The Mystery of Muriel's Life.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS—PART II.

mona. 'I heartily reciprocate your good opinion and trust I may not do aught to forfeit it. Now, listen, comrade! Our laws are vile. Iniquity is at the root of them, and bribery and corruption form the stem. I would alter this if I could. I would risk fortune and life to do so. Come amigo ami, and see if I have cause for my indignation. My countrymen shrug their shoulders and smile at the inquity. You will do neither. No man with teeling could.'

The reached the gaol, a gloomy, stone building, and Hugh shuddered as he entered the place.

A warder showed them over it, and, descending to the vaults they passed many a dungeon, where helpless men were immured perhaps for life.

At last they stopped at one of the cells and the warden opened the door, motioning them to enter. A man was stretched on some straw, and

as the warder flashed his lamp upon him, the wretched prisoner lay so still that Hugh imagined he must be dead. 'This one, senor,' exclaimed the gaoler

'is a prisoner awaiting his trial; but, between you and me, he will never be tried.' 'Of what is he accused?' demanded Hugh.

'Treason ! His guilt is fully known; but I believe there is not sufficient evidence to convict him. Thus he will wait; but I

The ward'r kicked the sleeper, who sat up and revealed a tage so full of misery and so wasted with suffering that Hugh felt a thrill of horror.

The prisoner rose to his feet, and his dark eyes stared so fiercely at the brutal warder that the later half-drew his sword. Suddenly the prisoner sprang forward and dealt the Mexican a blow in the face, that sent him senseless to the floor.

Perhaps they will take my life now,' he | ed the loneliness of his cabin. san uefiantly. 'I am prepared. Death would be a mercy. Why don't you call the guard?'

'Not I,' answered Hugh, in the best Spanish he could command. 'Nor do I think my frierd will. Why not make a bold dash for freedom? You may meet death, but it is your only chance of escap. ing from the dungeon with my life.'

'My friend speaks truly!' exclaimed Ramona 'Go! Lock the dungeon door so that we may have an excuse for not following you. Turn to the left, ascend the steps, then trust to chance for the rest.'

'May Heaven bless you for this noble deed,' exclaimed the wrethed man fervently, then he sprang to the door, and they

heard the key grate in the lock. Several minutes elapsed ere the warder regained consciousness; then, sitting up, he gazed wildly round the dungeon.

'The rascal had escaped and locked us in,' said Ramona calmly. 'Heavens! Then I am lost,' gasped the

terrified ma . 'Not at all,' replied Ramona; 'the governor is a friend of mine. I will bear you out that it was thought no fault of yours.' 'I ought to have locked the door, but I

thought he was too weak to attempt an es-'They may catch him.'

'True, senor. But, then, also he may escape. There will be no soldiers about at this time, and the warders are at supper.' 'It does not signify We can easily

prove you were not to blame. I suppose we shall soon be released.' 'I hope so, unless that villain has taken the keys with him. It is useless to call for help. No one can hear us here.'

Nearly an hour elapsed, however, be fore they were released, and when they went before the governor, Hugh was simply astounded at the cool manner in which he treated the prisoner's escape, while he

smoked one of Ramona's cigars. 'It's unfortunate,' he remarked, 'but I think the poor wretch was innocent. However, it can't be helped. You had better put another prisoner in that cell, warder. 'Shall search be made for the escaped

'No, I think not. It would cause a lot of trouble. As it is, no one will miss him. Well good-night, gentlemen.'

CHAPTER IV.

A few nights later La Estrella was being driven to her home, accompanied by her

As they drew up at the house a man staggered from the doorway, where he had been crouching. There was something so utterly dejected

and feeble in his gait that the beantiful yer blind ?' girl's heart was filled with pity. 'My poor fellow !' she said, 'Do you need aid ?'

He turned and revealed the features of the escaped prisoner; then he started back with a cry of dismay.

Inez stepped forward, and, with dilated eyes, gazed at his haggard face. 'Am I dreaming ?' she cried. 'Oh, speak! My darling, speak!'

'Inez! Dare I hope you love me even as I am now ?'

'Jack, they told me you were dead,' sobbed inez. 'Quick! Come this way,' cried her

mother, leading them into the house. Then, as she left them, Inez was clasped to her loved one's breast.

'Did that man speak falsely in saying

'You are very lenient,' answered Ra- | that you had fought a duel? she inquired, when the first transports of he joy at this strange meeting were past.

> 'No, my Inez,' he answered. 'We fought, and he believed that he had killed me. My seconds bore me to a little hut, and even they believed at first that I was dead. For many weeks I lay hovering between life and death. Then, when that miscreant Stanton learn't that I was recovering, he had me arrested on some talse charge.

> 'What it really was I never know, but ever since then I have been kept in a vile dungeon, and treated worse than some wild beast. Were it not for two brave men, who aided my escape, I should have ended my days in that place. I would have fled, but was penniless. Thank Heaven I did not do so, or we should not

While the lovers were talking over their future plans, Hugh Allingham's vessel had sailed.

To his surprise he met Stanton on board. Hugh had taken his passage on a sailer, partly for the sake of economy and partly because time was of little object to him.

Hour after hour he would sit on deck, trying in vain to fathom the mystery which serarated him from the woman he loved so Something told him that Stanton could

have revealed it, but they never spoke to each other, and Hugh knew it would be worse than useless to attempt to question

One night a storm arose, Wild waves burst upon the vessel, and the fierce wind swept the spray over her.

Through the black heavens the forked lightning darted, and the crashing thunder | ton P' she demanded sternly. drowned the tempest's roar. Hugh stood upon the deck watching the

raging storm It had no terrors for him, and he dread-

The sailor's marvelled, as they hurried to and fro to fulfill their arduous duties, how a man could be so mad as to remain on deck in such a storm when he might be in his berth.

Fiercer and fiercer grew the tempest; then a blinding flash of light filled Hugh's eyes, and a mighty explosion, more awful than anything he had ever heard, burst upon him, while he was hurled to the vessel's deck.

Presently he struggled to his feet.

He could hear the crashes of thunder, but he saw nothing now. From side to side he turned, and stretch

ed forth his arms hopelessly. He was blind.

They got him below, and the ship's doctor did what he could. 'Well, doctor, how is your patient progressing?' inquired the captain the tollowing morning; when the storm had some-

what abated. 'Badly. He is blinded.' Blinded, eh!' exclaimed the captain.

'That's bad! He's an artist too. I'm sorry for him. The captain would have spoken much

the same had a man been washed overboard He was not a bad-hearted man; but a life at sea makes one somewhat callous-And Hugh sat in the cabin, helpless and

Through storm and sunshine the vessel ploughed her way, and she reached port in Hugh was desperate.

Blindness was the most awful fate that could have befallen him.

While he had sight he could always earn a good living with his talent; now starvation stared him in the face. When he landed at the docks he posses-

sed only ten pounds. He was alone in the great city, with that awful veil of blackness upon him

A sailor found him a home, and refused to take the money Hugh offered him for his

The home was but a garret; but what did it signify to the artist in his blindness; He heard the church clock strike six, then he listened for it to chime the quarter, and it seemed that an hour had passed

before it did so. To know that he must spend days, weeks, months, in that misery distracted

He felt the blood flush to his brain at the very thought, in a manner that made him believe he was going mad. At last the landlady knocked at his door,

Will you have some tea, sir? she in-'No, thank you.'

'Shall I bring a li-I mean, shall I dr 'If you choose.'

'He seems a surly sort,' she said to her husband, when she returned to that inestimable individual. 'I suppose he'll pay all right?' he ans-

wered. 'If he don't he'll soon go ! snapped his wife. 'He's given me a week in advance, and his box will pay for another week or more.

'How do you know? It may be empty.' 'Do you think I'm as blind as he is ?' snarled the gentle creature. 'I've had a look in it. Do you take me for a fool like yourself?

'No, I don't.' 'What do you take me for then ?' Seems to me I took yer for better or worse about it to my mind. I'm going out. own ends,' she answered.

And this was all the commersion the wretched Hugh received.

Hour after hour passed by. The chiming of that clock was driving him nearly mad.

The footsteps in the street died away. until only the mosning of the wind disturbed the silence of the night.

At last he groped his way to the bed, and threw himself upon it without undressing, and sleep came presently to his re-

He dreamt that he was once more roaming amongst the Surrey hills with Muriel. Again he could see her golden-brown hair as the light of the setting sun fell upon it, and the sweet sound of chiming bells floated from the old church tower.

He awoke with a start. He could still hear the chiming bells. for it was Sunday morning; but he could

not see the fiields and trees, nor Muriel. Now the thought occurred to him tt communicate with his uncle, and he go the landlady to write the letter at his dictation.

In due course an answer came, but it was from a firm of lawyers, and Hugh learnt that the old clergyman had gone to the rest he deserved so well. He had left only a few hundred pounds,

and this was willed to Hugh. The weary time passed on, and so terrible was the monotony, that the young artist longed for death.

CHAPTER V.

From the night that Hugh had left Hazlemere Muriel never mentioned his name to her aunt.

The summer passed and the winter storms showled round the old mansion, but neither of the ladies ever complained of its

One night as Miss Neal was sitting by

herself, she was startled by a tapping at the casement window. Stepping towards it, she drew the blind aside, then started back, for a man's face

was pressed against the glass. An exclamation of dismay escaped her. She knew that face well, and had good

cause to loathe and dread the man. He was James Stanton. For some moments the old lady hesitat. ed, then, opening the window, she motioned him to enter the room.

'How dare you come here, J 'How dare I ?' he sneered. 'Well, that's cool! I have come to see Muriel.'

'Then you shall not,' she answered, fixing her eyes upon him. 'If my information is correct, that is not your house,' said Stanton.

'It is hers,' retorted Miss Neal. 'Yet I order you to leave it.' 'What right have you to interfere?' 'I have the right to shield my dear

niece from trouble. You promised never to annoy her. Is this how you keep your promise. I have a message for her that will—' 'Give the message to me and I will de-

'Not now!' exclaimed Stanton. 'But I give you my word of honor that --- ' 'Your word of honor!' exclaimed Miss Neal. 'You have already proved too well that your word is not to be relied on. You have no sense of shame or honor about you. You think that you can terrorize

helpless women, coward that you are !' 'By heaven!' never man spoke to me like that-'A man!' cried the old lady, tremulous

with indignation. 'If I were a man, you would not dare to venture here, because you would horsewhip you.' 'You will make me forget that you are a

woman!' cried Stanton turiously. Since you have forgotton that you are a man, it would not be very surprising,' retorted the old lady.

'I do not wish to bandy words with you,' said Stanton. 'I came here to see Muriel -and see her I will, even if I cause a scandal in the place. Send her down to me. I will not leave this room until she

'You say you will not go?' cried Miss Neal. 'I swear I will not,' answered Stanton

fiercely. 'We shall see!' retorted the old lady, leaving the room.

'The hag!' muttered Stanton. 'I wish she was dead. It is she who has set Muriel against me, yet, it I could only see her alone I--

He paused, and his face paled as he glanced towards the door, Miss Neal re-entered the room, leading

a large mastiff by the collar. Keep that dog back, or I'll kill it,' cried Stanton. 'Have you quite decided not to go?' in-

quired the old lady quietly. 'Keep the brute back, or-'Drive him out, Prince,' cried Miss Neal,

releasing the mastiff's collar. Growling ominously, the huge dog approached Stanton, who, uttering a cry of terror, fled through the open window and

on to the verandah. 'Poor Muriel!' exclaimed the old lady, calling the dog off and shutting the window. She must not know. She has trouble enough already. I wonder how that man | have not seen the last of me.' discovered our address? We must leave

here. I shall take her abroad.' The following morning, before her aunt had risen, Muriel took a walk towards the village, and she was somewhat startled by seeing a man push his way through the

hedge at the side of the road. Then her face turned deadly pale as she recognized James Stanton.

'For Heaven's sake hear what I have to say, Muriel! he cried, in a supplicating tone. 'During all these years I have known no moment's peace for having brought grief to you; but my crime is not what you imagine.'

'I will not hear you !' exclaimed Muriel. 'You are a murderer !' 'Your brother's blood is not on my

head,' said Stanton. Muriel, he lives !' 'Ah! you speak falsely to serve your

'I have told you the truth. I can prove plate. my words,' said Stanton. 'To bring you this joyful news I have travelled to Eng land. Last night I called on your aunt, but she refused to let me see you. Now I throw myself on your mercy.'

'I have no mercy for such as you,' exclaimed Muriel, shuddering. 'How can you expect it? Your whole life has been one of deception; but you will never

deceive me more. 'Yet I tell you that I can prove your brother lives,' continued Stanton, trying to conceal the fury which her words caused him I admit we fought a duel; but you must remember the great provocation I received. He fell, and I thought I had slain him; but such was not the case. I subsequently learnt that he had recovered from his wound, and I am thankful to say he is now living, although he is in prison for having been concerned in some treason. able plot.'

'That I know is false,' said Muriel. 'My brother would never take part in such a

plot.' 'Possibly not,' answered Stanton. 'That he is innocent I have not a doubt; but he was arrested on suspicion and has been imprisoned ever since.'

Where?' demanded Muriel eagerly, for she really believed from Stanton's manner, that he spoke the truth.

'Unfortunately I have been unable to discover that, so far,' he answered. 'But I will do so for your sake, and, indeed, for his. I bear him no enmity for the manner in which he treated me. He acted in ignorance of the facts of the case. Mind, Muriel, he was the aggressor-he struck

'Yes! And for what reason?' exclaim ed Muriel.

'For none. He had been deceived by someone,' declared Stanton; 'possibly, by one of my enemies. But it is useless to go into that question now. That there have been faults in my past life, I am ready to admit; but that I would do aught to bring grief to you is talse. My one aim is to win your love-

'My love!' interrupted Muriel. 'Yes; in return for the great love I bear

you.' 'How have you shown it?' cried Muriel. By wrecking my life; by murdering, or attempting to murder, my brother. Do he lay concealed, and glancing through the you imagine a few empty words-some of | bushes he saw Muriel. which I know are false—can atone for life of crime, such as yours has been ? I know your true character, and that knowledge convinces me you would not be here even now, but for my fortune.'

'There you wrong me greatly,' said Stanton. 'I love you as I have never loved before. Apart from your wealth and beauty, I love you for yourself, and whatever you say now, however cruelly you treat me, that love will remain unchanged.

'Your looks belie your words,' Muriel answered. 'I believe you hate me, and were I once in your power, your true nature would be revealed. But understand this—the only feeling that I have for you ts one of loathing, and that is the feeling I ever shall have.

liver it, If it is such that she should receive.' 'Yet you have love for another man, sneered Stanton. 'Hugh Allingham has boasted to me of his conquest.'

> though her cheeks turned paler at the mention of Hugh's name, and Stanton was quick to notice it. 'If this man, whom I met in Mexico, ha not made love to you how could I know it! How could I have found out your address

> have no affection for him, or that he has never spoken of love to yon?' 'No!' exclaimed Muriel definantly. I will not speak falsely, even if you do. Mr. Allingham asked me to be his wife, and I told him there was an unsurmountable obstacle between us. Now allow me to pass!

> I have nothing more to say to you.' 'But I have something more to say to you,' hissed Stanton. You have defied me; now you shall learn that you are play ing a dangerous game. As I have told you, your brother is not dead, but his freedom rests with me, and he shall die in his awful dungeon before I will raise a hand to save him. You will have the knowledge that his lingering death lies at your door. More than this, I will put a bullet through Hugh Allingham's heart for

having won your love.' 'That you are cowardly enough to exe cute your threat, I know,' retorted Muriel 'but you torget that Mr Allingham is well able to protect himself. You would not

dare to meet him face to face. 'Yet I met your brother,' sneered Stanton, who made no further effort to conceal his passion.

'Perhaps you judged my brother would never attempt your life. Mr. Allingham, if I do not mistake his noble nature, would refuse to meet you; but he would chastise you for insolence.'

That was exactly what Hugh had done and Muriel could not have enraged Stanton more had she chosen her words.

'Learn this! he cried. Your brother shall die a worse death than I would have dealt him. He shall never see the light of day again. As for your lover, terrible though his punishment is, I will make it greater and you may rest assured that you

'Now you reveal your true n Muriey. 'You are false, James Stanton; as false and vile as any man could be.' She stepped past him and his eyes were lowered as she fixed her own upon him.

Then striding after her, he cried-'There is one more piece of news I will give you. I came over in the same vessel as your lover. During a fierce storm he was steuck blind by lightening. He is now living in a wretched garret, blind and

And with a bitter laugh as he saw the

look of misery upon Muriel's beautiful face the cowardly ruffi sn strode away. Pondering over the words he had uttered, Muriel slowly made her way back to

poverty stricken. That is all!

Hazelmere. That her brother still lived filled her with joy, while the thought that Hugh was blind

and in poverty was too terrible to contem-

Although she tried to hide the fact seen from herself, in her own heart she new that Hugh had won her love as she had won his.

But that knowledge only convinced her that a life of sorrow lay before her. When she returned to the mansion she learnt that her aunt had gone out, and

would not be back till luncheon. In reality the old lady had gone to make arrangements for leaving Hazlemere, but when she returned at mid day she mentioned nothing of her plans to her niece until Muriel told her what had happened that morning.

'The man's story seems improbable Muriel,' exclaimed Miss Neal. 'Yet it is strange that he should have repeated it after he saw there was no chance of overcoming your abhorrence for him. At any rate, I shall at once telegraph to a lawyer in Mexico. Now, leave me, dear Muriel,

With bitter hatred in his breast-hatred for the beautiful woman he professed to love-James Stanton made his way to the inn where he was staying, and here he passed the day piotting how to get Muriel into his power.

and I will think what is best to be done.

'If I could only get her away from that old hag,' ran his thoughts, 'I would force her to listen to reason. And what is to stop me carrying off the girl? There could be no risk for me, even if I were caught. Muriel shall be mine yet, I swear, and with her wealth I'll lead a life of pleasure. That will be a fitting vengeance on Alling. ham. By Heaven, I'll do it !'

They brought him dinner, but he scarce. ly touched it, so occupied was his mind with his vile plot.

In the afternoon he bired a trap and drove to the village, where he purchased some chloroform. Then he drove to Hazlemere and fastening the horse beneath some trees at the

side of the lane, made his way towards the grounds of the mansion Desperate though his scheme was, James

Stanton had no fear of failure. For an hour or more he waited, then an evil light came into his eyes as he heard a step along the gravel path in the shrub-

It was approaching the very spot where

James Stanton saturated a handkerchief with the drug, and steped from his place of concealment. At the rustling his movements caused,

Muriel turned. She uttered a cry of terror as the villain sprang towards her and placed the hand-

kerchief over her face. In vain the helpless girl tried to free herself from his grasp.

She felt her senses leaving ber. She tried to cry for help, but her voice But now James Stanton heard a rustling

in the bushes.

Still holding the handkerchief over Muriel's mouth, he turned around and uttered an exclamation of terror. The great mastiff had heard his young 'That is a wicked falsehood,' cried Muriel mistress's cry, and came bounding towards the spot, growling fiercely. Stanton released his almost unconscious burden,

and, as Muriel sank to the ground, the miscreant sprang through the bushes, and clambered over the fence. But now he uttered a cry of pain, for a but for him? Do you dare to tell me you

grip was on his leg which almost drew him backwards. He heard people approaching, and, with a frantic effort, wrenched himself free. Then he fled towards the trap, and drove quickly away, maddened at the

thought that his scheme had failed when success seemed certain. Arrived at the inn, helentered the private

sitting-room. Confident that Muriel would not expose his attempted villainy, he saw no cause to make good his escape.

The servant had lighted the lamp, and

It was dark now.

Stanton ordered tea, but ere it was brought in, a stranger entered the room. 'Are you aware that this is a private room?' demanded Stanton, rising. 'Yes; my business is with you. I am a detective, and have tracked you here from

London. You are James Stanton, and have lately come over from Mexico. 'Pray, proceed.' sneered Stanton, trying to be calm, though his ashen face revealed his terror. 'Seeing that you are gifted with such marvellous acumen, it would be

quite interesting to bear your story.' Do you deny that you are James Stanton?' demanded the detective. 'You would not believe me if I did,' answered Stanton. 'Let me hear your charge.

'Forgery!' 'Ha, ha! Capital. Why not make it murder at once ?' 'I shall have to arrest you, sir,' said the detective, somewhat deceived by Stanton's

'Naturally, my dear sir!' he answered. You are only doing your duty. I blame you in no way. In fact I may tell you that I am James Stanton, but for certain reasons, which are easily explained, I have assumed another name. Have a cigar? You are not in any particular hurry, I pre-

'No, sir. We can go up by the last train. 'All right! John Fernly is the rascal who has played me this trick, I presume r

sume'?'

'Yes.' 'I thought so. I have helped the young wagabond with money and in other ways; but I understand his object. The worst of it is a man of straw, so I stand to loss. I stood by the young scapegrace when his own relative turned him adrift, but at last I had to throw him over, and this is his revenge. Of course, nothing will come of it, except a little inconvenvience to me. Have you mentioned your business here?

'Not I sir,' laughed the detective. 'So much the tetter.'

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