GODEY'S

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FRED HARLEY'S PASSENGER.

BY MARION HARLAND.

"You will be home by sunset, will you not?" asked Mrs. Harley of her husband, as she followed him to the door one bright, sharp morning in mid-winter.

"I shall try to return before dark; but if I am detained later you must not be uneasy. It will be moonlight, and, with this snow on the ground, as bright as day."

"You will have a charming jaunt! I wish I could go with you!" said the wife, drawing in a deep breath of the pure cold air, and shielding her eyes from the blinding radiance of the snow that enwrapped mountain and plain in a covering of glittering white several feet in depth.

"Why don't you? There is room in the sleigh, and I should be charmed to have your company. Come!"

"Tempter!" laughed Mrs. Harley, shaking her head. "What would baby say to my desertion? and how would house affairs go without my presence? No; you must be content with Johnny as my representative for this once, and I will try to be satisfied within doors. Perhaps I may go next time. The sleighing bids fair to last for a week longer."

Mr. Harley was examining the harness; adjusting here a buckle, there a strap, and concluded by patting the neck of the fine animal attached to the sleigh.

"I like to be sure that all is right, before I set out. A ride of forty miles through the heart of the mountains requires stanch gear and a trusty horse."

"You have both!" observed the wife. "Come, Johnny, papa is ready to lift you in."

The boy—a merry-eyed, rosy fellow of seven—put up his lips for a farewell kiss, and sprang into the vehicle without assistance.

"We have grown independent, you perceive!" said his father, smiling proudly, as the urchin established himself upon the seat, and made a great parade of tucking the fur robes about him.

"As becomes a young gentleman who accompanies his father in his business excursions!" replied Mrs. Harley. "Good-by, dear!" in response to her husband's kiss. "Take care of yourself and come back early, if you can. Johnny, be a good boy, and don't trouble papa!"

The horse sprang forward at the word of command, and the sleigh glided fleetly down the road. Mrs. Harley was just closing the door when she heard the tinkle of the bells coming nearer instead of growing fainter in the distance.

"My whip, if you please!" called her husband, as she ran out to inquire the cause of the return. "I left it in the hall."

"I thought Red Rover never needed it!" answered Mrs. Harley, handing him the forgotten article.

"He never has; but that is no guaranty that he never will be the better for a touch of the lash. No wise driver sets out upon a journey without his whip. Good-by again!"

How often, during the day, did the picture of the travellers, as they appeared at that moment, recur to the mind of the fond woman they left behind!—her husband's tall figure, enveloped in his shaggy great coat; his fur cap shading his kind, clear eyes, and framing, with its lappets, the strongly-marked features she thought so handsome—and the boy's happy face, smiling at her, over the mountain of buffalo-skins in which his careful parent had wrapped him!

"It 's bad luck to turn back, and Mas'r Fred oughter have knowed it!" grumbled old Sally, one of the fast-diminishing class of faithful negro servants, who had lived in the Harley family when the present master was born, and knew herself to be a privileged character. "If he had jest made a cross whar he turned 'round, and spit onto it, all would have been right!"

Mrs. Harley smiled, without contradicting the sable croaker, and went up to her room to see if her babe were still sleeping. The first object that met her eyes, upon entering the chamber, was a pair of pistols lying in an open leathern case upon the bureau.

"Really, Fred's humor is a forgetful one, to-day," she exclaimed, taking up one of the weapons. "I never knew him to leave these before, when there was any chance of his being benighted upon the road. Perhaps he did not take them because he was so sure of returning by daylight."

"Is the road really dangerous?" inquired her sister, who sat by the cradle; "or does he carry them as a matter of form?"

"As he does his whip, I fancy—from principle!" returned Mrs. Harley. "The Black Mountain has a bad reputation, founded, I believe, upon the legend that a peddler was murdered there twenty or thirty years since. It is a dreary and desolate route—not a human habitation being visible for six miles, and the forest of evergreens lining the road on both sides; but Fred has traversed it upon an average once a week for the last dozen years, and has never seen anything more frightful than his own shadow. It is perfectly safe during the day, being the main road to P———, and continually travelled by farm-wagons, and teams from the mines."

Frederick Harley had succeeded, by inheritance, to a valuable farm in the mountains of New Jersey—a fine, commodious homestead, and, as was soon discovered, by means of his intelligent researches, a wealth of minerals stored in the bosom of the lofty hills among which he had drawn his first breath. A liberal education and the advantages of travel had given him just and enlarged views of internal improvements, and the policy of developing the natural resources of his patrimony. Within five years from the date of his accession to the estate a joint stock company, of which he was the leading spirit, had erected substantial buildings and machinery in the wilderness of mountains composing the background of the smiling valley wherein were situated the Harley family mansion and a group of smaller farm-houses. The sharp tapping of the picks and hoes was echoed from the dark gorges, and distant peaks gave back the reverberant roar of the "blast," which hurled immense boulders in the air like pebble-stones. Further down the valley arose, as by magic, a tall furnace of solid masonry, within the throat of which blazed an intense fire day and night; while, on either side, a smelting-shop and rolling-mill added activity and clamor to the lately quiet scene.

In all these improvements Fred Harley was foremost and most energetic. In fact, he was the virtual comptroller of the enterprise from its inception to the present fruition of his dreams and hopes. Born to command, he exercised over capitalists and laborers a sway none the less absolute that it was apparently gentle and moderate. His fellow directors solicited advice from him, which, however courteously couched, had all the force of commands; overseers and workmen came to him for orders and redress. He it was who visited the works in person every Saturday, and paid each man his wages; admonishing the indolent, encouraging the diligent, and rebuking sternly the refractory and disorderly.

Dictator as he was, abroad, no man was ever more indulgent and affectionate in his home. He had wedded, ten years before, a sweet-tempered, happy girl, whom his love and care had kept happy and sunny of mood until now. Their first child had died while an infant, and the memory of this, the only sorrow they had known since their lives flowed into one, added strength and tenderness to the fondness they felt for Johnny and his infant sister. Already the boy tramped up the rugged road to the mine at his father's side, disdaining to accept the support of his hand; stood, an attentive observer of the

wonders of puddling, moulding, and rolling; open-eyed and silent, while Mr. Harley issued directions to, or instituted inquiries of, the head workman; and, eight times out of ten, he was his parent's sole companion in his journeys to and from the town of P———, distant about twenty miles from the works. The principal object of the present visit to that place was to draw a large sum of money from the bank for the purpose of paying the miners and other laborers.

They had gone five or six miles before Mr. Harley bethought him of the pistol-case lying harmlessly upon the bureau at home. He recollected perfectly how he happened to leave it. He had reloaded the weapons—having fired them off the preceding day—when his wife called to him that breakfast was waiting; and he put them down, intending to revisit the room before his departure. Finding that it was later than he had supposed, he ate his breakfast hurriedly, stopping several times during the meal to add items to his memorandum. When he was through, he put on his cap and overcoat by the dining-room fire, where his wife had hung them to be warmed, and set off without giving another thought to the implements, which had been his constant attendants during many years of lonely travel in unfrequented ways. He was in the habit of talking to his boy as he would have done to a grown fellow-traveller, making him, at this early age, an associate and confidant. Little dreaming that circumstances might arise which would make the child's knowledge of the incident inconvenient, if not dangerous, he said, laughingly:—

"Well, Johnny, you may be thankful that I did not forget *you*, this morning! I left my whip, and, as I now recollect, my pistols also."

"Can't you ride back and get them, papa?"

"No, I am behind time as it is; for I have much to attend to in town. It is a matter of little consequence, only I am ashamed of my carelessness."

"Why do you always carry your pistols, sir? Are there bears in the woods?" questioned the boy, his eyes growing larger and darker, as he instinctively nestled nearer to his protector.

"No; or if there are, they never come near the high-road. But it is safer to have arms of some description with me, carrying, as I often do, large sums of money in my pocket, and riding at all hours of the night in out-of-the-way places."

"Have you ever killed anybody with them, papa?"

"No, my son! and I hope never to be obliged to use them against any human being."

"Still," persisted the child, with boyish taste for the sensational, "if we were riding along here some dark night, and two great big men, with guns and swords in their hands, were to *rush* out of the woods and catch hold of Red Rover's head, I know what you would do! You would pull out your pistols and shoot, first one and then the other, and then give Red Rover one hard cut with your whip, and away we would go! Ah, wouldn't that be fun?"

Mr. Harley could not help laughing at the sanguinary innocent's ideas of sport.

"The day for such work as that has gone by, Johnny, and I for one do not care to have it come back. There are no awful robbers now-a-days, such as you read of in story-books."

"Like the two men who carried away the 'Babes in the Wood!' I know!" nodded Johnny. "I think, papa, they must have left the poor little children in just such a dark, lonesome place as this."

They were entering the Black Mountain forest, and the father was struck with the child's correct appreciation of the gloomy wildness of the region. The road was narrow; the giant hemlocks clasping hands above it, and the unsunned snow, broken rudely to permit the passage of vehicles, lay in hard, rough masses against the boles of the trees, leaving just room enough in the centre of the highway for the runners of the cutter.

"It is a doleful neighborhood!" he said. "But we have had some merry rides along here, and will, I hope, have many more."

It was noon when they reached P———, for the days were short, and the road was, as I have said, badly prepared for sleighing, in the first place, besides having been much cut up by the wheels of heavy wagons. Johnny valiantly disclaimed being hungry or tired; but his father, without wounding his manly susceptibilities, proposed to leave him in a quiet little eating-house, where they often stopped for luncheon, and let him amuse himself by dining, while he, the senior, attended to sundry errands about town. To

this inviting scheme Master Johnny's face and eyes said "Yes," even more promptly than his tongue, and having seen him ensconced in a snug corner, with a table all to himself, the promise of speedy hot oysters, bread and butter, and pudding warming his imagination, Mr. Harley insured the particular attention of a trusty waiter, who knew him well as an old customer, by crossing his hand with a piece of silver, and left them for three-quarters of an hour or more. When he returned, Johnny was curled up in an arm-chair, looking over a picture-book which his father had providently purchased on their way up-town, and munching a long stick of red-and-white candy.

"Why, my son, where did you get that? You surely did not buy it without my leave, or ask for it?"

"No, papa. A man gave it to me."

"What man?—the waiter?"

"No, sir. A very nice, kind man, who came in just after you went out, and asked me if I were not Mr. Harley's son, and how mamma was, and when we came over the mountain, and when we were going back; and I told him you said we would not get off before night, we were so late reaching town; and he asked ever so many questions besides, and said he knew you very well, and wished he could have seen you, and then he bought a paper of candy for me."

"Did you ever see him before?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Harley turned to the waiter, who had come forward to receive his order.

"Did you notice the person who was talking to my little boy, just now?"

"I did, sir."

"Who was he—do you know?"

"Well, really, sir, I cannot recall his name; but he looked like a decent countryman—a farmer, I should say, sir."

Satisfied that the inquisitive stranger was some one of his rural neighbors whose face Johnny had forgotten, Mr. Harley dismissed the subject from his mind. After finishing his luncheon he took Johnny with him to the bank, where, upon presenting the company's draft, he received several hundred dollars. While he counted the notes, preparatory to stowing them away in his pocket-book, the boy stood in silent and patient attendance upon his leisure. Too well-trained to interrupt his father by act or word, the bright eyes were yet busy, and the rosy face was so expressive of pleased interest, when Mr. Harley glanced at it, that he inquired:—

"What is it, my son? What have you seen?"

"There is the nice man that gave me the candy, papa!" he whispered. "There, just outside the door! He has been standing there ever since we came in."

Fred Harley's movements were always quick, and he wheeled now so suddenly towards the entrance that he got a full view of the person who was looking through the glass door—caught his gaze, keen and covetous, riveted upon the pocket-book he still held in his hand. Then the spy slunk away, evidently discomposed by the unexpected notice he had received.

"Who is that fellow?" inquired Mr. Harley, abruptly, of a clerk.

"I never saw him before, sir. There is always a knot of loafers hanging about that door."

"If they are all as ill-looking as that one, you had better look sharply after your deposits," was the reply. "I never saw a more villainous pair of eyes."

Not ten minutes later a friend, the principal lawyer of P———, stopped Mr. Harley in the street.

"When do you leave town?" he asked.

"In about a couple of hours."

"Then will you call at my office for a few moments before you go? I have a package of valuable papers which I wish to send up to your neighbor, Mr. Hinckley; you will oblige both him and myself by taking charge of them."

"I will, with pleasure! I will go back with you and get them, at once."

As he turned, he found himself almost face to face with Johnny's new acquaintance, who was leaning against the arched gateway of a covered alley so near by that he must have heard every syllable that was uttered. This time his eyes were downcast, and he was idly worrying, with his foot, a mangy cur, gnawing a bone it had picked up in the gutter. His whole attitude and expression were those of a lazy lounger, who cared for nothing beyond the amusement of the moment.

By the time that father and son took their places in the sleigh, for their homeward ride, one at least of them had forgotten the trifling incident of the meeting in the eating-saloon,

as well as the offensive curiosity displayed by the shabby idler.

The evening was cold, but not raw or piercing; Red Rover as fresh and lively as if he had not trotted twenty miles that day, over an uneven road, and had before him the certain prospect of a repetition of the task; Johnny was wide awake, although it was past his usual bed-time when they left the town behind them, and delighted beyond measure with the novelty of a moonlight ride. His tongue kept time with the music of the bells, in its merry chatter, and his father preferred his sprightly prattle to any other relaxation after the cares of a busy day.

Five miles from P——— there stood, within an angle formed by two cross-roads, a deserted log-cabin—a mere shell of a house, with broken chimney and sunken roof. It had not been tenanted for several years, yet, as our travellers neared it, Red Rover shied violently at some object standing within its shadow.

"Whoa, sir; what are you about!" cried his master, checking him sharply.

A tall woman came forward into the clear moonlight and approached the sleigh.

"I beg your pardon for frightening your horse, sir!" she said, in a wheezing, husky voice, "and I hope you won't think me very bold when I ask you to give me a seat in your sleigh for a few miles. I have been waiting here in the cold for near four hours, until I am afraid I have caught my death of cold. I came up, this afternoon, from P———, in the cross-country stage, and it set me down here, where my brother was to meet me with his wagon, and take me over to his house—but he hasn't come, and I'm afraid something is the matter with him or his folks. Maybe you know him, sir? His name is Moses Nixon, and he lives a piece back from the road, on the right-hand side, about half-a-mile from the foot of the mountain."

"Steady! steady!" Mr. Harley had some difficulty in restraining Red Rover's desire to press forward. He was used to applications of this sort from pedestrians, and saw nothing improbable in the story he had heard, somewhat impatiently, for he, too, wanted to be at home.

"I wish I had passed this way earlier," he said, kindly, "so that your time of waiting might have been shortened. I do know your brother, and am glad of the chance of doing him a good turn. Excuse me for not getting out to help you in, but my horse is, as you may see, rather restive."

The woman climbed into her place, with a hearty, "Thank you, sir!" and allowed her escort to tuck the warm robes about her, shivering audibly, while he was thus employed.

"I should have been frozen stiff in an hour more!" she said, with a snuffle and sneeze.

"Are you warmer now?" asked Mr. Harley, at the end of another mile.

"I'm a bit more comfortable—but my feet are like two blocks of ice!"

"There is a hot board in the bottom of the sleigh. Have you your feet upon it?" and he stooped to ascertain for himself if this were so.

As he fumbled for the board, he struck his hand against the passenger's ankle. She wore men's boots, heavy and thick-soled, as he felt by passing his fingers lightly down the foot, and their size was enormous, even for a woman of her uncommon height. Without the least abatement of kindliness in his accent or manner, he added, "All right!" and resumed his upright position.

But the eyes, above which the fur cap was slouched, were no longer careless and cheerful. Furtively, yet searchingly, they inventoried every particular of his passenger's attire and general appearance. She was gaunt and raw-boned, and wore a suit of rusty mourning; a woollen dress; a common blanket-shawl and a black bonnet, with a scanty veil of black crape hung before her face. Thus far, all was in accordance with her account of herself as a farmer's sister, and even the clumsy boots might have been borrowed for the occasion, by any respectable woman of her rank, anticipating, as she had done, the possibility of being obliged to wait in the snow for some time. Upon her knees lay a muff, wherein were concealed her hands, and to this Mr. Harley's attention returned, once and again, as drawn by some mysterious magnet hidden in this very useful appendage to a winter's night toilet. It was quite new, for each hair in the very common fur of which it was manufactured was smooth and glossy. Fred was a judge of peltry, and he knew that this was a cheap article, yet, in that region, rustic women were not in the habit of sporting such luxurious comforts—inexpensive as they might seem to a city dame. Ten dollars

would have been an extravagant outlay for Moses Nixon's sister or wife to invest in a stuffed fox-skin, for keeping warm fingers, that were wont to milk the cows when the frosted breath of the kine lay white upon their roughened hides, and to draw water that froze as it plashed over the sides of the bucket. True, the muff might have been the well-meant, but inappropriate gift of a town relation, and the recipient was not to be censured, if she incurred the risk of making her hands tender by using it upon this nipping evening.

Just as he had arrived at this charitable conclusion, one of the runners of the cutter struck a stone, or a lump of frozen snow, and the inmates received a smart jolt. The woman threw out her arm instinctively to recover her balance, and the dazzling moonbeams shone upon some polished substance within the orifice from which her hand was withdrawn. The next second she covered it as before, but the eagle eye of the observer who shared her seat had seen the outline and glitter of that which sent a shock through his hardy system.

Could he be mistaken, and was the treasure she seemed to clutch more firmly, as she plunged her gloved hand back into the recesses of the muff, anything more innocent, more fit for a woman's handling than the butt of a pistol? If this were so, then the shudder of horror, the vain, wild longing for the deadly implements lying useless in the leathern-case at home, were childish nervousness. If not—if the glance that seldom missed its aim, rarely failed to discern, instantly and correctly, the real form and nature of whatever came within its scope, had not played him false—he was in peril, the thought of which caused even his stout nerves to quiver. He made but one unguarded movement in the first thrill of apprehension, the spasm of deadly distrust that clutched his heart-strings with tigerish ferocity. Up to this time, Johnny had sat far back upon the seat between his father and the stranger. Since the appearance of the latter, he had grown silent, and, Mr. Harley fancied, drowsy, until, stooping to look at him, now, he saw that the large eyes were fastened steadfastly upon the veiled face of the passenger, and that their expression was one of thoughtful perplexity. With a nervous sweep of his arm, the father removed the child from his perch to a standing posture betwixt his own knees; wrapped the robes about him in solicitude that had in it a certain passion of tenderness, and pressed his bearded cheek to the firm, ruddy one of his darling. It was a brief interval of weakness, for he made no pause after the caress, before addressing the woman:—

"This is a rough road, and he must have crowded you!"

"Not at all!" answered the wheezing voice. "I have plenty of room."

"At any rate, I can keep him warmer where he is, and there is not so much danger of his falling asleep, while he stands."

Inwardly, he was thinking—"A rasping falsetto! just the voice of a man who tries to mimic a woman's style of talking! And she wears boots! she carries a suspicious looking instrument in her muff! I *must* see her face!"

They were beginning the ascent of the mountain, and the wind from the heights blew strongly down the road.

"We are likely to have falling weather, before many days," remarked Mr. Harley, with admirably assumed composure. "Isn't there a faint halo around the moon, or is it my imagination that makes me see one?"

The passenger raised her head and looked, as he meant she should, up at the full-orbed moon, which hung directly in front of them.

"It seems to me there is one." The frosty breeze fluttered her veil, exposing her face for an instant. She seized the flimsy covering in eagerness that would, of itself, have excited the wary watcher's suspicions, had the main object of his experiment remained unaccomplished.

He had believed that he was prepared for any disclosure, however frightful, but the sharp certainty of his imminent peril stabbed him like a knife-thrust in the heart, and the blood seemed to follow the blow, in the death-like faintness that ensued. That flash of moonlight across the bared countenance had showed him the remembered lineaments he had pronounced "villainous," that day; enabled him to identify in the wayfarer the loafer who had eyed the pile of bank-notes with such covetous desire; who had, afterwards, undoubtedly overheard the lawyer's proposition to intrust certain valuable documents to his, Mr. Harley's, keeping. Swift as lightning followed a train of conjectures, convictions, dreads; each more appalling

than that which preceded it. From the boy's lips the robber had learned when the travellers proposed to set out upon their homeward journey, and that the two would not be accompanied by others. Johnny knew, moreover, what had taken him to town, viz., to draw the money which now lay, like a weight of hot lead, against his father's breast, and, if interrogated, had probably divulged this, along with whatever other scraps of information the wily thief wished to obtain. Nor was it likely that the highwayman would have adopted the bold expedient of intruding himself, alone, into the sleigh of his proposed victim, had he not been assured that the latter was unarmed. Johnny had prattled of the forgotten pistols! The thought was maddening! He was powerless—at the mercy of the sinewy desperado, who sat so calmly by his side, only awaiting the arrival of the appointed moment for lifting his arm and blowing out his companion's brains.

Thought works rapidly under the goad of such circumstances as these, and imagination is frightfully vivid in her madly hurried sketchings. She showed the doomed man, now, a forest ravine, overgrown with hemlock and pine, half filled with drifted snow, and, upon the white bed, a human form—stark and cold—hair dabbled in the blood that had left a red trail in the direction of the road. Nor was this motionless figure alone in death. The moon peered through the thicket upon another, his boy! could he hope that his innocent beauty would move the assassin to pity, when he had had testimony so striking of the active intellect, the early maturity of thought and language, which would make him a dangerous witness against his father's murderer! They must perish together, if strength nor skill sufficed to save the life of the elder. We have said that Harley was brave, and it was the parent's heart rather than the man's courage, that quailed in that first awful moment which revealed the truth.

They were passing the last farm-house, which was to cheer their sight for six miles to come. It was situated upon another road, and nearly a mile away across the fields, but Fred's eye caught the spark of light in the window, and another picture glowed out freshly before his inner vision. It was the family sitting-room in his own home, the ruby shine of the fire tinting the walls and restoring the blush of girlhood to his wife's cheek, as she sat in front of the blazing hearth, singing her baby to sleep. The musical tinkle of the sleigh-bells seemed to chime the same measure; to echo the tender, thrilling tones he loved so well. She would not sing thus, to-morrow night! He pictured the happy face blanched by watching and fears; the wearisome, sickening vigil that would follow upon this evening of content; saw the wild eyes straining into the far-off moonlight, as she hearkened vainly for tokens of the arrival that could never be; then, the breaking of the morning; the alarm; the search, the *discovery*. A touch dispelled the trance that had held him with frozen chain for what might have been an eternity of anguish—which, in reality, was not more than three minutes in duration. Johnny leaned back upon his breast, with a shiver.

"I wish we were home, papa!"

The plaintive tone, the appealing gesture aroused the father's most active energies, sharpened into acuteness every faculty. He would save his child, or sell his life at a dear price. By one sudden and powerful blow he might dislodge the hated intruder, but there was the risk of failure, and should the wretch be cast into the road, his confederates, who were, doubtless, lying in wait in the darker and more secluded shadows of the mountain-pass beyond, could be summoned by a pistol-shot or shout. There were likewise insuperable objections to another scheme that passed through his mind, that of grasping the weapon which he was now sure he had seen within the muff, and threatening the robber with instant death if he did not surrender. There would be a struggle, and the wicked might prevail.

Meanwhile the road grew wilder and more solitary; the shade of the hemlocks more intense. The season for action was very near, if that action were to avail aught in the preservation of the innocent. The ring of the bells came back sharply from the tall banks that reared themselves on either side of the narrow highway; the beat of the horse's hoofs was the clanking of iron upon ice. It was a weird hour and a weirdly, desolate spot, fitting time and place for a nameless deed. The chill and gloom were like the very "shadow," if not the "valley" of death. Then it was that Johnny made his childish moan—"I wish we were home, papa!"

It cost the parent a prayerful effort to reply

steadily, even cheerily: "I am sure that I wish so, too, my boy! What if we hurry Red Rover, a little!"

He had never touched the withers of his faithful horse with the lash, and, in this moment of absorbing excitement, the crisis upon which hung his existence and the happiness of those dearest to him, he yet experienced a pang of remorse as he leaned forward and took the whip from its place. It was a mere fillip that fell upon the animal's flank, so light it would hardly have brushed a fly from his side, yet he gave a plunge and snort of resentment or fright.

"Papa," screamed Johnny, "you have dropped your whip! Stop! and I will jump out and get it!"

The hand upon his shoulder was like the grip of steel pincers, but the reply was quietly enunciated:—

"No, my son, the snow would be up to your waist! May I trouble you, madam," turning courteously to his other passenger, "to alight and pick up my whip? My horse is very spirited, I can hardly hold him with both hands, and I dare not trust a lady to attempt it."

In truth, the *lady* had seemed terrified by the wild bound of the mettled creature, and her manner showed her entire willingness to comply with the request.

"Certainly, sir! 'Twouldn't be safe for you to leave him!" she said, briskly, and depositing her muff carefully in the bottom of the sleigh—an action, that sent Fred's heart leaping into his throat, she sprang out as nimbly as her unaccustomed habiliments would allow her to move.

The whip lay upon the track, fully a dozen yards in the rear of the party, for Mr. Harley had not seemed able to check Red Rover immediately. He waited until the passenger had traversed half of this space, mad as was the bounding of his pulses, and the stretching of his instincts towards freedom and safety; then, a short, abrupt hiss escaped his set teeth, and the gallant brute, true to his training, forgetting terror and anger, bent his head, and was off at full speed. Before the startled and outwitted masquerader, thus deserted, could turn at sound of the rush of the departure, the sleigh was out of sight beyond a bend in the road, while the hurrying tramp of the horse, and the confused clamor of the bells might have betokened the sweep of a goblin troop through the defile. Johnny commenced an exclamation, which his father hushed at the first word.

"Down, sir! lie down, there!" he ordered, harshly, forcing him down with one hand, while the other held the taut rein. "Don't speak or move!"

He had his senses, now; comprehended, without fearing, all the dangers of his situation. Each rock and bush might conceal a foe. Red Rover was swift and sure of foot, but the assassin's eye might be surer still, and a bullet more swift in its errand to head or heart. If he fell, he could trust his tried and sagacious servant to carry his boy to his mother's arms, now that there was no one to check him. So, he threw, more than thrust, the child into the nest of furs about his feet, where he lay, frightened into docility.

In after life Johnny could never recall, without a shudder, the image of the figure that towered above him, during the breathless sweep of that impetuous flight; the marble pallor of his complexion; the blazing eyes and glittering teeth hard-locked within the parted lips. He uttered no sound beyond an occasional sibilant whisper to the flying steed, while they dashed through the mountain pass, where glints of moonlight and black shadows were blent in the boy's perceptions in one fleeting panorama, impelled backwards with dizzying swiftness, by a resistless machine, the noise of which filled his ears, as he crouched upon the floor of the sleigh, too much stunned and confused to distinguish the ceaseless agitated peal of the bells, from the shrill grinding of the runners upon the snow, and the rapid blows of the horse's hoofs. No slackening now of speed for rugged track or steep ascents; no cautious treading of dangerous declivities, which men as adroit and strong as was he who now controlled the progress of the vehicle, and animals as thorough-bred and true of step as was the noble beast he guided, might well fear to attempt in reckless haste, and by the deceptive light that checkered the route. Once, Red Rover slipped upon the treacherous ice; but the stanch lines and more stanch right arm of his master kept him up. Once, the sleigh struck a large snow-ball, and, rebounding, careened so fearfully that nothing but a more sudden change of position on the part of Mr. Harley saved it and its contents from being precipitated down an embankment.

For six miles they held on their headlong progress, until the open plain, with its long stretch of fences and level fields of snow, and sparkles of lighted windows in peaceful farm-houses, was gained. Then Mr. Hartley spoke.

"Soho! old fellow! you have done your work well! Gently! gently!"

His tones were replete with soothing and grateful affection, and Red Rover subsided from his excited trot into a more moderate gait. At the appearance of these favorable signs of the times, Master Johnny ventured to lift his abased pate and to peep over the spatter-board at the favorite.

"Whew, papa! how he smokes!"

"Yes, my boy! You may get up now."

In lifting him back to the seat, his father kissed him—more as his mother was wont to fondle him than he had ever done before, with a clinging tenderness that awakened the boy's wonder, although he made no remark upon the circumstance.

"Papa!" he said, regaining his freedom of speech, "won't you tell me, now, why you left that woman in the road? Did Red Rover run away?"

"Yes, Johnny."

"Then why did you keep whistling to him to go on?"

"That is the best way to cure a horse of running away—to urge him forward until he is tired of the fun and anxious to stop."

"But what will the woman do, papa?"

"I am sure I do not know, dear!" very drily.

It was clear that Mr. Harley was "cured" of confiding his secrets to Johnny.

Mrs. Harley was at the window when they drove up to the front gate, and Fred had had no harder struggle that eventful night than the effort he made to master the sickness that came over him as he compared the present scene with the phantasm of the lonely watcher which had haunted him an hour ago. The quick eye of the wife detected the signs of recent emotion as he folded her to his heart within the lighted hall.

"Fred, love, how pale and ill you look!"

"No wonder!" put in Johnny, his eyes starting from his head in the animation of having a marvellous piece of news to communicate. "Red Rover ran away, mamma! I tell you he did some tall travelling!"

"Ran away!" repeated Mrs. Harley, incredulously.

Reassured by her husband's significant smile, she set the story down to the credit of Johnny's imagination, and asked no more questions until that youth was snugly ensconced in his bed.

Then, Fred brought in the muff and its contents—a pair of loaded pistols—and gently told to the two sisters the tale of his peril and escape. There were tearful eyes and throbbing hearts around the family altar that night, and never ascended more fervent thanksgivings from mortal lips than went up from that home to the Guide of the traveller, the Guard of the defenceless.

Mr. Harley privately, but vigilantly instituted inquiries with regard to the would-be robber and murderer, but the search was fruitless. When he left the pseudo-sister of Moses Nixon in the middle of the road, that January night, he lost every clue to the discovery of him who had so nearly proved his assassin. To this day the muff and pistols remain unclaimed in the Harley family, and may be seen upon application to the proprietors, by any reader who is disposed to question the authenticity of what I hereby affirm to be a true story—one of which other portions as well as the principal idea have their "foundation in fact."

MARY.

BY JOHN PRYNE.

I MET her in the summer-time;
The bloom of health was on her cheek,
Her golden hair in tresses fell—
Her eye of blue was soft and meek.

I saw her in the winter-time,
When winds were blowing cold and bleak;
Her brow was pale, and worn, and sad—
The rose-tint faded from her cheek.

The arm of Death, where mine should be,
Was round her young and slender waist;
But, nestling closely in his arms,
Ne'er looked an angel half so chaste.

She died; they laid her in the ground;
The winds blew bleak above her grave;
And I was left alone on earth
To stem life's dark and dreary wave.

But oft, at twilight's dreamy hour,
I hear her lightsome footsteps near,
And listen, as her gentle voice
In silvery accents meets my ear.

And though bereft, as I have been,
I still am happy, happy here;
For well I know, when life is o'er,
She 'll meet me in that brighter sphere.