

# The Three Travellers

By Dora Sigerson Shorter

They were three travellers sitting in the smoking-room of a country inn, who had come together as strangers and grown companionable over their pipes and wine. Two of them were young, the third was grey-haired and wrinkle-faced. They were discussing women's love.

The youngest argued lightly, because he delighted in debate.

The second bitterly, because he had been jilted and fancied himself still in love.

The grey third without emotion, because he had known sorrow.

"For fairy gifts to win the heart of my fair lady," said the youngest, "were we in the magic days of old, I would ask nothing save a light heart and a handsome face with few harsh years stamped upon it."

"Nay," said the second youth; "I would request nothing save a purse of gold that never would grow empty, and were I ugly as sin, and wicked as its originator, I could buy the heart of any damsel I longed for."

"And you," said the first speaker, turning to the silent, grey man, "are you too old to remember women's hearts are worth the winning?"

"Old?" said the grey man; "how many years would you say that I carry?"

"You look old for your days if you be under sixty?"

"Nay, then," said the man, "I am forty-five at cockcrow to-morrow."

"Good heavens!" said the youth; "what has aged you so?"

"If I," said the grey man, passing the question, "had the goodwill of the fairies, I would claim the old gift women have always loved—more than beauty, wealth, gentleness, or aught else."

"And that?" said the first youth eagerly.

"Courage," said the man—"plain animal courage."

"I don't agree," said the other. "Where would he be with an ugly face, beside the curled, beribboned, and handsome lover, the tender glance from dream-loving eyes, the soft hand? No."

"I don't agree," said the second youth. "What! the courage of the snarling hound, before silken gowns, horses, the envy of one's neighbours? Gold it is, hard, yellow gold, that makes the ring."

"Beauty wins the eyes," said the grey man softly, "and gold is pretty to the touch; both make marriage. But I spoke of *love*—and courage wins the heart."

"You have a story to tell," said one youth, filling his pipe; "I see by your face."

"Go on," said the other, replenishing his glass.

"I have a story," said the grey man hesitatingly, "of a woman—of courage—of a man who was a coward. It happened some ten or twelve years ago, and I knew the man."

\* \* \*

This is the story that he told, and as he talked the glasses of the youths were unemptied and their pipes unfilled. But he had forgotten them, for he spoke aloud the story that was seared upon his heart.

"Ten or twelve years ago I knew the man. He lived in my village, but where that is does not matter. He was a coward. No one knew he was a coward, except himself—and a woman. In fact, to-day they speak of him as a hero in my village.

“When he was a child he was full of many terrors—afraid of robbers, afraid of ghosts, afraid of the dark. Perhaps he had been frightened as a baby by some nurse, and the terrors lingered. It sometimes happens thus that a child is ruined. When he grew older he was afraid of pain, afraid of blows. So he had few boyish rows, and joined in no rough games. People thought him a quiet and gentle youth. Later he was afraid of being afraid—of the shame of it.

“Then as his youth passed he grew out of this fear, or there were no longer calls on his boyish courage. He passed to manhood, and then, when he understood, he became afraid of death. Death was to him not peace and rest, but darkness. He thought of strangers, creatures not made as he was, there in the gloom—horrid faces, clutching hands, shadows half seen. Something of all this death was to him, yet it was a terror that he could not fully explain.

“Once as a boy he fought another, but that was because the other was bearing a story to the boy’s father, and he was afraid of the father.

“Once as a man he fought again, and that was because there was no possible escape without deadly shame, and he fought like a child mad with terror. This nobody knew, and he won—his foe was the smaller.

“Then he married the woman.

“For three years they lived together, and nothing happened to try his courage. Such is the cairn of life. The much-dreaded possible battles of boyhood were now no more. He was a man.

“But it happened he had to move from his quiet village into a desolate part of the country. Why does not matter. His was the only house for miles around, and it stood on the edge of a great cattle ranch. Behind it, some distance off, was a railroad, and on one side a strong river, often swollen to twice its natural size by heavy rains. Over it was thrown the railway bridge, too light for it, many thought, but the man laughed at the idea as he looked upon the great supports which stemmed the full flow of the tide.

“So for weeks their uneventful lives went on, nothing more exciting happening in the day than the passing of the great train—tearing by like some screaming soul rushing from damnation; a black snake in the daytime, one of fire by night. To the man and his wife it seemed the one link that bound them to civilization—which spoke to them of the great world that they might else well forget. Through the windows they got many a lightning glance of that society they had left. Here was the young bride alone in a carriage with her husband, speeding on her honeymoon and regarding the world with a smile; here the weary city man reading in a corner his everlasting papers; there the merry schoolboy waving his hat and shouting his unheard jokes from the window; there the hopeless woman mentally checking her household affairs. All were there. In each numbered carriage, every one in his place—first, second, third, the division of the classes according to the purse.

“Now the grim humour of circumstances willed it for the man that he should not be among those people who whirled past him from city to city, whose quiet, uneventful lives brought no strain upon their physical courage, who went without danger from place to place protected by civilization. Who knows but that among the crowd who looked from the flashing windows of the train there might not have been many who chafed the bit of social monotony and pined for this man’s freedom?

“Soon he saw in the eyes of his wife, as they bent upon him, looks of unquiet, or was it of fear? Did she suspect his secret? Was she afraid that he was afraid? Why should she suspect him? He had a retrospective five minutes. Yes, once when they were walking across the fields a great bull ran at the man; he had turned and fled, but the woman was beside him. Had he not shown he knew this? Had he not looked to her first and kept between her and the bull? He could not

remember. He never could remember after his fits of terror. When he was a child they bore him along in one great gust, blinding, deafening, maddening for the time. Now the years had hardly lessened their strength. Again, he remembered a brawny villain who had leered at and shouldered his wife as they walked through a neighbouring village. He had turned on the fellow with stern anger, but the drunken bravado would have nothing but blows, and before his clenched fist the man had stepped aside. He knew, however, that his voice had changed as he said he would have no brawling before a lady. He remembered again, when driving across the country the horse had taken fright, and he sat pale and trembling while the woman took the reins from his hands and guided the animal into quiet. She had never reproached him for these things, only her eyes seemed to speak; and then, how she loved courage! Once, when a weakling lamb of hers fell into the swollen and rapid tide, she stood knee-deep in the water weeping and calling to the man. When he reached her she begged him to go in and save the little creature. She could not swim, but *he* was a strong swimmer. Yet when he faced the running water he dared not take the risk for the sake of an animal, and said so. But a herdsman on the farm had also heard her calling and had noted the bleating of the lamb. Running down the bank, he had flung off his coat and leaped into the water. With a few strokes he had reached the drowning beast. To get back was not an easy matter, and twice the watchers thought the swimmer must fail, hampered as he was by the struggling beast and with the strong tide against him. But he had fought his way bravely, carrying the lamb, as a cat would her kitten, in his mouth. When he at length reached the side the watchers ran to meet him and helped him ashore. The woman said little, but thanked him with shining and excited eyes. The herd was shamed by her gratitude. He was a coward the minute he was out of danger—afraid of thanks. He shuffled off, saying something about a flood in the river if the heavy rains continued. When he had gone the woman turned to her husband: ‘Oh, if you had done that!’ ‘But dear,’ he answered, ‘is an animal worth the risk of a human life?’ ‘Oh, it was not the lamb,’ she replied, with glowing eyes—then added thoughtfully, ‘*He* was a man.’

“ ‘I am not as fine a swimmer as he,’ the man retorted, angry with her and with himself. ‘Perhaps you would have been sorry if I had gone to save your lamb and had been drowned?’

“In a moment she had turned and taken his hands in hers.

“ ‘Oh, dear love, yes!’ she said. ‘I am glad you did not risk it. I did not think; but I love courage so.’

“She took the lamb in her arms and carried it into the house. As he walked beside her, the man heard her whisper, as she kissed the wet, woolly head, ‘Yet it is but right that the strong should help the weak, even if it be only a lamb.’

“After that it seemed as though something had come between them, something neither could define. True, she loved him even more than before, it might be, but not in the same way. Now she seemed to add pity to her love, and no pride. She did not look up to him, but down upon him. Her love was like that of a mother for a crippled child. Yet, after all, it was the greater love; for love of the weak and failing is true love, while love of the strong and successful is selfish in a degree when he who loves lives in the shadow of that strength.

“One evening the man, sitting in the doorway with his beloved violin at his shoulder, beheld the woman coming towards him in great haste, her pretty curls behind her in the wind, her cloak blown back, her little feet twinkling in their speed. At first he did not hear her calling to him, for his soul was still with his music, and travelled slowly from his dreams. Soon her frightened face became more distinct, and he was conscious something disastrous had happened. He put down the violin and went to meet her, the bow still in his hand. She turned back the way she had come when she saw he was approaching her, and waved to him to hasten.

“The bridge!’ she cried—‘the bridge!’

“He hurried after her, and they reached the bridge together. What a sight there met his eyes! The river, turbulent, uncontrollable, mad, swollen to twice its size by the heavy rains, rolled by in a current too strong for waves to break upon. Heavy and dark it moved on, bearing everything before it—trees, dead sheep, a struggling ox, and once a white face with drowned, staring eyes—all he saw in that moment go by like chips of wood on the great river. But more than this he saw, and most terrible—the long railway bridge had given way! The central buttress had crumbled, and the iron rails trailed twisted to the water. At the middle of the great bridge nothing remained to cover a gap of over ninety feet but the handrail, which somehow had loosened from its hold on the broken bridge and swung across—no, not as a tight-rope, but more like a ladder with rungs, which the stanchions made, half a man’s height apart. The second wire, one could see, had broken on the further side, and this caused the whole fence to swing as if it might give way at any moment. In one second the man had seen all this; in the next he had remembered that the train would pass this way in an hour. An hour! What a little time when there is much to do! What an eternity when one waits!

“‘My God, the train!’ he gasped. ‘A hundred people—a hundred—’

“He looked into the rushing torrent, black with its force.

“The woman grasped his hand, and her nails pierced his skin. She was gazing at the wire swaying across the gap.

“‘There is only one possible way. I have thought it all out. Only one possible way.’

“‘And that?’

“‘To cross the wire.’

“‘The wire? My God! You are mad! Who would cross the wire?’

“‘You must. It is the only way to save them.’

“‘It is impossible; it might break under one’s weight. It is probably loose or rotten with time. It would be suicide to attempt it.’

“‘There is no other way, and it is like a ladder—firm enough to bear a man. You are so swift and strong—so strong, Alfred,’ she said slowly, turning and looking into his eyes. ‘There is only one man to whom the chance is given to save all these people—only one man—and only one way.’

“The man looked around; nobody else, they were miles from every one, from every help—one man; and he a coward.

“‘There is another bridge ten miles off. I could just do it on Prince,’ he whispered.

“‘Alfred,’ she said, ‘if this bridge has gone beneath the flood, do you think that that other little bridge yet stands? If you find it gone, and you leave no time to return and go this way, many will die here by your door—drowned, mangled, tortured—women and little children—little children. There will be crying and screaming—and you will hear them—I shall hear them!—O God! O God!—screaming down there in the dark.’

“The man broke from her, the agony pouring down his forehead into his eyes. He put his feet upon the lower wire, and, grasping the other in his hands, shuffled a few feet from the land into the air. The woman leaned to his sleeve and kissed it, her face white with anguish.

“‘The risk of one dear life, for a hundred lives; in your care—O God!’

“The man went out further; he looked down; his brain sickened. The wire swayed and creaked beneath his weight. The black, cruel water lay beneath him, and under his feet only the thin support. And all the time he was so near safety. He forgot the train and the people—only his own dark danger was living. He sprang back to the firm land again.

“The woman looked into his face; her eyes were on a level with his; she was tall, but slight and weak. She looked at her own tremulous thin hands, and at the long gap between her and the other side. The man saw the glance, and it maddened him. It said: ‘If these had your strength I would not be as you. There is a weak coward in your strong body; how did it get there?’

“ ‘It would be madness to attempt this,’ he cried; ‘I will go by the other bridge.’

“ ‘It is too late,’ the woman said, in a dull voice; ‘even if the bridge were there you could not do it now.’

“The gentle woman before him seemed to grow into a harsh monitress.

“ ‘I believe,’ he muttered, ‘that you would rather see me dead—if a hundred were saved over my body.’

“ ‘I would rather see you dead,’ she said, like one repeating him.

“ ‘You would rather I were a dead hero than a live—?’”

“A word tripped on her tongue; he could see it.

“ ‘Why don’t you say coward?’ he sneered.

“ ‘If I were dead in this cause, you would hear them call you the widow of a hero.’

“ ‘And now,’ the woman flashed up, ‘they will say I am the wife of a—They will say you were afraid.’

“The man turned on her sadly. ‘Oh, you woman,’ he said, ‘you should have been the wife of a soldier—the mother of men-children; you would have loved them, worshipped them, and harnessed on their armour and sent them forth to die.’

“He turned from her and ran to the stables; he flung a halter on the black horse, and, leaping upon its back, galloped off in the direction of the other bridge. The black horse covered the ground as it had never done before, but as they sped by the side of the river the man heard a faint voice shouting from the water. He looked and saw a drowning man hanging to a beam of wood, his white, wet face glowing in the gathering gloom. The pallid lips opened again.

“ ‘The bridge!’ they said—‘the bridge is down!’

“Yes! had he not known it all the time? The bridge was down, and he had run away from the danger on the other bridge near which the woman stood despising him.

“ He turned his horse and drove it into the water in the direction of that white face. The swift current nearly took it off its feet. It turned in its terror and ran, uncontrollable, towards its home. As the horse raced the flood for a time, the two human beings gazed at one another, the one powerless to help the other out in the darkness. ‘Help! help! help!’ How the horse’s feet echoed that cry long after the drowned lips had gone underneath.

“The man swayed in his saddle. Between the light of the fading day and the rising moon he saw plainly, as he came nearer home, the dark bridge with the great gap in the middle of it, and across the gap, fine as a spider-thread, the wire.

“The swaying wire—but what was on it? Something small and black, like a spider, was creeping across. When he got nearer he saw that it was a man. There was someone braver than himself, then? Well, she had got a hero at last. He drew nearer and watched. He saw the man crawl along, stopping often—sometimes it seemed through fear, sometimes to quiet the dangerous swaying of the wire, yet never looking back and always going forward—slowly, slowly he went over the swollen, angry torrent. The man thought of the white face he had seen go under, and shuddered. He wondered if this other man had seen it as it passed. This other man—Katie’s hero, he would call him! He was jealous. Where should he be when this fellow returned full of glory? Katie’s hero! Oh, it was safe enough, after all, the wire, seeing that it bore

this fellow, who was as tall as he! Why had he not gone and been brave for once? To stand before her eyes with a heart like a hare, and to fail her—to fail her!

“Katie’s hero had crossed; he had stopped for a moment on the other side, where the lower wire had broken and there was no longer rest for his feet. Then he held on with his hands, and swung himself across with them alone. He sank on the ground on the other side for a minute, and the man almost hoped for a jealous second that his rival had failed; but when the man rose to his feet and ran down the line, he muttered hoarsely,—

“ ‘God speed your feet!’

“Then it struck him as strange that his wife was not there to see the success or failure of her hero; he threw himself from his horse, letting it go loose, and he ran towards the house calling. Through the lower rooms he went, and round the small garden, but she was not there. Frightened, he again searched the house, and, coming to his dressing-room, he noticed the press standing open and all his clothes tossed about. A black suit he often wore was gone. A light dawned upon him. He rushed into her bedroom. Yes, there was the dress she had worn that morning. What had she done? He flew down the stairs, calling her name, and ran across the fields to the broken bridge again.

“He saw it all now. She had dressed in his clothes and gone in his place. All the manhood in him rose up; he would follow her. She had made a path for him; he was no longer afraid. All along that low wire her little feet had gone; all along the top one her pretty hands had moved. The electricity of her courage must lie there still, and would give him strength to follow. He put his feet on one wire and his hands upon the other. He slowly slid along them into the air. He moved bravely a few yards and then stopped. The wire bent and swayed beneath him; he looked down. Below him the black river tumbled, bearing upon its breast the triumphs of its robberies—dead animals, hay, beams, trees, even wooden furniture, stolen from some cottage, all jumbled together and hurrying ever onward.

“The man gazed down as he swayed above. He might yet be part of that moving mass. He closed his eyes and started on. Again he stopped, his face, wet with fear, turned to the heavens so fair beneath the rising moon, so smiling in the face of all this horror—he, the one lone, living thing, swaying between earth and heaven, life and death.

“He moved onward; he heard the cry of wild birds over the waters. Once a wing against his face caused him to leave go a hand. He caught again, trembling and moaning; he worked his way on with more speed. Thus did her little feet go; here were laid the hands he loved. With a cry he found the wire had failed his feet and he was swinging by his hands alone. For a moment he swung so in terror before he realized that he had just come to the end of his journey and was at the side where the lower wire had snapped. He swung himself forward and with a great effort landed on the bank. He sank on his knees an instant and then ran down the line.

“After running a few minutes he saw a man coming towards him; he stopped and waited. He knew it must be she; and it gave him no surprise to see her bright, dancing eyes and bonny face beneath the cap pulled over her brows. When she saw him she started and laughed.

“ ‘You are late; it is all right. I was at the station before the train arrived, and all are saved. I heard it come dashing into the station soon after I left. They never realized that I was not you in the failing light.’

“The man took her two hands in his.

“ ‘My dear, why have you done this?’

“ ‘I had to. You see, it was the only way. You were too late going by the other bridge—as I said.’

“ ‘I did not go by the other bridge—I crossed the wire after you. The other bridge is down too.’

“ ‘She clapped her hands.

“ ‘Oh, you were brave. Now you will not be a hero for nothing, after all, and you did cross the wire.’

“ ‘A hero for nothing?’ the man questioned.

“ ‘Yes,’ she said slowly; ‘you see, it was the only way—I had to pretend to be you. They did not see much in the moonlight; I just said the bridge was down, and bade them see to it, then came away. They all think it was you, and you will be a hero when they know how you crossed—and you did cross.

“ ‘But they must not think it was me; I will not—’

“ ‘Oh, but you must.’ Then she said softly, ‘I would not let them think you dared not come . . . and you are the only one who knows.’

“ ‘So you came in my place?’ The man turned away in shame.

“ ‘Never mind,’ she said brightly; ‘the glory is mine. I am your wife, and what you win I win. But let us go. They must not come here to find us.’

“ ‘But how can we return?’ said the man.

“ ‘There is only the one way,’ she answered; and seeing him draw back, added eagerly, ‘you must not—you dare not—let them find me here like this.’

“ ‘In a few moments they had reached the bridge. She laid her hands upon the wire rope.

“ ‘See,’ she said, ‘it is tough and thick; it is strong enough to bear a dozen men. Let us tie ourselves together like the Alpine climbers, and we shall feel more safe. See, I brought this in case I should want it.’

“ ‘She drew a rope out of her pocket and slipped a noose beneath his arms, across his chest, and tied the other end around her waist. Then she laughed. ‘If I slip you can hold me, and if you lose your footing I can help you.

“ ‘But the wire is not safe for the two together,’ the man said, though to him the mere contact of some one near, even thus united, made him more courageous than when he went alone. He felt the wire rope; it seemed firm and stout enough. It had not started or snapped a strand when he came over, and surely there was not much danger if only they held tight.

“ ‘Quick! quick! they are coming; let us get on, let us get on.’

“ ‘The man set his feet on the wire and started, the woman following without hesitation. The wire creaked and swayed.

“ ‘Go back!’ the man cried; ‘go back! Take off the rope, or let me go first alone.’

“ ‘But she pushed him forward, and with her sweet companionship fear fled from him; he was anxious to get across only for her sake, and all his thoughts were of her. Yes, we can get used to everything, and the second crossing of the rope did not seem so bad as the first. They had reached the middle, when the rope creaked again. Then some of the old fear returned and his face grew white and wet.

“ ‘Hold tight, whatever happens!’ he shouted above the roar of the waters.

“ ‘At the horror in his voice fear seemed to come to her too. She clenched her hands upon the wire and refused to move. Now that her mind had nothing to think of but their danger, she realised for the first time the risk they ran.

“ ‘Oh, I am afraid—afraid!’ she sobbed.

“ ‘A little further,’ said the man, the drops of agony blinding his eyes. They looked up at the serene heavens and down at the sullen death that awaited them below—at the dark figures coming along the line—too far off to be any possible help.

“‘One more effort,’ the man said ; ‘come, dear.’

“She closed her eyes and followed him. The rope swayed and creaked ominously beneath them. He gave another movement forward—and the wire broke. A moment of nothingness and they found themselves hanging in the air a few feet from the rushing waters. The man clung fast to the wire, but the woman’s hands only held a minute and then let go. They swung like a pendulum over the face of death. The man screamed in his agony. The rope noosed around his chest, and, laden with the unconscious woman’s weight, cut into him and seemed to pinch his heart out. He uttered cry after cry, and then—he went mad. He was no longer a reasoning human being, but an insane animal fighting for life. There was something—he did not know what—dragging him down to death; something that bit like a wolf into his breast and choked like a serpent. He strove to free himself. He tried to advance, but it drew him back. He loosed one hand, and tried to push it from him in vain; he thrust his hand into his pocket—the thing was tearing the flesh from his ribs, it was pressing the breath from him, he was mad, dying. He drew forth his penknife and hacked at it. He was free! In a moment he had sealed the wire and stood in safety on the shore. What had he done with his wife? The rope round his chest was cut, he looked into the river, and his soul died within him.

“That was she—whirling and turning, beaten by the passing timbers, half drowned in the waters—the woman he loved. Her white face was raised to his. He could hear her screaming down there in the shadows, her pretty curls all gone, the red cheeks so pale, the parted lips washed over by the tide. And he had done this thing to his beloved.

“What had he done—he who would not have hurt her for all the stars in the heavens? Did she know what he had done?

“He was running along the bank nearest to the spot where the waters had swept her. She had clung to a mass of wood that had got wedged in the middle of the river.

“Here there had been an island, now so flooded that nothing was seen of it but the tops of a few rocks, and on these the woman clung, not having a foothold.

“The man plunged into the river above her and struck out for the island. it was an almost impossible effort, but love bore him along. The waters closed often over him. The drifting timbers struck him many times as they passed, so that he was bleeding and exhausted when at last he reached her.

“She rested, half-fainting, clinging to the small foothold that the rocks gave, and without strength to change her position. He drew her upon it and clasped her in his tired arms.

“‘My dearest!’ he wept over her.

“‘Save me!’ she cried, clinging to him. ‘Oh, do not let me drown!’

“He held her to him without hope. Could he swim ashore with her, or could they wait there long enough for help to arrive? Already the river left them nothing dry to rest upon. They were standing on a ridge a few feet wide and the waters washed over it. He shouted for help. Far away he could see the black figures in the moonlight investigating the broken bridge, but they did not hear his cries. He screamed to them, but at last he saw them gather together and depart.

“He turned to his wife and bade her be brave, saying,—

“‘If anything happens to fling us off this, cling to me and I will swim ashore with you. Put your hand upon me and you will float along by my side quite easily, only do not fear.’

“He saw a huge beam glide towards them, and repeated what he had said. He saw the great mass come like a cork on the rising waters. It was making straight for them.

The next moment he was in the water, with the senses half knocked out of him. He went down, and felt he would never come to the top again. Was he rising? The water looked green around

him. There were black things passing above him. His throat was bursting. He felt that in a moment the blood must spring from his ears and eyes. Would he never get to the surface?

“It was clear, thank God, at last. He could see the blessed sky once more and the green shore. How far away it seemed! Would he ever reach it? There was something clinging to him, keeping him back. But he could easily thrust it off—a weak thing like a child’s hand. But there was no child there—nothing there save death. The waters washed across his eyes, blinding him. The floating timbers and refuse struck his white face to red, but he fought with them all, flinging them from him. Everything, even the child’s hand, was gone now. Once a drowning cat had reached him, caught his sleeve and tried to clamber on to his head. For a moment they fought together—two animals mad with fear. Then the man went on alone with blood upon his mouth.

“The shore was growing green. He could surely see the trees now. One effort more for dear life. He sank and rose again, and once more sank. As he went down he stretched his hands over the waters in a death clutch, and they clung to the overhanging branch of a tree by the river. In a moment he hung so, getting back his strength. Then he drew himself ashore. For an hour he lay there, half in and half out of the water, and then he rose—and lived.”

\* \* \*

“And he never told the world that the woman had saved the train?” said one youth, after a long pause.

“That was part of his punishment,” said the grey man. “It would have undone what she had died for. She was always in terror lest people should know that the man she loved was a coward.”

“If I,” said the other young man, “had left a woman to drown like that in my madness, I would have returned to the river in my senses and thrown myself in.”

“So would he have done,” said the grey man; “but when he looked into the water it was full of faces and darkness—a grave of horror. He was afraid to die.”

“And how do you come to know the story?” said one youth.

The grey man did not answer. He rose and went to the window. As he drew aside the heavy curtain a fork of lightning flashed across his eyes, followed by a loud crash of thunder.

“My God! my God!” he cried, falling upon a chair and covering his face.

The young men started to his side.

“Are you hurt? blinded?” they cried.

He drew his hands from his ghastly face looked towards the window.

“Pull the curtains,” he said. “I am afraid.”