

A MYSTERY.

The Lock-Smith's Story.

I LIVE in San Francisco, and I am a lock-smith by trade. My calling is a strange one, and possesses a certain fascination, rendering it one of the most agreeable of pursuits. Many who follow it, see nothing in it but labor—think of nothing but its return in money. To me it has other charms than these. I am called almost daily to open doors, and peer into long neglected apartments; to spring the stubborn locks of safes, and gloat upon the treasures piled within; to quietly enter the apartments of ladies with more beauty than discretion, and pick the locks of drawers containing peace-destroying missives, that the dangerous evidence of wandering affections may not reach the eye of a husband or father possessing the mystic key; to force the fastenings of cash boxes and depositories of records; telling of men made suddenly rich, of corporations plundered, of orphans robbed, of hopes crushed, of families ruined. Is there no charm in this—no food for speculation—no scope for the range of fancy? Then who would not be a locksmith, though his face is begrimed with the smut of the forge, and his hands are stained with rust?

But I have a story to tell—not exactly a story either, for that implies the completion as well as the beginning of a narrative—and mine is scarcely more than the introduction to one. Let him who deals in fancy write the rest.

In the Spring of 1856—I think it was in April—I opened a little shop on Kearney street, and soon worked myself into a fair business. Late one evening, a closely veiled lady entered my shop, and pulling from beneath her cloak a small japanned box, asked me to open it. The lock was curiously constructed, and I was a whole hour fitting it with a key. The lady seemed nervous at the delay, and at length requested me to close the door. I was a little surprised at the suggestion, but of course complied. Shutting the door and returning to my work, the lady withdrew her veil, disclosing as pretty a face as can be imagined. There was a restlessness in the eye and pallor in the cheek, however, which plainly told of a heart ill at ease, and in a moment every emotion for her had given place to that of pity.

"Perhaps you are not well, madam, and the night air is too chilly?" said I, rather inquisitively. I felt a rebuke in her reply.

"In requesting you to close the door, I had no other object than to escape the attention of persons passing."

I did not reply, but thoughtfully continued my work. She resumed:

"That little box contains valuable papers—private papers—and I have lost the key, or it has been stolen. I should not wish to have you remember that I ever came here on such an errand," she continued with some hesitation, and gave me a look which was no difficult matter to understand.

"Certainly, madam, if you desire it; if I cannot forget your face, I will at least attempt to lose the recollection of ever seeing it here."

The lady bowed very cold at what I considered a fine compliment, and I proceeded with my work, satisfied that a suddenly discovered partiality for me had nothing to do with the visit.

Having succeeded, after much filing and fitting, in turning the lock, I was seized with a curiosity to get a glimpse at the precious contents of the box, and suddenly raising the lid discovered a bundle of papers and a daguerrotype, as I slowly passed the box to its owner.

She seized it hurriedly and placing the letters and picture in her pocket, locked the box, and drawing the veil over her face, pointed to the door. I opened it, and as she passed into the street, she merely whispered—"Remember!" We met again, and I have been thus particular in describing her visit to the shop to render probable a subsequent recognition.

About two o'clock in the morning, in the latter part of May following, I was awakened by a gentle tap upon the window of the little room back of the shop in which I lodged. Thinking of burglars, I sprang out of bed, and in a moment was at the window with a heavy hammer in my hand which I usually kept at that time, within convenient reach of my bedside.

"Who's there?" I inquired, raising the hammer, and peering out into the darkness—for it was dark as Egypt, when under the curse of Israel's God.

"Hie!" exclaimed a figure stepping in front of the window; "open the door—I have business for you."

"Rather past business hours, I should say; but who are you?"

"No one that would harm you," returned the voice, which I imagined was rather feminine for a burglar's.

"No one that can!" I replied emphatically, by way of warning, as I tightened my grip on the hammer, and proceeding to the door, I pushed back the bolt and slowly opened it, and discovered the stranger already upon the steps.

"What do you want?" I abruptly inquired.

"I will tell you, if you dare open the

door wide enough for me to enter," answered the same voice.

"Come in," said I resolutely, throwing the door ajar, and proceeding to light a candle.

Having succeeded, I turned to examine my visitor. He was a small and neatly dressed gentleman, with a heavy Raglan around his shoulders, and a blue navy cap drawn suspiciously over his eyes. As I advanced toward him, he seemed to hesitate a moment, then raised the cap from his forehead, and looked me curiously in the face.

I did not drop the candle, but I confess to a little nervousness as I hurriedly placed the light on the table, and silently proceeded to invest myself with two or three necessary articles of clothing. As I live, my visitor was a lady, and the same for whom I had opened the little box a month before! Having completed my hasty toilet, I attempted to stammer an apology for my rudeness, but utterly failed. The fact was, I was confounded. Smiling at my discomfiture, she said:

"Disguise is useless. I presume you recognize me?"

"I believe I told you, madam, I should not soon forget your face. In what way can I serve you?"

"By doing half an hour's work before daylight, and receiving five hundred dollars for your labor," was the reply.

"It is not ordinary work," said I inquiringly, "that commands so magnificent a compensation."

"It is labor common to your calling," replied the lady. "The price is not so much for the labor, as the condition under which it is to be performed."

"And what is the condition?" I inquired.

"That you will submit to being conveyed from and returned to, your own door blindfolded."

Idea of murder, burglary, and almost every other crime of villainy, hurriedly presented themselves to my vision, and I bowed and said:

"I must understand something more of the character of the employment, as well as the conditions, to accept your offer."

"Will not five hundred dollars answer in lieu of an explanation?"

"No—nor five thousand."

She patted her foot nervously on the floor. She had placed too low an estimate on my honesty, and I felt some gratification on being able to convince her of the fact.

"Well, then, if it is absolutely necessary for me to explain," she replied, "I must tell you that you are required to pick the lock of a vault, and—"

"You have gone quite far enough, madam, with the explanation," I interrupted; "I am not at your service."

She continued—"You are required to pick the lock of a vault, and rescue from death a man who has been confined for three days there."

"To whom does the vault belong?" I inquired.

"My husband," was the somewhat reluctant reply.

"Then why so much secrecy? or rather, how came a man confined in such a place?"

"I secreted him there to escape the observation of my husband. He suspected as much and closed the door upon him. Presuming he had left the vault, and quitted the house by the back door, I did not dream until to-day that he was confined there. Certain suspicious acts of my husband this afternoon convince me that the man is there, beyond hearing, and will be starved to death by my barbarous husband, unless immediately rescued. For three days he has not left the house. I drugged him less than an hour ago, and he is now so stupefied that the lock may be picked without his interference. I have searched his pockets, but could not find the key; hence my application to you. Now you know all. Will you accompany me?"

"To the end of the world, on such an errand!"

"Then prepare yourself; there is a cab in waiting."

I was not a little surprised, for I had not heard the sound of wheels. Hastily drawing on a coat, and providing myself with the required implements, I was at the door. There, sure enough, was the cab, with the driver in his seat, ready for the mysterious journey.

I entered the vehicle, followed by the lady. As soon as I was seated, she produced a handkerchief, which by the faint light of an adjacent street lamp, she carefully bound around my eyes. The lady seated herself beside me, and the cab started. In half an hour it stopped in what part of the city I am entirely ignorant, as it was evidently driven anything but the direct course from the point of starting.

Examining the bandage, to see that my vision was completely obscured, the lady handed me the bundle of tools, and taking me by the arm, led me through a gate into a house which I knew was of brick; and after taking me through a passage way which could not have been less than fifty feet in length, and a flight of stairs which was evidently an underground basement, stopped beside a vault, and removed the handkerchief from my eyes.

"Here is the vault—open it," said she springing the door of a dark lantern, and throwing a beam of light upon the massive lock.

I seized a bunch of skeleton keys and after a few trials—which the lady watched with the most painful anxiety—sprung the bolt. The door swung upon its hinges and my companion, telling me not to close it, as it was self-locking, sprang into the vault. I did not follow. I heard the murmur of voices within, and the next moment the lady re-appeared; and leaning upon her arm, a man, with a face so pale and haggard that I started at the sight. How he must have suffered during the long three days of his confinement!

"Remain here," she said handing me the lantern. "I will be back in a minute."

The two slowly ascended the stairs, and I heard them enter a room immediately above where I was standing. In less than a minute, the lady returned.

"Shall I close it madam?" I asked, placing my hand upon the door of the vault.

"No! No!" she exclaimed hastily seizing my arm; it awaits another occupant!"

"Madam, you certainly do not intend to—"

"Are you ready?" she interrupted, impatiently holding the handkerchief to my eyes. The thought flashed across my mind that she intended to push me into the vault, and bury me and my secret together. She seemed to read the suspicion, and continued, "Do not be alarmed. You are not the man?"

I could not mistake the truth of the fearful meaning of the remark, and I shuddered as I bent my head to the handkerchief. My eyes were carefully bandaged as before, and I was led to the cab, and then driven home by a more circuitous route, if possible, than the one by which we came.

Arriving in front of the house, the handkerchief was removed, and I stepped from the vehicle. A purse of five hundred dollars was placed in my hand, and in a moment the cab and its mysterious occupant had turned the corner, and were out of sight.

I entered the shop, and the purse was the only evidence I could summon in my bewilderment, that all I had just done and witnessed was not a dream.

A month after that I saw the lady and gentleman taken from the vault, walking leisurely along Montgomery street. I do not know, but I believe the sleeping husband awoke within the vault, and that his bones are there to this day! The wife is still a resident of San Francisco.

NOTHING LEFT BUT HIS BOOTS.

A Wolf Story that Needed Proof.

AN old man, not living a thousand miles from Washington, delights in nothing so much as telling anecdotes of his pioneer life, to the people in the town where he resides, and though his stories are not always strictly true, he tells them with such an air of truth that his hearers find it hard to question his veracity.

On one occasion, when he had gathered a little audience about him, on a hotel stoop, he was more than usually spirited in his descriptions of hunting scenes, probably for the benefit of a stranger present, who manifested no surprise whatever at anything he heard, though he listened attentively.

The story-teller, whose name is Brown, glanced at him several times, a little uneasily, but he could not gather from the expression of his face anything to encourage him to proceed. Not willing, however, to give him up as a stupid fellow, he made another attempt, and related that he had at one time killed six wolves with one rifle shot, from the window of a log cabin in the woods, and that he had six skulls at home to prove it.

"Remember the place," said the stranger, now quite worked up. "Wasn't it about a mile from where Jack Peiton's farm is now?"

"Just so," said Brown.

"Exactly," said the stranger, "and I want to tell of a curious thing that happened to me in that very cabin. I was out on a hunting expedition, and somehow got separated from my company and I stopped there over night, for it was so dark that I could not see the way to my barbed door and windows, and felt safe, though I could hear the wolves howl on the outside."

"I've heard them a hundred times," said Brown, quite interested.

"Well," continued the stranger, "I slept soundly until 3 o'clock in the morning, when I was awakened by a dozen or more wolves coming down the chimney, and, sir, do you believe me, they pulled me to pieces and ate me up in precisely two minutes—every bone of me, nothing left but my boots."

"Do you mean to say that the wolves ate you all up?" said Brown, "ate you up."

"I do, sir and I have the boots at home to prove it."

"Well," said Brown, amid the shouts of the audience and with a curious half-sold expression on his face, "all I have to say is that—that needs—proof!"

It is said that Brown has lost all relish for stories not strictly true.

Paris always had the reputation of being the gayest city in the world, but the number of balls there at the present time surpasses anything.

The Wilkins Family.

AUTHORITIES differ in regard to the origin of man. Some think he is but a higher grade of the "What is it?" and others that he is only a fully developed clam. I incline to the latter opinion in the case of certain men who fritter away their lives in folly and dissipation. But the whole subject is a difficult one, and peculiarly so to the metaphysical mind. This is illustrated in the case of young Wilkins, who sought the author of his being with the following inquiry:

"Paw, weren't all men made by Heaven?"

"Yes, my child," benignly replied the paternal Wilkins; "but why do you ask?"

"O, nothing; only I see in the papers long accounts of 'self-made men,' and I thought maybe some of those fellows had been a gettin' of their own selves up."

This is the brother of that other Wilkins, baptized Holofernes Montgomery, who came home and complained that he didn't like the arithmetic they had at school, because he couldn't guess the conundrums in it.

"Conundrums!" exclaimed his parental guardian; "why, Holofernes Montgomery Wilkins, what do you mean?"

"Why, you know that old arithmetic of ours is full of conundrums and them things, and when Mr. Swisetail asked me 'if 120 bushels of corn will serve fourteen horses fifty-six days, how many days will ninety-four bushels serve six horses?' I said 'I give it up,' and he said 'I was as stupid as an owl. Then he wanted to know why forty rods make one rod? I couldn't guess it; I can't guess his darned old jokes, you know, and then he licked me.'

"He was only trying to demonstrate, my child, that while forty rods make a rod, one rod sometimes makes one polite Louisiana, remove this child to bed."

This was the same boy who, afterward got his teacher foul on the question, "If it takes four nails to make a quarter, how many carpet tacks will it take to make a ten-dollar bill?"

Wilkins has a taste for these things. It was during his connection with the Utterly Hopeless Mutual Insurance Company, that he went over to Boston for a few days, and upon his return was asked by Smyth, you know him—son of old Smyth—coal oil man—was asked by Smyth, "Say, Wilkins, where have you been for a week back?"

"I haven't been anywhere for it. I haven't got a weak back," and he shot round the corner.

But his great point is in educating the minds of his boys; and one day when he had a quarrel with his aunt, and Euclidus Alexander, his oldest child, wanted to know what was the matter, he said it was simply a little grammatical error.—The relative didn't agree with the antecedent.

He was strong on grammar; and when Mary Jane asked him what Syntax was, he said the tax on whisky; for Wilkins will have his tod whether or no, and he thinks it ain't right to put high duties on it.

Wilkins would sacrifice anything to a joke. When his father died, a venerable friend called to console him upon the loss of his parental protector. Wilkins sighed and said, "Yes, the old man was good at that, but now I'm the head of the family, and I suppose I'll have to pay rental in his place." His friend dropped a sympathetic tear, and drove to the funeral in a hack.

The elder Wilkins died of consumption and his son remarked, as he saw the remains placed in an undertaker's carriage, that it was singular that the old man should first be carried off by a hackin' cough, and afterward by a coffin hack.—The undertaker didn't perceive that this was a joke until he got to the cemetery, and it made him feel so mad that he kicked a dog that lay in his way, and the dog bit a chip out of his leg.

"Is it a bull dog?" said Mrs. Wilkins.

"No, love," replied her husband, "it's a cane-terrier."

But Wilkins had a brother-in-law named Gouge, who ran for Judge in Schuylkill county, and the very first case he tried was that of a man who owned a coal mine, but had been a major in the army. His tailor sued him for a uniform, but Gouge decided against the tailor, that he couldn't have made those clothes for him, because a miner couldn't be a major.

Gouge was an infidel. He was so skeptical that his own mother wouldn't believe him, and he gave up the law and turned spiritualist. He was the medium who received a message from the spirit of Daniel Webster, stating that there were a great many errors in his dictionary he would like to have corrected.

It was before Judge Gouge that Ferguson, the soap-fat-man, was sued by a woman for a breach of politeness—she thought that was what it was; and Gouge charged the jury to give her a verdict of thirty thousand dollars, which they did while Ferguson was led out of court, headed by a brass band playing "The Girl I Left Behind Me." Ferguson said he was like Leander—it was-wimmin' that reduced him to such great 'stra ts.' To which she said that if he hadn't mortgaged herself to him, he had at least lied 'er.

Judge Gouge sent them both to prison for contempt of court, for joking in his presence.

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For information relative to the Patenting of lands, call on or address S. H. GALBRAITH, Attorney-at-Law & County Surveyor, Bloomfield, March 8, 1870.

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