously of the situation and leaned her hand upon me; that touch saved the burglar's life, and nearly cost me my own, the bullet from his weapon having buried itself in the casing of the door dangerously near my head. Being all this time in undress, pursuit was impossible. I had already heard the slam of the front door as the desperado made his escape.

He had concealed himself during my search, in a closet on the upper hallway, the existence of which I was unaware of, until the next day. The other part of the house was occupied in a few days after, and we were not troubled by such customers since. I think a great deal of that rifle, and will never part with it, nor do I think I shall ever forget the part it played in "the burglar's escape."

## Pop Goes the Weasel.

"Pop goes the Weasel," has become the chorus of a thousand snatches of song, but not one of a thousand who sing it ever heard its origin. But its parentage is as easily traced as that of an English baronet. A famous Methodist preacher, by the name of Craven, was once preaching in the heart of Virginia, and spoke as follows:

"Here are a great many professors of religion here to-day. You are sleek, fat good-looking, yet something is the matter with you. Now, you have seen wheat which was plump, round and good-looking to the eye, but when you weighed it you found that it only came to forty-five or perhaps forty-eight pounds to the bushel, when it should have been sixty or sixty-three pounds. Take a kernel of that wheat between your thumb and finger, hold it up, squeeze it, and—pop goes the weevil. Now, you good-looking professors of religion, you are plump and round, but you only weigh some 45 or 46 pounds to the man. What is the matter? Ah! when you are taken between the thumb of the law and finger of the gospel, held to the light, and squeezed, out pops the whiskey bottle." From "pop goes the weevil" to "pop goes the weasel," the transition is easy.

Sunday is the strongest day in the week. The rest are all week days.