Samuel Boyd Of Catchpole Square Vol.I

By

Benjamin Leopold Farjeon

Freeditorial

CHAPTER I

ABEL DEATH AT WORK

At six o'clock in the evening of the first day of March, in the year of Grace, 1898, Abel Death, a man of middle age, with a face appropriate to his name--which should never be given to any living human being--was sitting at his desk, employed in the task of writing the last of a number of letters, in accordance with the instructions of his employer, Mr. Samuel Boyd, of No. 6, Catchpole Square, in the North district of London. The letters all referred to Money: to Money due for principal and interest, and to warnings and threats of what would be done in case prompt payment was not made at such and such an hour on such and such a day. Uncompromising and relentless to the point of cruelty, debtors were told in plain terms that ruin was their portion if Mr. Boyd's demands were not complied with.

Abel Death appeared to be just the kind of man for the task he was executing, being hollow cheeked and sunken eyed; his hands were long and lean, his movements eager and restless. Clad in shabby and badly fitting clothes, he did not belie the position he occupied, that of an ill paid drudge working long hours for a hard taskmaster.

The room in which he sat, and in which his daily duties were performed, could scarcely be called an office. From the number of singular articles it contained it might have been a curiosity shop, or the store-room of a dealer in the miscellaneous goods of the earth to whose net everything that presented itself was more or less marketable fish. Here was a massive safe fast bedded in the wall and securely locked; here a grand piano, locked; here weapons and armour of all nations, and pictures in which lay dumb stories of fruitless genius and disappointed ambition; here pieces of valuable china and bric-à-brac; here some dozens of wine of a rare vintage; here hangings of old tapestry; here (the oddest feature in the heterogeneous collection) a waxwork figure, holding in its outstretched hand a cane stick of the reign of Charles the Second; and, scattered in all directions, but still with some kind of method in the order of their disposal, a great variety of other oddments: all taken for debt, and all representing, in different degrees, despairing hopes and reckless extravagance and prodigality which had come to a bad end.

The apartment was large and lofty, with panelled walls and doors of oak. The ceiling was covered with paintings of flying angels, and nymphs, and festive landscape-scenes after

the style of Watteau, barely discernible through the accumulated dust of years; the mantel and fireplace were richly carved in many a quaint and curious device, the beauty of which was defaced by smoke and ill usage and neglect. The house itself was very old, and these evidences of decay forcibly illustrated how low it had fallen from its once high estate. For assuredly in years long since passed by it had been inhabited by persons of wealth and fashion and good taste. Time was, indeed, when these walls resounded to gay music and revelry, when satin-slippered feet glided over the polished floor, and bright eyes smiled, and bold lips murmured into beauty's ears. Here shone the sunny aspects of life; here gladness reigned; here all the luxurious ways of fortune's favourites were in their outward show at their best and bravest. Nothing of this was apparent now. The men and women who had trod these flowery paths were dust and ashes, and the dwelling was the abode of one who held fashion and good taste in contemptuous disregard, and whose principal aim in life was the driving of hard bargains and the making of money.

Having finished the last letter Abel Death descended from his stool to stretch and refresh himself. From the pocket of a threadbare coat which hung upon a nail he took a paper containing a couple of sandwiches, and cast a longing look at the bottles of wine, a thirsty movement of his lips betokening the nature of his thoughts. But he did not venture to lay his hand upon them, knowing full well that strict account was kept, and that if he appropriated but a single bottle the offence would be detected the moment his employer entered; so he took his fate in his hands by extracting from his coat a twisted paper of tea and another twisted paper of brown sugar which he emptied into a teapot. A very small fire was burning, and he stood and watched the boiling of a tiny kettle of water. As he poured the water into the teapot he heard a knock at the street door, which he did not take the trouble to answer.

"A trap," he muttered, pouring the tea into a chipped cup. "No, no, Mr. Boyd. You don't get me to open the door for you."

He suspected a ruse. He had received instructions not to answer a knock, nor to admit any person into the house during Mr. Boyd's absence, and the conditions of his engagement were strict and onerous, the most trifling transgression of the rules laid down being visited with a fine. When, therefore, the knock was repeated a second time he shook his head with a smile, and proceeded with his scanty meal.

It did not take him long to get to the end of it; and presently, when he heard the opening and the shutting of the street door, followed by steps on the stairs, he mounted to his stool, and bent his head over the books.

"Is that you, Mr. Death?"

He almost fell off his stool, for it was not the voice he expected to hear.

A young man of gentlemanly appearance confronted him with an ingenuous, open countenance; with an honest eye and a graceful manner. In the teeth of these advantages there was an expression of anxiety on his face which denoted that his errand was one upon which grave issues depended.

"You, Mr. Reginald!" exclaimed Abel Death, staring open mouthed at the visitor.

"As you see, Mr. Death," replied Mr. Reginald. "You are still in the old place."

"Yes, Mr. Reginald, yes, still in the old place."

Mr. Reginald's eyes travelled round the room. "Where's my father?" he asked.

Abel Death answered in Irish fashion.

"How did you get in?"

Mr. Reginald held up a key.

"You don't mean to say----" stammered Abel Death.

"That I stole it?" said Mr. Reginald. "No. It is the old key which I took away with me when I left this house----"

"For ever," interposed Abel Death.

"Not exactly, or I should not be here now."

"That is what he told me."

"That is what he told me."

"His word is law in this house, Mr. Reginald."

"We will not discuss the subject. I ask you again, where is my father?"

"Out."

"When will he be back?"

"I don't know--I can't tell you. He has his ways. He likes to leave people in uncertainty."

"Is he well?"

"Yes, Mr. Reginald. As well as ever. There is no change in him--no change!" He said this in the tone of a man who would not have grieved at a change for the worse in his employer's health.

Mr. Reginald drew a silver watch from his pocket. "It is six o'clock. My time is my own. I will wait."

"I earnestly beg you not to, Mr. Reginald."

"Why?"

"It would be difficult for me to get another situation."

"I understand. I have no wish to injure you. I will call later."

"I should not advise you. Earnestly, I should not advise you."

"I don't ask your advice. I must see him, I tell you. I intend to see him."

"Then I give it up. I am sorry you have come down in the world, Mr. Reginald."

The young man looked at the clerk with a curious contraction of his brows. "How do you arrive at that conclusion?"

Abel Death tapped his waistcoat pocket. "It used to be a gold one."

"Now I call that clever of you," said Mr. Reginald, half merrily, half lugubriously, "but your lines have not been cast in pleasant places; you should know something of the process."

"I do," said Abel Death, in a dismal tone.

"If the watch I now wear is an indication of my having come down in the world, why, then, I have had a tumble. Am I interrupting your work?"

"I have the books to make up."

"I'll leave you to them. Would it be unfair to ask you to tell my father that I will call again at ten o'clock? He is sure to be disengaged at that hour."

"Very unfair, Mr. Reginald. I wouldn't venture to tell him that I'd seen you."

"In that case I'll not trouble you."

"And if you do call again, Mr. Reginald, I beg you, as a particular favour, not to mention your present visit."

"You have my promise." He turned to go, but paused to glance at the strange collection of goods in the room. "My father gets plenty of odd things about him. I see stories of wreckage in them."

"Not our wreckage, Mr. Reginald."

"No," said Mr. Reginald under his breath as he left the room, "other people's."

CHAPTER II.

SAMUEL BOYD SETS A TRAP FOR HIS DRUDGE.

Abel Death experienced a feeling of relief when he heard the street door slammed in token that Mr. Reginald was gone. Whatever his thoughts may have been with reference to that young gentleman he did not give audible utterance to them, but an occasional shake of his head as he worked at the books, and an occasional pause during which he rested his chin upon the palm of his hand in reflection, were an evidence that though Mr. Reginald was out of sight he was not out of mind. At first he worked rapidly to make up for lost time, but at the end of an hour or so his pen travelled more slowly over the paper, his task being nearly completed. He had lighted two candles stuck in common tin candlesticks, and had pulled down the blind, for night was coming on. The feeble glimmer of these candles, which were long and thin, threw light only upon the desk at which he was working; the distant spaces in the room were in deep shadow, and an occasional shifting of a candle seemingly imbued many of the objects by which he was surrounded with a weird and fitful life. This was especially the case with the wax figure, which was that of a Chinaman who might have come straight from the Chamber of Horrors, so ghastly was its face in this dim light. Being not quite firm on its legs any hurried movement in its direction caused it to quiver as though it were set on wires; and once, when Abel Death threw a heavy ledger from his desk on to the table, the oscillation of the figure was sufficiently fantastic to have engendered the fancy that it was preparing to leap upon the living man and do him violence. Neither Mr. Samuel Boyd nor Abel Death could have informed a curious inquirer who the figure was intended to represent. It came from the house of a modeller in wax, to whom Mr. Boyd had lent a small sum of money, and who, when he was pressed for payment, himself brought it to Catchpole Square as the only asset he could offer in discharge of the debt. "It is all I possess," said the man mournfully, who had hoped to soften the heart of his creditor by his tale of distress. "Then I'll take it," said Mr. Samuel Boyd. "You'd take my blood, I believe," cried the man savagely. "I would," retorted Mr. Boyd, "if there was a market for it." "Keep it, then," said the man, flinging himself from the room. "It's brought me nothing but bad luck all the time I have been at work on it. May it bring the same to you!" Mr. Boyd laughed; he did not believe in omens, nor in sentiment, nor in mercy to any person in his debt. He believed only in Money.

The day's work over, Abel Death sat awhile so deep in thought and so still and quiet that he might have been taken for one of the inanimate objects in this strangely furnished apartment. He had removed the candles from the desk to the table, where they flickered in the draught of a broken window, into which some rags had been thrust to keep out the wind. Within the radius of the flickering light the shadows on the walls and ceiling

grew more weird and grotesque, each gust of air creating insubstantial forms and shapes as monstrous as the fancies of a madman's brain. Catchpole Square was a blind thoroughfare--being, as has been elsewhere described, like a bottle with a very narrow neck to it--and was therefore undisturbed by the tumult of the city's streets; and the prevailing silence, in which there was something deathly, was broken only by the sobbing and moaning of the rising wind which, having got into the Square, was making despairing efforts to get out. These sounds were in unison with the spectral life within the house, which seemed to find interpretation in the mystic voices of the air. It might have been so in very truth, for what know we of the forces of the invisible world through which we move and play our parts in the march from the cradle to the grave? Unfathomable mystery encompasses and mocks us, and no man can foretell at what moment he may be struck down and all his castles overturned, and all his plans for good or evil destroyed.

Abel Death started to his feet. A stealthy step was on the stairs. The man coming up paused three or four times either to get his breath or for some other purpose; and presently he entered the room.

Mr. Samuel Boyd was a tall man, and bore a close resemblance to his son in certain expressions of countenance and in certain little mannerisms of gesture which in the younger man were indications of an open-hearted nature, and in the elder of a nature dominated by craft and cunning.

"You're back in time, sir," said Abel Death, in a cringing tone.

Mr. Boyd made no immediate reply, being employed in looking distrustfully around to convince himself that nothing had been removed or disturbed. Even when he was assured of this the look of distrust did not die out of his eyes.

"Are the letters all written?" he inquired, seating himself at the table.

"They are, sir."

"Have you posted up the books?"

"Yes, sir. Everything is done."

"Has any one called?"

"No one, sir," promptly replied Abel Death.

"Any knocks at the street door?"

"No, sir."

"You lie! There was a letter in the box."

Abel Death's lips shaped themselves into the word, "Beast!"

"What did you say?" demanded Mr. Boyd, upon whom no movement on the part of his servant, however slight, was lost.

"I was going to say that the postman was no business of mine."

"You are getting too clever, Abel Death--too clever, too clever! The men I employ must do their work without spying, without blabbing, without lying."

"You have never found me unfaithful."

"I have only your word for it. When did you know me take a man's word?"

"Never, sir."

"And you never will. So--you did not go down to the postman when he knocked?"

"No, sir."

"And you have not been out of the house during my absence?"

"No, sir."

"Nor out of this room?"

"No, sir."

"Ah! Is that so--is that so? You have your office coat on, and your office slippers. Had you not better change them?"

"I was going to do so, sir," said Abel Death. Mr. Boyd's keen eyes were upon him while he made the change. "May I hope, sir, that you will grant the request you kindly promised to consider? It may be a matter of life or death, it may indeed. It means so much to me--so much! I humbly beg you, sir, to grant it."

"Let me see. You asked me for a loan."

"A small loan, sir, of ten pounds. I have trouble and sickness at home, I am sorry to say."

"It is inconceivable," said Mr. Boyd coldly, "that a man in regular employment should need a loan unless it is for the gratification of some unwarrantable extravagance. Your wages are paid regularly, I believe."

"Yes, sir. I don't complain, but it is not an easy task to keep a wife and family on twenty-two shillings a week. I don't know how it is," said Abel Death, rubbing his forehead as though he were endeavouring to rub some problem out of it, or some better understanding of a social difficulty into it, "but when Saturday comes round we have never a sixpence left."

"Very likely. It is the old story of improvidence. Thrift, Abel, thrift. That is the lesson the poor have to learn, and never will learn."

"Ten pounds, sir, only ten pounds," implored Abel Death.

"Only ten pounds!" exclaimed Mr. Boyd. "Listen to him. He calls ten pounds a small sum. Why, it is to millions of men a fortune!"

"It is truly that to me, sir."

"And if I lend it to you," said Mr. Boyd, with a sneering smile, "you will call down heaven's blessing upon me, you will remember me in your prayers?"

"Yes, sir, yes," replied Abel Death confusedly.

"There is the question of security, Abel."

"I am a poor man, sir, but I will do anything you wish. I will give you a bill--I will sign any paper you write out--I will pay you any interest you like to charge. You can deduct five shillings from my wages every week till the debt is cancelled. I shall be eternally grateful to you, sir." His agitation was so great that he could not proceed.

"Gratitude is no security," said Mr. Boyd, still with the sneering smile on his lips. "Prayers and heaven's blessing are no security. No business man would lend a shilling on them. They are not Property. You remarked a moment ago that I had never found you unfaithful. I will put it to the test. Let me see the slippers you have taken off."

"My slippers, sir!" stammered Abel Death.

"Your slippers. I wish to see them." Puzzled by the singular request, and with inward misgivings, Abel Death lifted the slippers from the floor. "Lay them on the table before me, soles upward."

Ruefully wondering what connection there could possibly be between his frayed and worn slippers and the question of unfaithfulness which Mr. Boyd had raised, he obeyed the order. His wonder increased when Mr. Boyd proceeded to examine the soles through a magnifying glass.

"That will do," said Mr. Boyd, leaning back in his chair. "You can pack them up with your office coat, and take them home with you."

"But I shall want them to-morrow, sir."

"Not in my office, Abel Death. I discharge you."

"Sir!"

"I discharge you. Here are your wages for a half week. You can claim no more. The conditions of your engagement with me were that in the event of the slightest violation of my orders you were to be immediately discharged without further notice."

"In what way have I violated your orders, sir?" cried Abel Death, despairingly. "Good heavens! This will be the ruin of me!"

"You have brought it on yourself. It is an ungrateful world, Abel, an ungrateful world. Robbery on all sides of us, treachery whichever way we turn. Do not send to me for a character; it will not assist you to obtain another situation." Abel Death gazed at the hard taskmaster in speechless consternation. "I have suspected you for some time past, Abel----I beg your pardon, you were about to speak."

"I was not."

"You were. Come, come--be honest, Abel, be honest. It is the best policy. I have found it so."

"It was in my mind to say, sir," said Abel Death, in a shaking voice, "that you suspect everybody."

"It is the only way to protect oneself from being robbed. Keep this axiom before you; it is as good as capital, and will return you good interest. Suspecting you as I have done I laid a trap for you this afternoon--a simple, artless trap. Observe this thin piece of brown paper, observe this little piece of wax which I place upon it. Any person treading on it will carry away with him on the sole of his shoe both the paper and the wax. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, sir," said Abel Death, staring at the paper and moving his tongue over his dry lips.

"Before leaving the house this afternoon," continued Mr. Boyd, "I deposited on the stairs eight very small pieces of this paper, each with a very small piece of wax on the top of it, and placed them on those parts of the stairs which a person coming up or going down would be most likely to tread. Is this quite clear to you?"

"Quite clear, sir."

"It is a singular thing, Abel, that upon the soles of your slippers I do not see one of those pieces of paper or any trace of wax."

"It proves, sir," interposed Abel Death eagerly, "that I spoke the truth when I declared that I had not left the room during your absence, and that I did not go down the stairs."

"But it does not prove, you dog, that no person came up the stairs during my absence!" Abel Death fell back, confounded. "Upon my return a few minutes ago I examined the stairs, and found only two of the eight pieces of paper I deposited there so carefully--so very carefully! Six pieces of the eight I placed there had affixed themselves to the soles of the shoes or boots worn by the person who entered this room while I was away. I asked you if any one had called. You answered no. It was a lie, a deliberate lie, a lie not to be explained away."

"If you will listen to me, sir," said Abel Death, reduced to a state of abject fear, "I think it can be explained away."

"I am listening, Abel Death."

"I made a mistake, sir--I confess it."

"Oh, a mistake, and by such a clever man as you are!"

"I am not clever, sir--far from it. Every man is liable to error. A person has been in this room, but I did not open the door to him. He opened it himself."

"What!" cried Mr. Boyd, starting from his chair in mingled anger and alarm.

"Yes, sir, he opened it himself. How could I help that, sir--I ask you, how could I help that?"

A few moments elapsed before Mr. Boyd spoke; and during the silence he took a revolver from a drawer, which he unlocked for the purpose. Then he said slowly, "Who was the man?"

"Your son, sir, Mr. Reginald."

"My son! He was forbidden the house!"

"I can't help that, sir. He knocked three times at the street door, and bearing your instructions in mind I did not answer the knocks. When he came into the room I asked him how he had got in, and he produced the key he was in the habit of using when he lived here. He wanted to see you, and I told him you were not in. He said he would wait, and I begged him not to, because I knew you would be angry if you saw him here. Then he said he would call to see you later, and I begged him not to mention that he had been here; he gave me the promise and left the house. That is the whole truth of the matter, sir."

"Why were you so anxious that this visit should be kept a secret from me?"

"I feared you might suspect that we were in--in----" He could not hit upon the right word.

"In collusion," said Mr. Boyd, supplying it in accordance with his humour to place the worst construction upon the interview. "In league to rob me. A fair and reasonable suspicion which the explanation I have dragged out of you does not remove. Have you anything more to say?"

"Nothing more," replied Abel Death, in a hopeless tone.

"Take up your money. You can go."

"But you will withdraw the discharge, sir--I entreat you to withdraw it. Think what it means to me--what it means to my family! Starvation, sir, starvation!" He wrung his hands in despair.

"You have lied deliberately to me. Go--go and starve!--and never set foot inside this house again."

Convinced now that any farther appeal would be unavailing, the look of misery in Abel Death's face changed to one of fury. He made a step towards the man who had doomed him to ruin, and who, thus threatened, held the revolver straight before him, with his finger on the trigger. Muttering, "God help me!" Abel Death took up the few shillings which Mr. Boyd had placed upon the table, and backed out of the room, followed by his employer, still armed with the revolver, and holding a candle above his head. Thus they went down to the street door, which Abel Death slowly opened. But before he left the house he turned and said,

"Do you believe in God?"

"No," snarled Mr. Boyd, "I believe in nothing!"

"Men have been struck dead for less," said Abel Death, pointing a shaking finger at him. "Remember that, Samuel Boyd!" And went his way with misery in his heart.

Mr. Boyd, undisturbed and with a smile of self-approval on his lips, closed the door and put up the chain. Then, with deliberate steps, and with no misgivings, he returned to his room.

CHAPTER III.

A LADY OF FASHION PAYS SAMUEL BOYD A VISIT.

A close and crafty face, masking a soul which knew no mercy and gave none. The grave holds its secrets, and holds them no less securely than Mr. Samuel Boyd, in his outward presentment to his fellow man, believed he held his. Whether the pursuit of pleasure for the delights--be they fair or foul--that pleasure brings, or the pursuit of wealth for the power it confers, was the dominant principle of this man's life, no human being could truthfully say, for no human being was admitted into his confidence. But one thing was certain. By whatever motive he may have been guided he held his way with absolute dependence on his own resources to triumph easily over every obstacle that might present itself. As to the manner in which these triumphs were obtained it mattered little to him whether he merely brushed aside the persons who opposed him, or trampled them into the dust. Their mortification, their sufferings, their destruction, concerned him not and did not trouble him. There are men who, in the contemplated execution of a crime, or in the pursuance of a base desire, listen to the voice of conscience before it is too late. Not so Mr. Samuel Boyd. He was harassed by no troubled dreams, by no weak fears of consequences, by no whisperings of an inconvenient conscience, by no spiritual warnings of Divine punishment for sinful deeds. For him, the entire range of the moral affections and of moral sentiments and conditions was expressed in one word: Self. It was for Self he lived and for Self alone.

Such being the man it was not to be supposed that he was in any way affected by the sentence he had pronounced upon Abel Death, or that he gave a moment's thought to the poor clerk who was trudging home almost broken-hearted at the loss even of the miserable wage he received for duties faithfully performed.

The letter he had taken from the letter box was from a lady who stated that she would call upon him at eight o'clock this evening. He had not long to wait, for by his watch he saw that it wanted but two minutes to eight; and punctually to the hour there came a rat-tat-tat at the street door.

With no indication of haste he went down, and laughed slyly to himself when the knocking was repeated, more impatiently and peremptorily the second time than the first. He drew the door ajar leisurely, still keeping it on the chain.

"Who wants Samuel Boyd?" he inquired.

"Who wants Samuel Boyd?" answered a lady's voice. "Upon my word! To keep a lady waiting in such a dreadful place as this, the entrance to which is so narrow that a carriage can't get into it! Open the door at once, man, and let me in!"

"As quickly as I can, my lady," said Mr. Boyd, fumbling at the chain. "It is Lady Wharton, is it not?"

"Who else should it be, pray?" replied the lady. "And if Lady Wharton had known what kind of thoroughfare this was she would have thought twice before she'd have ventured into it." There was nothing querulous in the voice; it was hearty and bluff, with a cheerful ring in it very pleasant to the ear.

"Might a man so humble as Samuel Boyd inquire whether it is too late now for Lady Wharton to think better of it?" asked Mr. Boyd, continuing to fumble at the chain.

"Man alive! Of course it is. Oh, you've got it opened at last. Well, that's a blessing. If it takes as long to get out of the house as to get in I sha'n't be home till midnight. Remain where you are, John, and wait for me. If I don't make my appearance before ten o'clock shout for help at the top of your voice." These last words were addressed to a footman, who, holding a large green umbrella over her ladyship's head, had accompanied her from her carriage to the door of Mr. Boyd's dwelling. "John is my confidential man," she was now addressing Mr. Boyd. "I don't put my trust in women. They're a pack of artful, designing creatures. What men see in us to marry us passes my comprehension. If I were a man I'd want a sackfull of diamonds before I'd marry the handsomest among them."

"If your ladyship will kindly follow me," said Mr. Boyd, ascending the stairs.

"Bless my soul!" she exclaimed. "The passage is as dark as a railway tunnel, and that parody of a candle in your hand makes matters worse. The stairs are safe, I hope? There are no trapdoors in them through which a defenceless woman might suddenly disappear?" These words were accompanied with a ringing laugh which awoke the echoes in the almost deserted house.

"They are quite safe, my lady, quite safe. Permit me to welcome you to my poor abode."

They were now in the room, around which Lady Wharton stared in amazement. She was a large-framed woman, well proportioned and with a perfect figure. There was a hearty good nature in her face which matched well with her brisk voice. Her eyes were bright, her movements quick and decided. Eminently a woman of management, of kindly heart,

and one whose healthy physique and amiable disposition guided her to take a cheerful view of difficulties.

"Heaven and earth, Mr. Boyd!" she exclaimed. "This is the oddest abode a man of means could select." Here she caught sight of the wax figure of the Chinaman, which caused her to retreat a step or two and to give utterance to a little scream.

"Don't be frightened, my lady, he's only wax. I took him for a debt; he was better than nothing, if only for melting down. All these things have been taken for debt. That is the way we are robbed; and the law gives us no redress, no redress."

"Poor Mr. Boyd!" said Lady Wharton, with twinkling eyes "How very sad! Shall I lend you a five pound note?"

"I should be very grateful, my lady."

She burst into a merry laugh. "Singular creature! Shall we proceed to business?"

"Yes, my lady. Time is money. You will be comfortable in this chair."

A strange contrast did they present as they sat on opposite sides of the table, the crafty, cringing face of the man looking into the cheery, good-humoured face of the lady.

"Now, Mr. Boyd, I am going to be quite frank with you." She placed her satchel on the table, and took some papers from it. "My husband owes you a large sum of money. Look over these figures and tell me if they are correct."

"Quite correct, my lady, but calculated only up to the last day of February, which was yesterday. One day's interest has to be added if you are prepared to pay to-night. Strictly speaking, it is two days' interest, it being now past the hour of business."

"Of course you know I am not prepared to pay to-night, and of course you know that I have come in the place of my husband because in matters of business he is a mere child."

"I have not found him so, my lady," said Samuel Boyd. "In my experience of his lordship I have seen nothing in him to cause me to think he is weak-minded. He came to me to borrow money, and I lent it to him on bills signed in his name. It was a risk, and I took it."

"Very well, Mr. Boyd," said Lady Wharton, cheerfully. "We have not met to contradict each other, or to raise up difficulties, but to come to such an arrangement as may be agreeable to you."

"If your ladyship pleases," said Mr. Boyd.

"At the same time," she continued, "I wish to state how far my understanding went, when, Lord Wharton being ill in bed, I opened up a correspondence with you. I am very fond of my husband, Mr. Boyd."

"His lordship is to be envied."

"Indeed I think he is," said Lady Wharton, with a little laugh, "and I am to be envied, too, for having a husband so amiably inclined. But he is altogether too easy and careless in money matters; when he wishes for a thing, he will promise anything, consent to anything, sign anything, so long as he gets it. He is really like a child in these matters, and having made up my mind that he was not to be worried, I opened a letter which you wrote to him, and I replied to it. Now, Mr. Boyd, it was from that letter that I learned, for the first time, that Lord Wharton was in your debt."

"Indeed, my lady."

"Yes, indeed. I was not astonished. Nothing that Lord Wharton does astonishes me. He can get through a great deal of money. So can I. He is extravagant. So am I. What are you to do, Mr. Boyd, when you have been brought up to it?"

"Nothing but spend," said Samuel Boyd.

"You are a man of sense. We can do nothing but spend--and between you and me, Mr. Boyd"--here she laughed long and heartily--"we do spend. Why not, when we can afford it?"

"Why not, indeed?" murmured Mr. Boyd, in ready acquiescence.

"But rich as people may be they are sometimes in need of ready money, and that, I suppose, is where gentlemen of your profession come in. Having now, in a manner of speaking, cleared the ground, we can go on easily. There are bills coming due."

"There are, my lady."

"I asked you in a letter what they amounted to; you answered, twelve thousand pounds. Now, Mr. Boyd, I should not like you to think that I want to take advantage of you."

"Thank you, my lady. I have been taken in so often that I am almost beginning to despair of human nature."

"Don't, Mr. Boyd, don't. There is a great deal of good in human nature, and we can get a lot of fun out of life if we set about it the right way. I have consulted another person in this business, and he has advised me. My brother, Lord Fairfax. You have heard of him, perhaps. Yes? I thought you must; he is almost a celebrity, with his indolent and easy ways. It is in our blood; we object to be troubled. All we ask is that the world should go round as usual, and that our little wishes should be gratified. Lord Fairfax suggested that I should put the business into the hands of a lawyer." Mr. Boyd, with a scarcely perceptible motion, lifted his eyebrows. "I said, no. We have a rooted objection to lawyers in our family; they make your head ache. 'Quite right,' said Lord Fairfax. 'Have nothing to do with lawyers.' He never disputes, Mr. Boyd. The moment you say a thing he agrees to it. Then he said, 'Find out how much it amounts to.' I wrote to you, and you told me. You also sent me some bills, for the purpose of doing away with the old obligations, and putting the whole of the business on a new footing. These bills were to be accepted by Lord Wharton, and you strongly urged me to get another responsible name at the back of them. Lord Wharton signed the bills when I put them before him. The dear man hardly as much as looked at them. Then I went to Lord Fairfax, and he put his name on the back. He hardly as much as looked at them. And to cut a long matter short, Mr. Boyd, I have brought them with me."

She took them from her satchel, and handed them to Mr. Boyd, who examined them carefully, and jotted down figures on a piece of paper. Satisfactory as the transaction was to him no sign of satisfaction escaped him.

"Are they in order, Mr. Boyd?"

"Yes, they appear to be in order. I am making a great sacrifice for you, my lady."

"We are under a great obligation to you. And now, Mr. Boyd, for a little piece of business on my own account. I want a thousand pounds for my private purse."

"A thousand pounds, my lady, a thousand pounds!" murmured Mr. Boyd.

"I will not worry Lord Wharton with my dressmaker's bill, and she has begged me to let her have something on account. There are also one or two other little bills I wish to pay. Don't be alarmed; I am going to give you security. I have been looking through my

jewellery, and I found some things that have gone out of fashion. I will not sell them, but I am willing to deposit them with you. Here they are. Oblige me by looking over them. Some of the cases would not go into my satchel, so I took them all out, and wrapped them in paper. I hope you won't mind."

"Not at all, my lady," said Mr. Boyd, opening the papers, which contained jewels of various kinds, bracelets, necklaces, ear-rings, brooches, and other gewgaws. Many of the precious stones were in old settings, and he saw at a glance that they were worth considerably more than the thousand pounds which this reckless lady of fashion wished to raise upon them. Among them were two ornaments of conspicuous beauty--a pearl necklace, and a device for the hair in the shape of a peacock's tail.

"I am reposing a great confidence in you," said Lady Wharton. "The pearl necklace and the peacock's tail were presents from my father--they cost a great price, I believe--and I would not part with them for any consideration. In a few months I shall--shall--what is the word for it? Oh, yes, redeem them."

"You don't want the thousand pounds immediately, my lady?" said Mr. Boyd.

"My good man, I want it now, this minute."

"Impossible, my lady. I could not get it together in less than five or six days. If that will suit you----"

Lady Wharton beat an impatient tattoo on the table with the tips of her fingers. "Are you sure you could not get it earlier?"

"Quite sure, my lady."

"It must suit me, then, but it is really very provoking. Lord Wharton is ordered into the country, and we are going to-morrow."

"I can send you a cheque through the post."

"I should prefer to receive it personally from you, and in bank notes. You can bring it to me in the country, I suppose?"

"There will be no difficulty, my lady. To what part of the country?"

"We are going to our place in Bournemouth, The Gables. We give a ball there every year on the 7th of March. Of course I may rely upon having the money before that date."

"Pardon me a moment, my lady," said Mr. Boyd, pretending to make certain calculations on paper, and presently adding, "I can't positively promise, but you shall be sure to have it on that date."

"Oh, very well, very well," said Lady Wharton, "I see that I am expected to agree to everything. And now, Mr. Boyd, our business is over, I think. Bless my soul, how dismally the wind sounds in this house! If I don't get out of it quickly John will think I've been spirited away. Don't trouble to come down; one of your servants can see me to the door."

"I keep no servants, my lady," he replied. "A charwoman comes when I send for her. That is my life."

"Do you mean to tell me that you live here quite alone?"

"Quite alone, my lady, quite alone, and safer and more secure than if my house was full of servants."

"Mr. Boyd," said Lady Wharton, tapping him lightly on the arm, "you should marry."

"What did your ladyship say yourself about women when you entered the house," he answered slyly.

She laughed heartily at this retort, and following him down the stairs as he led the way with a light, bade him good night at the street door.

"John," she said to her confidential man as he conducted her to her carriage, "the house is like a grave."

"I was thinking that myself, my lady," said John.

CHAPTER IV.

SILENCE REIGNS.

Was it indeed a grave, and were the phantom shapes thrown upon the walls and ceiling by the flickering light the phantoms of the dead that were buried there? How easy to imagine this--how easy to imagine that, animated by a spirit of revenge for past wrongs and injuries, they moved and shifted, and glided hither and thither, and took fantastic and monstrous form, for the purpose of striking terror into the heart of the enemy who had filled their lives with suffering and brought them to an untimely end!

Silence reigned.

Were those shapes and forms the only phantoms in the lonely house? Or, in the spaces that were unlighted--say in the passages and on the stairs leading to the room in which its owner transacted his business, and into another room in which he slept--were other phantoms moving, as dumb as they, as silent as they, with thoughts as murderous and with power more sure? This phantom, now, unseen by reason of the darkness, pausing with finger at its lips, all its senses merged in the sense of hearing as it listened for a sound to warn it that the time was not yet ripe? Had this phantom escaped from the lighted room in fear lest, were it visible to mortal eyes, its dread purpose would be frustrated, and that a frenzied cry ringing out upon the air, might reach some chance and aimless wanderer, and thus mar the murderous design lurking in its breast? Even of this the risk was small, for rarely indeed did any such wanderer find himself in Catchpole Square, or any man, who, being there without design, did not gladly and quickly grope his way out of it. The very guardians of the night avoided it, and contented themselves with the slightest and swiftest scrutiny, as of a place which bore an evil reputation and had best be left alone. It happened at odd times that some houseless and homeless vagrant, slinking in, curled himself up in a dark corner and dozed till daylight came, creeping away then with no feeling of gratitude for the shelter it had afforded him. Once a hapless child, sleeping there during a fierce snowstorm, had been found dead in the morning, covered with a white shroud. But that was long ago.

But this one phantom was in the house--now pausing, now creeping slowly along, now pausing again, now crouching with its head against a panel, and so remaining for many dumb minutes. And another phantom was at its heels.

And when the lights were out, and the rooms, like the stairs and passages, were in darkness and the master in his bed, they were still there. So stealthy were their

movements that no sound proceeded from them; their breathing was so faint that it would scarcely have disturbed a wintry leaf.

Silence reigned.

The sobbing and the moaning of the wind continued. Could it have carried the news to the wider thoroughfares, trodden by men and women whose business or pleasure kept them out so late, what message would it have conveyed? In its whispering voices would the word MURDER have found a place?

At no great distance from the Square stood Saint Michael's Church, its clock proclaiming the hour.

Ten!

Eleven!

Twelve!

How long these hours took to strike! A measured pause between each stroke, and in that pause the passing away of a life in the life of the great city, or the ushering in of one. This life at an end, this with a feeble cry at the journey before it.

One o'clock!

Samuel Boyd was asleep. No prayer on his lips, no prayer in his heart, before he retired to rest. He slept in peace, undisturbed by fear or remorse.

Suddenly he awoke. His heart beat wildly, a cold perspiration broke out on his forehead.

With a powerful hand pressed upon his mouth, and another at his throat, no man can cry aloud. But while strength remains he can gasp, and moan, and fight for dear life--and may struggle out of bed, still with the hand upon his mouth, and another at his throat--and may summon to his aid all the despairing forces of his body--nay, even while thus imprisoned, succeed in dragging his adversaries this way and that--and may in his agony prolong the execution of the ruthless purpose. Though not avert it.

The door between the two rooms is open while this muffled struggle is going on. Furniture is overturned and displaced, tapestry torn from the walls, and smaller articles tossed in all directions. On the part of one of the men there is displayed a cold, cruel,

relentless method in the execution of his design; on the part of the other a wild, despairing effort to obtain possession of a weapon. He succeeds. A pistol is in his hand.

A shot rings out! Another!--and the wax figure of the Chinaman collapses into a chair with a bullet in its heart.

Again Saint Michael's Church proclaims the hour.

Two o'clock!

Silence reigns.

CHAPTER V.

CONSTABLE APPLEBEE AND CONSTABLE POND FOREGATHER.

In the course of the next few days the weather exhibited its vagaries in a more than usually astonishing fashion. On the night of the 1st of March the sobbing and the moaning of the wind continued till early morning, when it pleased the air to become mild and balmy, almost promising the advent of spring. A few bold buds awoke and peeped out of their little brown beds, and over the atmosphere hung a hazy veil of dim, delicious sapphire. On the following day this promise was destroyed, and another change took place; and on the night of the 5th a fog which had been overlooked in the early winter took its revenge for the neglect by enveloping the City of Unrest in a mist so dense that Mrs. Pond, in a conversation with Mrs. Applebee the next day was driven to the use of a familiar illustration.

"If you'll believe me, Mrs. Applebee," she said, "it was that thick you could have cut it with a knife. I could hardly see my hand before me."

"But what took you out in it, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Applebee.

"I couldn't help thinking of Pond," replied Mrs. Pond, a young woman of two and twenty, whose wifely experiences were tame in comparison with those of Mrs. Applebee, the mother of eight, "trapesing up and down in the cold while I was setting before a blazing fire as comfortable as you please. 'A cup of hot coffee 'll put life in him,' says I to myself, and I was soon on my way outside with a bottleful tucked under my cloak. It took me a good hour to get to him."

"And by that time the coffee was cold," Mrs. Applebee remarked.

"No, it was just lukewarm. Thinking of Pond I cuddled it close; but I don't mind confessing I was almost giving him up."

"How did you find him at last, my dear?"

"I'll tell you a secret," said the young wife, with a little blush. Mrs. Applebee, who dearly loved a secret or anything mysterious, pricked up her ears. "When Pond was put on the night beat we agreed upon a signal. It was his idea; he's that clever you wouldn't believe."

"May it ever continue," ejaculated Mrs. Applebee.

"What?"

"Your opinion of him."

"Oh, it will," said Mrs. Pond, nodding her head confidently. "What Pond thinks of is a bird-call, and he buys two, and gives me one. 'If it should chance to happen,' says Pond, 'that you're my way--say about ten o'clock--when I'm on duty, just you give a soft blow. When I hear it out comes my bird-call, and I give a soft blow. Only one, Polly, because it might be noticed and against the regulations.' It does often chance to happen that I'm Pond's way on a dark night," added Mrs. Pond, with a sly look, "and I give a soft blow and he gives another. He says it's like company when he hears it, and he resooms his tread with a light heart. As for me, I go home as happy as happy can be. Thankful I was last night when Pond answered my call, and thankful he was for the coffee. 'Polly,' he says, 'you're a angel.'"

"How many kisses did he give you, my dear?"

"Oh, Mrs. Applebee," said Mrs. Pond, archly, "against the regulations, you know."

"I've heard of it being done," said Mrs. Applebee, pensively, "even by policemen on night duty. It was a dreadful night for our men to be out, but duty's duty and the pay's regular. It's a good thing you got home safe. Is your room let yet?"

"No, the bill's still in the window. Twenty-five pounds is a lot to pay for a house, but Pond says, 'Don't you fret, Polly; we'll soon get a lodger, and there's half the rent paid.' I must run home now in case he wakes up."

Mrs. Applebee's lord and master was at that moment in his bed, dreaming of fogs and shadows. Mrs. Pond's lord and master was also enjoying repose. They lived in adjoining streets, and their husbands being in the Force and at present on the night beat, it was their habit to foregather for a social gossip while their good men were in the arms of Morpheus.

There had been forewarnings of this visitation of the heaviest fog of the season. When people woke up on the morning of March 5th they thought it was the middle of the night. The comfortable illusion being dispelled by a consultation of watches and clocks they found that the sky was not visible, and that they could not distinguish the houses on the opposite side of the way. They crawled to their places of business in a discontented frame of mind, through a white blinding mist which made them uncertain of the direction they were taking. To add to their perplexities the trams and omnibuses

were not running, and jubilant cabmen, bent (paradoxically) on making hay while the sun shines, walked at their horses' heads, holding the bridles, and demanded gold instead of silver for taking a fare anywhere. These creeping shadows, the muffled cries that fell upon the ear, and the lighted links which seemed to move through space without the aid of hands, were more like a scene in the infernal regions than a representation of the anxious, throbbing life of our modern Babylon.

As the day wore on the fog lifted a little, but at night it became worse. Theatrical managers were sad and low-spirited, for their patrons were not disposed to leave their firesides in such weather, and the actors performed their ghostly parts to indistinct and scanty audiences, upon whom the brightest flashes of comedy fell with depressing effect. The fairies in the pantomimes which were still running were shorn of bright fancies, and even the bad spirits derived no pleasure from the perpetration of evil deeds. The few monomaniacs who believed that the end of the world was coming, were on their knees, waiting for the blast of Michael's trumpet. Topers standing at the bars of their favourite publichouses drank their liquor with a distinct absence of conviviality, and the verbal and visual inanities between barmaids and their admirers were shorn of that vacuous vivacity which generally distinguishes the intercourse of those parties. Dejection and dulness reigned in all the waking world.

In no part of the city were matters quite so bad as in the vicinity of Catchpole Square, North district, where, an hour after midnight, Constable Pond was cautiously feeling his way towards the border-line of his beat, hoping there to meet with human companionship in the person of Constable Applebee, who, himself animated by a similar hope in respect of Constable Pond, was advancing from an opposite direction. On this miserable night one crumb of comfort--oh, but it was more than a crumb; it might have been called a whole loaf--had fallen to the share of Constable Pond. He had not thought it likely that his wife would have ventured from the house, nor, lonely as he was, did he wish it; but when, an hour or so before midnight, he heard the familiar bird-call, he joyfully responded.

"Why, Polly, Polly!" he exclaimed, passing his arm around her. "My senses don't deceive me, do they?"

"I hope they don't," said Polly, drawing his arm tighter. "You wouldn't do this to another woman, I'm sure of that."

"You may be, Polly, you may be. Not to Queen Victoria herself with her gold crown on. Well, this is a surprise! Such a surprise, Polly, as makes up for all."

He gave her a great hug. He did not consider the regulations--not he!

"I'm afraid it's cold," said Polly, putting the bottle of coffee into his hand, and paying good interest for the hug. "It was boiling hot when I started."

"What a brick you are!" said Constable Pond, extracting the cork with his teeth, and applying himself to the refreshment. "It's ever so much better than three-star. Here, take a pull yourself." She did. "Polly, you're a angel!"

She laughed, but did not dispute it, and they remained a short time in fond dalliance. A strange hour for Cupid's pranks, but that urchin has no conscience. Polly proposed to walk the beat with her husband all through the night, but this was such an alarming infringement of the regulations that he would not listen to it. So he escorted her to the end of his beat, and would have escorted her farther, but she would not listen to that.

"Can you find your way home?" he asked, in doubt.

"Blindfold," she answered promptly.

"You may as well have the empty bottle," he said. "Hold it by the neck, and if anybody comes up to you give him a crack on the head with it. Another kiss, Polly!"

As she walked away she blew on her bird-call every few yards, to which her husband did not fail to respond; and if desolation did not fall upon him when he could hear it no longer it was because of the impression which Polly's thoughtful love had produced upon him. "Good little woman," he said. "A regular trump, that's what she is." But a couple of hours' loneliness sent his spirits down again, and now he was seeking his brother-constable Applebee to cheer him up with the friendly word. With the advance of the night the fog continued to deepen, and he got into a state of muddle as to his whereabouts. His progress was painfully slow. The white mist blinded and deceived him; his footsteps were noiseless; and but for the striking of the hour from a neighbouring church he might reasonably have fancied that he was traversing a city of the dead.

"Saint Michael's Church," he soliloquised, with a feeling of relief. "I didn't hear it when it struck last. Where could I have been--and where am I now? It can't be fur off, though whether it's to the right of me or the left of me, or before me or behind me, I'll be hanged if I can tell. What street am I in--Riley Street or Silver Street? If it's Riley Street I ought to come upon Applebee in a minute or two, unless he's at the other end of the beat. If it's Silver Street I'll have to tack."

That he should be puzzled was not to be wondered at, for the streets he named were so precisely alike in every detail and feature that they might have been turned out of one mould. Their frontage was the same, their height was the same, their depth was the same, and each had the same number of rooms of exactly the same shape and dimensions, and the same number of chimney pots placed in exactly the same positions. When this mathematical demon of architecture receives its death-blow a joy will be added to existence.

While Constable Pond stood debating whether to tack or creep straight on he saw in the distance what might be likened to a dead star--the misty glimmering of a despondent light; and on the chance of its indicating the presence of Constable Applebee he boldly challenged it.

"Hallo, there!" he cried.

"Hallo, there!" came the echoing answer.

There was little life in their voices; they seemed to linger, as though they had not sufficient power to effectually pierce the thick air.

"Is that you, Applebee?"

"Yes, it's me. Is it Pond?"

"Yes."

"Your voice sounds strange. Come slow."

Each advancing with caution, a friendly grasp of hands presently united them.

CHAPTER VI.

IT WAS GONE! THROUGH DEADMAN'S COURT.

"What a night!" then exclaimed Constable Pond.

"The worst I ever saw," responded Constable Applebee. "It's a record, that's what it is. We had a bad spell in December--lasted two days--you remember it, Pond?

"Should think I did."

"It was nothing compared to this. I'd sooner walk through a foot and a half of snow than through such a fog. It gets into the eyes, and into the chest, and into the head; you can squeeze it through your fingers. When it's snow you know where you are; there it is, at your feet; it don't mount. It gives a man fair play; this don't. I've been looking for you everywhere. Where did you get to?"

"Hard to say. As fur as I know I haven't been off my beat."

"Same here. Anything to report?"

"No. Have you?"

Constable Applebee gave no direct reply, but branched off into what, apparently, was another subject. "Look here, Pond. Are you a nervous man?"

"Not particularly," answered Constable Pond, with a timid look around.

"But you don't like this sort of thing?"

"Who would?"

"Ah, you may say that. If fog was fog, and nothing else, I'd put up with it. And why? Because we've got to."

"A true bill," said Constable Pond, assenting.

"But it brings something else along with it. That's what I complain of--and what I mostly complain of is shadders."

"What do you mean?" inquired Constable Pond.

"What I say. Shadders. I don't call myself a nervous man, but when you see something stealing along a yard or two ahead of you, and you go to lay hold of it and it vanishes--yes, Pond, vanishes--it's enough to give a man the creeps."

"It'd give me the creeps."

"Very well, then," said Constable Applebee, as though a matter which had been in dispute was now settled. "Put a substantial body in my way and I'll tackle it. But how can you tackle it when it melts and disappears? You call out, 'Now, then, what are you up to?' and you don't get a whisper in reply. Ain't that enough to aggravate a man?"

"More than enough; I know how I should feel over it. But look here, Applebee, it ain't imagination, is it?"

"Imagination!" exclaimed Constable Applebee, in a voice of scorn. "What! Me! Why, I don't suppose, from the day I was born to this blessed night of white fog, that if it was all reckoned up I've had imagination enough to fill a two-ounce bottle."

This new view of the quality of imagination in relation to quantity seemed to impress Constable Pond, who turned it over in his mind without feeling himself equal to offer an opinion on it.

"A fog like this always serves me the same way," said Constable Applebee. "There was a black fog when I was born I've heard my mother often say. That's why, perhaps."

"But what happened?" asked Constable Pond. "You haven't told me that."

"This happened. I see a shadder creeping along the wall. I foller it till I'm within half-a-dozen yards. Then I stop and hail it. The minute it hears my voice it gives a start, and when I run forward to lay hands on it, it vanishes."

"You've got," said Constable Pond, admiringly, "the heart of a lion. I don't bring to mind that there's any orders about taking up shadders. Bodies, yes. Shadders, no."

"I ain't exactly a mouse," said Constable Applebee, stiffening himself. "It happened a second time. There it was, creeping ahead of me. This time I don't give it a chance. I run after it and call out, 'Stand up like a man!'"----

"It might have been a female shadder," suggested Constable Pond.

"Perhaps you know more about it than I do," said Constable Applebee, testily.

"No, Applebee, no. Go on."

"'Stand up like a man!' I call out. What's the consequence? It vanishes again, and there I stand, dumbfoundered."

"Does it come a third time, Applebee?"

"No, it don't come a third time. When I was a little boy my mother took me to the Polytechnic to see 'Pepper's Ghost.' You saw it, and it wasn't there. You run a sword through it, and it grinned in your face. I was that scared I couldn't sleep for a week afterwards. It's my belief, if I'd got close enough to run a knife into the shadder, it'd have served me just the same. Step up, we're in the gutter."

"It's singular, that's what it is. It's singular. Shall you report it?"

"I'm doubtful of it. They might think I was off my head. Let it be between us, Pond."

"It don't pass my lips, Applebee."

They entered a hooded court, and halted there.

"Where are we?" asked Constable Pond.

"In Deadman's Court." Constable Pond shivered. "Leading to Catchpole Square, and leading nowhere else. You wouldn't catch me living in a cooldersack."

"What may be the meaning of that, Applebee?" asked Constable Pond.

"You couldn't have been much of a dab at school to ask that question. Now, me!--but I won't boast. Cooldersack is French for blind thoroughfare. A man that sleeps as sound as I do 'd find himself in a trap, with a entrance like this. Suppose you live in the end house where Mr. Samuel Boyd lives, and there's a fire in the middle of the night. How's the fire engines to get to you? You wouldn't have half a chance. A man might as well be shut up in a bottle. Do you know the Square at all, Pond?"

"No. Never been in it to my knowledge."

"Couldn't have been in it without," said Constable Applebee, chuckling at his wit. "It's the rummiest built place you ever saw. Just step in a minute. Not that you can see much of it with this fog on, but I could describe it blindfold. Six houses with the street doors in front of us--we're standing facing 'em now--and only one of 'em let, the one at the end corner, Mr. Samuel Boyd's. The others have been empty I don't know how long. Now right about face, and what do you see?"

"As fur as I can make out," said Constable Pond, peering before him, "it's a blank wall."

"It is a blank wall, the backs of six houses, without any back entrance to 'em."

"Where's the front entrance?"

"In Shore Street. If we had Samuel Boyd's money we'd do better with it, wouldn't we, Pond? We'd have a house with a bit of garden in front and a bit of garden at the back, with a rose tree or two, and flowers in the winder--because what's the use of money if you don't enjoy it?"

"That's what I say. Life's short. Only tempery."

"Temporarily, Pond, temporarily," said Constable Applebee, in correction. "You must have made a mess of it at school. My missis'd go wild with delight if she had a house like that. She's as fond of flowers as bees of honey."

"So's mine," said Constable Pond, standing up for his own like a man.

"They all are. And if I had my wish I'd never leave the house in the morning without one in my buttonhole. It mellers a man, Pond, that's what it does, it mellers him, and whether you're rough or whether you're smooth it shows you've got a good heart. I never saw Samuel Boyd with a flower in his buttonhole, and if I lived to a hundred I never should. And I never had a civil word from him."

"Nor anything in the way of a tip, I'll bet," remarked Constable Pond.

"You'd win it. It was a different pair of shoes with his son, Mr. Reginald. There he was, as handsome and free a young chap as you'd set eyes on in a day's march, with a flower in his coat and a smile or a cheery word to brighten you up. 'A wild night, constable,' he'd say, 'have a cigar?' And he'd slip one in my hand, and sometimes the price of a pint. It's nigh upon two years since I set eyes on him--wus luck!" These reminiscences came to a sudden stop. Constable Applebee clutched his comrade's arm, and whispered hoarsely, "Look there! The shadder!"

A figure was creeping along the wall, as though in the endeavour to escape observation. They darted forward, and Constable Applebee laid his hand upon it, crying, "Now, then, give an account of yourself!" It was not a shadow, for shadows have no substance. It was not a shadow, for shadows have no voice. The sound of a sob escaped from the figure. Constable Applebee's grasp was nerveless rather than vigorous, and a less powerful effort than it made would have enabled it to escape. It was gone! Through Deadman's Court!

"Quick, Pond, quick!" cried Constable Applebee. In a state of confusion they scrambled out of Catchpole Square, and came into violent collision. Ruefully rubbing their heads they looked about them, and saw nothing but the thick white fog.

"Vanished!" exclaimed Constable Applebee. The collision had knocked Constable Pond's helmet off. Stooping to recover it he saw something white beneath it--a lady's handkerchief, trimmed with lace. With a sly glance at Constable Applebee he put it into his pocket.

"It'll do for the missis," he thought. "She's fond of a bit of lace."

CHAPTER VII.

IN BISHOP STREET POLICE STATION.

Availing itself of the privilege to creep through every chink and crevice, to steal up backstairs and take advantage of every keyhole, and to make its dismal presence felt equally within the habitations of man as without, the white fog had insinuated itself into the Bishop Street Police Station, where it lay in the form of a semi-transparent shroud, and where Inspector Robson looked more like the ghost of a man than the man himself. In the brightest of weather the office was not a cheerful apartment; under the thrall of the white fog, an hour after midnight, it assumed a funereal aspect inexpressibly depressing.

Busily employed in making out the charge sheet for the following day, Inspector Robson still found time to cast an occasional eye upon another ghostly form who, with one foot resting on the end of a wooden bench, was leaning against the wall in a negligent attitude, engaged in the insubstantial occupation of chewing a ghostly straw. The Inspector wrote a fine copperplate hand, and his steel pen neither scratched nor spluttered. On the present occasion he was taking extraordinary care over his task, as though more than usually important issues hung upon the perfect outlines of his pothooks and hangers. The absence of sound within the office and the shroud which lay upon it, rendering objects within a few yards of him indistinct, imparted so strong an air of unreality to the scene, that his slow and measured movements bore some resemblance to the movements of an automaton. The other ghostly person in the office chewed his straw and moved his lips with so regular and unintelligent a motion that his movements, also, bore some resemblance to the movements of an automaton. But for the difference in their ages these two men might have been posing to an invisible artist for a picture of the Industrious and the Idle Apprentices.

That there was something in the negligent figure that discomposed the Inspector was evident from the expression on his face when he raised his head from the charge sheet and glanced in that direction, and it was quite as evident that his discomposure was powerless to arouse the cause of it from his apparent insensibility to all external objects and impressions. He was young and good-looking, his age probably twenty-four or five; Inspector Robson was old enough to be his father, and on his features were stamped the effects of long years of official responsibilities and steady application to duty. In this relation of the Idle and the Industrious Apprentices the marked contrast they presented was capable of a dramatic interpretation.

"Do you intend to remain much longer?" inquired the Inspector, goaded at length into breaking the oppressive silence. "Because I'd like you to know I'm pretty well tired of you."

"I'm pretty well tired of myself," replied the young man, in a listless tone. "As to remaining much longer I can't exactly say."

"You have no right to be in this place, you know, unless you are here upon business. Now, the question is, are you here upon business? If you are, I'm ready to take it down."

The young man turned the straw in his mouth, and appeared to reflect. Coming to a conclusion he languidly said, "I can't think of any particular business."

"That's a pity," said the Inspector.

"That's a pity," echoed the young man, with distinct indifference.

"Well, then," said the Inspector, bracing himself up for a great effort, "as you have no business to be here unless you have business to be here----" This was so involved that it brought him to a full stop; scratching his head with whimsical perplexity he extricated himself from the difficulty by adding, "The best thing you can do is to clear out."

The young man, deciding that he had sufficiently rested one foot, lowered it, and lifted the other upon the bench. This was the only movement he made.

The Inspector resumed his writing with the manner of a man driven to a helpless pass. A peculiar feature of the defeat he had met with was that it did not seem to anger him. Presently he spoke again.

"I don't often get into a temper, Dick."

"Not often."

"But when I do," said the Inspector, with an anticipatory chuckle, "it's a thing to remember."

"When you do, uncle, I'll remember it."

The Inspector finished the charge sheet, tidied up his papers, and looking over his shoulder at Dick, suddenly burst out laughing.

Dick's face cleared; a light stole into his eyes; his lips quivered. These tokens of serious emotion were like the passing of a cloud. The next moment he joined the Inspector in the laugh, and the storm was at an end.

"Where are you going to sleep, Dick?"

"Let me see," Dick answered. "Buckingham Palace sounds tempting; there must be several beds unoccupied there. Could a fellow get between the sheets of one? Do you think it might be managed? I hope they keep a fire in the rooms and the sheets well aired."

"Don't be a fool."

"Can I help it?"

"No, Dick, no," said the inspector, advancing and laying his hand kindly upon Dick's shoulder. "Upon my soul I don't believe you can."

Dick lifted his eyes, with an implied suggestion that the Inspector, by the barest possibility, might be mistaken; but he did not put this into words.

"I can't take you home with me," said the Inspector. "Aunt Rob won't have it. She's put her foot down, and when she puts her foot down, why, there it is."

The comic helplessness expressed in this obvious statement seemed to amuse Dick, but he said, gravely enough, "Yes, there it is."

"And there's Florence."

At the introduction of this name a look of sad tenderness stole into Dick's eyes, but he said calmly, "Ah, and there's Florence."

"Now, Dick, let us have this out, once and for all."

"I'm agreeable."

"It's altogether too bad," exclaimed the Inspector. "What with you and Florence, bless her! and Aunt Rob, I haven't a moment's peace of my life. What Aunt Rob says is this. 'Here's Dick Remington,' she says, 'that you've behaved as a father to, and that I've behaved as a mother to. Ever since he was left an orphan, having lost his father, then his mother--you were three years old when my poor sister died--he's lived with us as one of

our own, and so we've treated him. He had a claim upon us, and that claim we've met.' And she says--her foot being down--'It's time Dick looked after himself.' She gave you a hint, which you took pretty quick. I'll say that of you; you took it almost too quick."

"What else could I do?"

"It was a mistake, Dick, to get into a huff as you did. The minute she began to speak you took her up sharp--and if there's one thing more than another that puts her back up it is to be took up sharp. You see, Dick, it's a delicate matter. Aunt Rob says, 'We must think of Florence. She comes first.' And she's right, Dick."

"She is, uncle. Florence comes first--always first!"

"'Here's Dick,' says Aunt Rob, 'that I'm as fond of as if he was my own son, what is he good for? What prospects has he got? He's been in one situation and another, and never keeps to one thing for more than a few weeks at a time. Here he is, a grown man, and here is Florence, almost a grown woman.' To think of it!" said Inspector Robson, pensively, breaking off. "It was only yesterday that she was in short frocks, going backward and forward to school, and climbing up on my knee to pull my whiskers, and cuddling up in my arms, and singing her little songs in a voice as sweet as music. And now! a grown woman! To think of it--to think of it!"

"Loving you no less as a woman, uncle, than she did as a child."

"I know it, my lad, I know it, but it sets a man on the think."

And Inspector Robson fell forthwith into a brown study which lasted quite five minutes, during which the image of his only child, most tenderly and dearly beloved, presented itself to him in its sweetest and most engaging aspects.

CHAPTER VIII.

AUNT ROB THINKS FLORENCE OUGHT TO MARRY A MARQUIS OR A PRINCE.

Dick Remington waited patiently to hear the full sum of the reproaches which Aunt Rob brought against him. He, too, saw with his mind's eye the image of the young girl for whom he would have laid down his life, and if his thoughts of her brought a pang to his heart they were at the same time charged with exceeding tenderness.

Inspector Robson shook himself free from dreams, and returned to his subject.

"That is what Aunt Rob says. 'Here is Dick a grown man, and here is Florence almost a grown woman. When Dick comes down in the morning he kisses Florence and she kisses him; and when he bids her good night he kisses her again. And,' says Aunt Rob, 'I don't know that this is a thing that ought to be allowed to go on.' I dare say it's puzzled other people as well as us when kissing ought to be left off. So long as you were little it was as natural as natural could be. You were playmates and chums, and you rolled on the floor together and played coach and horses and London Bridge is Falling Down, and you'd carry her on your shoulder and lift her as high as the ceiling, and throw her up and catch her, she screaming with delight and crying, 'Again, Dick, again!' You grew up, Dick, and when you were eighteen Florence was only twelve, and the kissing went on, and there was nothing to object to. But you got to be twenty and Florence fourteen, and the kissing went on. Then her frocks were lengthened, and the pair of you continued to grow up till she was nineteen and you twenty-five--and all this time the kissing went on. Now, Dick, there must come a time when, even between cousins, kissing must stop. Sometimes it's done gradual, sometimes all of a sudden, which makes things a bit awkward--but one way or the other it's got to be done. You must see that yourself, Dick."

"Yes, I suppose so, uncle."

"And Aunt Rob has got an eye to the future. Pretty girls like Florence don't grow on every gooseberry bush. Show me the girl that can compare with her. Do you know of one, Dick?"

"Not one in all the wide world," replied the young man. "God bless her, and make her happy!"

"She's been brought up sensible," said Inspector Robson. "She can make a beef steak pudding and play the piano; there's nothing she can't turn her hand to, and the man that

gets her will be a lucky chap. Aunt Rob thinks a gentleman born would not be too good for her. 'Why not say a marquis, or a prince?' says I to her, speaking sarcastic like. And she bridles up and answers, 'Why not? He might do worse; he couldn't do better.'"

"No gentleman in the land," said Dick, with a tremor in his voice, "could be too good for Florence. She's equal to the best, and could hold her own among the best, even if they were born in a palace."

"That's what Aunt Rob thinks," said Inspector Robson, his eyes glowing with loving pride, "and that's what we all think, and who that knows Florence could think differently? But let's come back to you, Dick, for that's the main point. Why don't you stick to one thing, my lad?"

"Perhaps because it won't stick to me," Dick replied.

"Nonsense, nonsense, lad, it's the other way about. Do you recollect the morning you went to your first situation, and how we all stood at the street door to see you off? There was Florence and Aunt Rob waving their handkerchiefs and kissing their hands to you till you were out of sight. You kept that situation seven months, and then you threw it up. You didn't like the place, you said. All right. You got another situation, as traveller on commission in the sewing machine line. You commenced well, and was earning your fifteen shillings a week. What was our surprise when you came home one night and told us you'd left because it wouldn't suit you? The next thing you took to was the stage, and you gave us tickets to come and see you act. We rehearsed at home, and Florence gave you the cues. As for your make-up as you call it, you did it so cleverly that we didn't know you when you come on the stage. 'That's what he's cut out for,' I said. 'One of these days he'll have a theatre of his own.' But Aunt Rob shook her head. You wrote a little piece in one act, and got it played--actually got it played. We thought it beautiful, and the way Florence laughed and cried over it--well! But it wasn't a success for all that. Still, you know, Dick, if at first you don't succeed, try, try again. You didn't try again. You gave up the stage----"

Dick interposed with, "Or it gave up me."

"Anyway you left it. Your next move was clerk to Mr. Samuel Boyd of Catchpole Square."

"Ah!" said Dick, and there was a look of inquiry in his eyes as he fixed them upon the Inspector.

"You may well say 'Ah,' for from what's known of him he's not the kind of man one would be proud to serve. What made you go to him?"

"I was hard up, and had been trying for a couple of months to get in somewhere. I was curious about him, too: thought he would do for a character that I could make up like if I ever went on the stage, or could use if ever I wrote another play." He spoke with apparent carelessness, but with a covert observance of the Inspector while he gave this explanation.

"It didn't surprise me that you remained with him only three months. When you left him you took to writing for the papers, and we read your paragraphs and articles with wonder at your cleverness. You don't do much in that way now, Dick?"

"Not much," said Dick, with a smile, "but I haven't given it up entirely. There is always the future."

"Ah, Dick, Dick," said Inspector Robson, very seriously, "we don't live in the future, we live in the present. When we're hungry a future dinner won't satisfy our stomachs. Aunt Rob sums it up in three or four words. 'Dick's got no stability,' she says, and, against my will, I've come round to her way of thinking. I suppose, Dick, all this time you haven't saved a penny--eh?" The young man made no reply, and Inspector Robson cried, half angrily, half admiringly, "What business had you to be making us presents and bringing things home for Aunt Rob and me and Florence when you ought to have been looking after yourself? What did you do it for?' Here's Dick brought home an immense turkey,' says Aunt Rob to me at Christmas; and at other times, 'Here's that stupid Dick brought home a couple of chickens, or a veal and ham pie,' and I don't know what all. 'I wish,' says Aunt Rob, 'that you'd tell him to stop it, and put his money into the savings bank.' But not you! At the least mention of such a thing you fired up and wanted to know what we meant by it."

"I could not have acted differently," said Dick. "I was living upon you--yes, I was. You wouldn't take anything for my board and lodging, and I had to try and make it up in some way. It was little enough I did, but if I hadn't done that little I should have been ashamed to look you in the face. Besides, how many times have you said to me, 'Dick, you must be in want of a bit of pocket money,' and forced a half sovereign upon me, and sometimes more?"

"Welcome you were to it," said Inspector Robson, in his heartiest tone, "though it's my firm belief if you had a thousand a year you'd never have a shilling in your purse, you're that free with your money. A sailor come ashore after a two year's cruise is a fool to you." He paused a moment. "Dick, my lad, I've been too hard on you, in what I've said: I'm downright ashamed of myself."

"It isn't in you, and it isn't in Aunt Rob, to do anything of which you need be ashamed. I have been thoughtless and inconsiderate----"

"No, no, Dick!"

"Yes, yes, uncle. I've been too much wrapped up in myself, and given no thought to the best friends a young ne'er-do-well ever had. If I could only make it up to you!" He turned his face to the wall, so that the Inspector should not see the tears that rushed into his eyes.

"Dick, my lad," said Inspector Robson, "have you got yourself into any money difficulty? Say the word, and I'll see what we can do to get you out of it."

"What a trump you are!" exclaimed Dick. "No, uncle. I owe no one a shilling except you and Aunt Rob."

"Don't keep on harping on that string or you'll get my temper up. If it isn't money, is it a woman?"

"If you mean whether I've entangled myself with a woman, or done anything wrong that way, I can answer honestly, no."

"I knew it, my lad, I knew it," said Inspector Robson, triumphantly. "Whatever your faults may be I was sure there wasn't a bit of vice in you. And now I tell you what it is; you shall come home with me to-night, your room's ready for you, and I'll make it all right with Aunt Rob. Make it all right! It is all right. 'The place isn't the same, father,' she says to me, 'with Dick out of it.' If you knew how we've missed you, my lad, you'd grow an inch taller."

"Who is it that has kept my room ready for me?"

"Aunt Rob and Florence, to be sure."

"And Florence," whispered Dick to himself, a wave of exceeding tenderness flowing over him.

"Florence it was who said to Aunt Rob, 'Mother, we mustn't let Dick think when he comes back that we've been neglectful of him.' 'Of course not,' said Aunt Rob, and up they go to see that everything is sweet and clean. You know the pride that Aunt Rob takes in the house. You might eat off the floor. And there's Florence of a morning sweeping out your room, and looking in every corner for a speck of dust. There's the

canary and the cage you gave her, and the goldfish--why, if they were her own little babies she couldn't look after them better. So home we go together, and we'll let bygones be bygones and commence afresh."

"No, uncle, I can't come home with you," said Dick, shaking his head. "I thank you from my heart, but it can't be."

"Not come home with me!" exclaimed Inspector Robson, in great astonishment. "Why, what's the matter with the lad? You don't mean it, Dick, surely!"

"I do mean it, uncle."

"Dick, Dick, Dick," said Inspector Robson, shaking a warning forefinger at the young man, "pride's a proper thing in the right place, but a deuced ugly thing when it makes us take crooked views. I say you shall come home with me. Do you know what kind of a night it is, lad? I wouldn't turn a dog out in such weather, unless it was a blind dog, and then it wouldn't matter much. Come, come, Dick, think better of it."

"Nothing can alter my resolution, uncle--nothing. I did not come here to-night to annoy you; I wanted a shelter, and I hoped the fog would clear; but it seems to have grown thicker. However, it can't last for ever. In three or four hours it will be morning, and then----"

"Go on. And then?"

"The night will be gone, and it will be day," said Dick, gaily.

"And to-morrow night?"

"It will be night again."

"And you'll sleep in Buckingham Palace, for it stands to reason a man must sleep somewhere, and they don't charge for beds there that I'm aware of. How's the treasury, lad?" Dick laughed. "It's no laughing matter. Here's a sovereign; it'll see through the week at all events."

"I'm not going to rob you, uncle," said Dick in a shaking voice.

Inspector Robson caught Dick's hand, forced it open, forced a sovereign into it, and closed the young man's fingers over it, holding the hand tight in his to prevent the

money being returned. In the execution of a ruthless action the Inspector's muscles were of iron.

"If you drop it, or try to give it me back," he said, "I'll lock you up and charge you with loitering for an unlawful purpose. What will Florence think when she sees your name in the papers and my name charging you? Be sensible for once, Dick, if you've any feeling for her."

The blood rushed up into Dick's face, and he staggered as if he had been struck; but he recovered himself quickly, and was the same indolent, easy-mannered being as before.

"Thank you, uncle; I'll keep the sovereign. Before the week's out I daresay I shall get something to do. The mischief of it is, there's nothing stirring; stagnation's the order of the day. If I could hit upon something startling and be first in the field, I should get well paid for it. Would you object to my dashing on the colour in an article headed, 'A Night in an Inspector's Office.'? I think I could make it lurid."

Before the laughing Inspector could reply a constable entered, holding by the arm a poorly dressed woman of woebegone appearance. Her gestures, her sobs, the wild looks she cast around, were those of a woman driven to distraction. Clinging to her skirts was a little girl as woebegone and white-faced as her mother.

Inspector Robson instantly straightened himself; he was no longer a private individual, but an officer of the law prepared for duty in whatever complicated shape it presented itself.

"She's been here half-a-dozen times to-night, sir," said the constable, "and last night as well, and the night before. She's lost her husband, she says."

"My husband--my husband!" moaned the woman. "Find him for me--find him for me! He's gone, gone, gone! Merciful God! What has become of him?"

Inspector Robson saw at a glance that here before him was no woman maddened by drink, but a woman suffering from terrible distress; and by a motion of his hand he conveyed an order to the constable, who instantly took his hand from the woman's arm.

"What is your husband's name?" asked the Inspector in a gentle tone.

"Abel Death, sir. Oh, for God's sake find him for me--find him for me--find him for me!"

Tears rolled down her face and choked her voice. Every nerve in her body was quivering with anguish.

"How long has he been gone?" asked the Inspector.

"Five days, sir, five long, long days."

"Was he in employment?"

"Yes, sir, yes. Oh, what can have become of him?"

"What is the name of his employer?"

The agony the woman had endured overcame her, and she could not immediately reply.

"Mr. Samuel Boyd, sir, of Catchpole Square," said the child.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ABEL DEATH.

She spoke in a hoarse voice, and very slowly, a scraping, grating cough accompanying her words. "Mr. Samuel Boyd, sir, of Catchpole Square," might, according to her utterance, have lain in a charnel-house among the bones of the dead when she fished him up for the information of Inspector Robson. Such a rasping cough, forcing what little blood she had in her poor body up into her pallid face, where it stood out in blotches of dull, unhealthy red! Such a wearing, tearing cough, as though some savage, malignant beast, lurking in her chest, was clawing at it in sheer devilry, and scraping it clean to the bone! But she did not seem to mind it, nor, by her manner, did she invite pity for it. The cough was an old companion, "and goes on so," she said to a juvenile friend, "when it takes me unawares, that it almost twists my head off." This was not said in a tone of complaining; it was merely a plain statement of fact.

The name of Samuel Boyd had scarcely passed the girl's lips, when Inspector Robson darted forward to catch the woman, who, but for his timely help, would have fallen to the ground. Assisted by Dick he bore her to a bench, and there they succeeded in restoring her to consciousness.

The attitude of the child was remarkable for its composure, which sprang from no lack of feeling, but partly from familiarity with suffering, and partly from a pitiful strength of character which circumstances had brought too early into play. Too early, indeed, for she was but twelve years of age, and had about her few of the graces which speak of a happy child-life. How different is the springtime of such a child from that of one brought up in a home of comparative comfort, where the pinching and grinding for the barest necessaries of life are happily unfelt! What pregnant lessons are to be learned from a child so forlorn--say, for instance, the lesson of gratitude for the better fortune and the pleasant hours of which we take no account!

But Gracie Death did not murmur or repine. She simply suffered, and suffered in dull patience. It was her lot, and she bore it.

The introduction of the name of Samuel Boyd of Catchpole Square brought a startled look into Dick's eyes, and he glanced at Inspector Robson to see if it made any impression upon him. The Inspector gave no indication of this, but devoted his whole attention to the woman, who, the moment she revived, was in full possession of her senses.

"My husband!" she moaned. "My husband!"

"Has he run away from you?" asked the Inspector.

"No, sir, no," replied Mrs. Death. "He was too fond of us for that. The best husband, the best father! If you have any mercy in you, find him for me! What shall I do without him? What will the children do without him?"

"We shall starve," said Gracie, answering the question, coldly and impassively.

Inspector Robson coughed behind his hand, and his cough awoke the demon in Gracie's chest to emulation so strong that it straightway set to work, and the spectators had a practical illustration of her statement that it was "enough to twist her head off."

"The child has a bad cough," said Inspector Robson, with a look of pity; "she oughtn't to be out on such a night."

"I would come with mother," said Gracie. "It ain't her fault, it's mine."

The Inspector coughed again, and Gracie's demon followed suit.

"Did your husband drink?" asked the Inspector.

"No, sir, no," said the woman, reproachfully. "How can you ask it? Gracie will tell you. Did father drink, Gracie?"

"Yes," she answered. "Tea. Very weak. I like it strong," and added, "when I can get it."

"I wish I had a cup to give you," said Inspector Robson.

"So do I," said Gracie, "and a cup for mother."

"If there's anything you wish to tell me," said the Inspector, addressing the woman, "I will see what can be done. Take your time, and don't hurry. He was employed by Mr. Samuel Boyd, you say."

"Yes, sir, of Catchpole Square. He was Mr. Boyd's clerk, and a hard time he had of it. We did the best we could upon his miserable salary, but what with one thing and another we were worried out of our lives."

"Did I worry you, mother?" asked Gracie. "I'd stop coughing if I could, but I can't. If it didn't worry mother, gentlemen, I wouldn't mind. It ketches me that tight that I can't hold it if I try ever so. I do try, mother!"

"You do, my dear. A little while ago"--to the Inspector again--"we borrowed three pounds of a money-lender and signed a paper, and though we've paid it twice over he makes out that we owe him more than we did at the beginning. Our bits of furniture aren't worth much, but it's all we have, and every time he comes he threatens to sell us up."

"I wish he'd sell my cough up," said Gracie, with a queer little laugh, "I'd let it go cheap. It wouldn't fetch much, I reckon, but he can have it and welcome, because it worries mother."

"That's the way she talks of it, sir. She never thinks of herself."

"Oh, don't I, though? You mustn't believe everything mother says, gentlemen."

"Let me go on, dear, and don't interrupt, or you'll make the gentlemen angry."

"I'd be sorry to do that. You will help mother won't you, please!"

"We'll try," replied Inspector Robson, kindly and patiently.

"Then I won't say another word till she's done," said Gracie.

"Last Friday night he came home in a terrible state," continued the woman, fondling Gracie's cheek with her trembling hand. "He hoped to get the loan of a few pounds from Mr. Boyd, so that we could pay the money-lender off, and buy a chest protector for Gracie, and a little warm clothing for the other children."

It was as much as Gracie could do to refrain from protesting that she didn't want a chest protector, or any nonsense of that sort, but when she passed her word she was not in the habit of breaking it, so she contented herself with shutting her thin white lips tight, and looking defiantly at the mist that filled the room. Which revenged itself by tickling her throat to such a degree that she almost choked.

"He went out in the morning full of hope," said Mrs. Death, when the fit of coughing was over, "and came home full of despair. Instead of getting the loan which was to set us free and give the children a chance, he had been discharged. Discharged, gentlemen, discharged, at a moment's notice! It came upon me like a thunder-clap, and when I saw

my husband sitting at the table with his face hidden in his hands, I wondered what we were sent into the world for. Look at my little Gracie here, gentlemen. She doesn't weigh half her proper weight, and she hasn't an ounce of flesh on her bones. She's more like a skeleton than anything else, and so are we all. Look at her, and look at me, and think of our little children at home almost at the point of death, and you'll understand why my poor dear husband was filled with despair. Oh, it's bitter cruel, bitter, bitter cruel! One tries, and tries, and tries, and never a spark of light to comfort us. Nothing but misery, nothing but misery, nothing but misery!"

It was terrible to hear the repetition of her words, terrible to witness her agony and her just rebellion against her cruel fate. Gracie did not speak, but slid her little hand, cold as ice, into the hand of her mother, who clasped it convulsively. Quietly and impassively the child watched the faces of the listeners to note the effect the appeal had upon them.

"Would it be a breach of duty to introduce a mug of hot tea into a police station?" asked Dick of the Inspector.

"No, it would not," said Inspector Robson. "There's a can in the cupboard there. Here's a shilling. Get it filled."

"I must stop and hear the end of this story," said Dick. "I've a reason for it. The constable can go, can't he?"

Inspector Robson nodded, and the tin can and the shilling being given to the constable, he departed on the errand.

By this time the woman had sufficiently recovered to proceed.

"There my poor husband sat, the picture of misery, and never said a word, and I hadn't a word of comfort to give him. To tell him to bear up--what would have been the use of that? I put before him what little food there was in the cupboard, but he pushed it away and wouldn't touch it. All at once he started up and said, 'I'm going out.' 'Where to?' I asked, and I put my hand on his arm to keep him at home, for his face was dreadful to see, and I was afraid of--I don't know what. He guessed what was in my mind. 'No,' he said, 'don't think that of me. You've got enough trouble to bear as it is; I won't bring more on you. I'll fight on to the bitter end.' You know what was in my mind, I dare say."

"Yes, I know."

The woman resumed. "'Where are you going?' I asked him again. 'To Catchpole Square,' he answered. 'I'll make another appeal to Mr. Boyd.' I didn't think there was any hope

for us, but I knew it would dishearten him if I said as much, and I let him go. As near as I can remember it was half past nine, and I expected him back before eleven, but at eleven there was no sign of him. I did not dare to leave the house, for the children hadn't got to sleep yet, and if he returned while I was away it would put everything in confusion. I waited and waited till I could bear it no longer, and then I went out to look for him, thinking that perhaps Mr. Boyd had relented, and had given my husband work to do which kept him in the office all night. It was past two when I reached Catchpole Square, and looked up at the windows. There's never any life to be seen there, and I didn't see any then. There was a bell-pull at the door that wouldn't ring, so I knocked and knocked and kept on knocking without any one coming. I hung about the Square for an hour and more, and knocked again and again as loud as I could, and at last I came away and ran home, hoping to see my husband there. Gracie was awake, and said nobody had come while I was away. Can you understand my feelings, sir?"

"I can," replied Inspector Robson, as the constable entered the office with an empty cup and the can of hot tea. "Take a drink of this before you go on. It'll warm you up." He filled the cup with the steaming liquid and gave it to her.

Gracie's eyes glittered, but she did not move, and when her mother offered her the mug she said, "No, mother. After you's manners," in quite an elegant way, as though their mission to the police station was to take afternoon tea with the Inspector. Mrs. Death, too well acquainted with her child's character to attempt any persuasion, therefore drank first, deep sighs of satisfaction betokening her gratitude. Refilling the cup Inspector Robson handed it to Gracie, who, before she put it to her lips, said, in her best society manner,

"'To you and yours, sir, and gentlemen all, and may none of you ever feel the want of it. The Lord make us truly thankful! Hallelujah!"

A form of grace which, but for the pathetic side of the picture, might have caused some amusement to those who heard it.

Nothing of Gracie's face could be seen except her coal black eyes glittering like dusky stars above the white rim of the mug as she tilted it, and though the tea scalded her throat she made no pause till the last drop was finished. Then she sidled up to her mother and stood quietly there, her child-soul filled with thankfulness which was not expressed in her thin, sallow face.

"Saturday passed, sir," said the woman, pressing Gracie to her side and resuming her story, "and he didn't come home, and nobody could tell me anything about him. It was the same all day Sunday and all yesterday; I was never off my feet. Half-a-dozen times

every day have I been to Catchpole Square, knocking at the door without being able to make anybody hear. What am I to do, what am I to do? If somebody don't help me, I shall go mad!"

"The only thing I can suggest just now," said Inspector Robson, "is that your husband's disappearance should be made public. Come to the magistrate's court to-morrow morning at twelve or one o'clock. I will be there, and will see that you get a hearing. Some of the reporters will take notice of it, and it will get into the papers. It's the best advice I can give you."

"I'll follow it, sir," said the woman, but it was evident that she had given up hope. "Thank you kindly for listening to me so patiently. Come, Gracie, we'll go home. Will it be sure to get into the papers, sir, if I come to the magistrate's court?"

Inspector Robson looked at Dick, who nodded. "I think I can promise that. Now get home as quickly as possible, and put your little girl to bed. Her cough is dreadful."

In a voice as hoarse as any raven's, and quite composedly, as if the Inspector were the object of compassion, Grace said, "Don't let it worry you, please. I don't mind it, not a bit." She drew her breath hard as she added without any show of feeling, "You will find father, won't you? Mother'll never forget you for it. You've been ever so good to us. I never tasted such tea, and, oh my! wasn't it hot neither? Come along, mother.

"You had better leave your address," said Dick, who had listened to the woman's story with absorbed attention.

"We live at Draper's Mews, number 7, second floor back." While Dick was writing it down Inspector Robson slipped a sixpence into Gracie's hand. Then, patting her shoulder, he gave her an encouraging smile, which she acknowledged, as she did the sixpence, though her fingers closed quickly and tightly over the coin, with the same gravity as distinguished all her movements. Emerging into the street she began to cough with great violence, and gasped and fought with her little fists, as though the demon in her chest, now that he had got her outside, was bent upon tearing her to pieces. The men in the police station listened compassionately until the child and her cough were lost in the fog through which she and her mother were slowly creeping.

CHAPTER X.

UNCLE ROB AND DICK ARGUE IT OUT.

"Is that in your line, Dick?" said Inspector Robson. "You were wishing for something startling, and I should say you've got it."

"It is hardly startling enough yet," Dick replied, "but there's no telling what it may lead to. Have you formed an opinion?"

"I haven't heard lately of any dead bodies being found that couldn't be identified, but it looks to me as if the man has made away with himself."

"No, uncle. I'll take his own word for it that he'd do his duty and fight it out to the bitter end."

"Mightn't he have said so to his wife to quiet her? And even if it wasn't in his mind then, it might have come suddenly afterwards. When a man's in the state he was, there's no telling what he might do on the spur of the moment. I don't throw doubt on Mrs. Death's story, though I've heard some queer stories in my time and believed in them at the time they were told, only to find out a little later that there wasn't one word of truth in them. The lengths that people'll go to whose minds are unsettled is astonishing. Astonishing!" he repeated reflectively. "How often do you hear of men giving themselves up as murderers when they're as innocent as the babe unborn!"

"Suppose we try and follow Mrs. Death's story out, uncle," said Dick.

"Go ahead. Upon my word, Dick, I almost fancy I hear that poor child's cough now--the ghost of a cough travelling through the fog. It will make a ghost of her, I'm afraid, before she's many weeks older."

"Poor little mite!" said Dick, and paused a moment. "Uncle Rob, you've the kindest heart that ever beat."

"Pooh, pooh, my lad, the fog's got into your foolish noddle."

"You don't deserve," pursued Dick, very earnestly, "to have trouble come upon you unaware----"

"Dick!" cried Inspector Robson, startled by the unusual earnestness with which the words were spoken no less than by the words themselves. "Trouble come upon me unaware! Do you know what you are saying, my lad?"

"I was thinking," said Dick, in some confusion, "of the trouble that comes unexpectedly to many people without their being prepared for it."

"Oh, that! Well, when such trouble comes we've got to bear it and meet it like men."

It was in Dick's mind, though not upon his tongue, "But if it comes upon you through the one you hold most dear, through Florence, dear to me as to you, how will you bear it then?"

"Go on with the story of Abel Death, Dick. The last we see of him is when he sits at the table in his lodgings with his head in his hands, and starts up to make one more appeal to Samuel Boyd. The first question is, does he go straight to Catchpole Square, or does he go into a public and get drunk?"

"He goes straight to Catchpole Square, and knocks at Samuel Boyd's door."

"Admitted--for the sake of argument."

"The next question is, does he get into the house?"

"And there," said the Inspector, "we come to a full stop."

"Not at all. Let us consider the possibilities. There are a dozen doors open."

"All opening on different roads, and leading to confusion. Better to have one strong clue than a dozen to distract your mind."

"Granted," said Dick; "but in the absence of that one strong clue I shall leave all the doors open till I see what is behind them. Let us suppose that Abel Death gets into the house."

"Openly or secretly, Dick?"

"Openly. Samuel Boyd admits him. He takes delight in playing with those whom he oppresses, in worrying and torturing them, in leading them on to hope, and then plunging them into despair. Abel Death being in the house, the question arises did he ever get out of it?"

"What are you thinking of, Dick? Murder?"

"The man is gone, and left no trace behind. If he had committed suicide it is a thousand to one that his body would have been found and identified."

"True."

"How do men commit suicide?" continued Dick. "I will confine myself to four methods: by poison, by hanging, by shooting, by drowning. It would have been difficult for Abel Death to purchase poison; his nerves were unstrung, and an inquiry for poison across the counter would have caused suspicion; the state of agitation he was in would have prevented the invention of a plausible explanation. We put poison aside. A pistol he could not have possessed, because of his poverty. We put shooting aside. Hanging comes next; but if he had resorted to that means of ending his life a very few hours would have sufficed to make the matter public. There would be no mystery to clear up. This reduces us to drowning. The water-ways of London do not hide many secrets of this nature, and had he sought death in the river his body would have been washed ashore."

"Therefore, Dick," said Inspector Robson, looking at his nephew in admiration, "not suicide."

"Therefore, uncle, not suicide."

"He may have run away."

"With what object? His pockets were empty, and the idea of unfaithfulness to his wife is preposterous."

"Very well. Let us get back to the main point. What has become of Abel Death. We left him in Samuel Boyd's house, and we decide that he did not come out of it. I am going to have my say now."

"Fire away."

"The man not coming out of the house, the natural conclusion is that he is dead, and if he did not meet his death by suicide there has been murder done. To be sure," he said, reflectively, "there are other probabilities. He might have had heart disease--might have fallen down in a fit which put an end to him. Assuming this, what course would Samuel Boyd, or any sensible person, pursue? He would give information--his own safety depended upon it. A doctor's certificate as to the cause of death would clear him. He

does nothing of the sort. He keeps himself locked up in the house, and refuses to answer the repeated knocks at his street door. I have heard you say he lives alone, and that no servant sleeps in the house."

"That is so."

"Catchpole Square leads to nowhere. It is, in a certain sense, out of the world. Can you tell me, of your own knowledge, whether Samuel Boyd keeps sums of money in his house?"

"Of my own positive knowledge I cannot tell you; but I am convinced that he does."

"What we've got to look to in these cases," said Inspector Robson, sagely, "is motive--motive. The mainspring in a watch keeps it going; motive is the mainspring in a man, and it keeps him going. Now, what motive had Samuel Boyd for murdering Abel Death--always supposing, Dick, that there was a murder? He had nothing to gain by it, and it was not he who went to Abel Death's house, but Abel Death who went to his. And went with anger and despair in his heart. Put it the other way----yes, by the Lord!" he cried, as if a light had suddenly broken upon him. "Put it the other way. There was a motive for Abel Death murdering Samuel Boyd. He was poor, and in desperate need of money; his master was rich, and had refused to give it to him. The motive was robbery, by fair means or foul. If this is what occurred Abel Death's disappearance is explained. He's in hiding somewhere, or has managed to get on board a ship bound for foreign parts." He broke off with a laugh. "What nonsense am I talking? My wits are going wool-gathering. You've fairly muddled me, Dick, by the serious way you've spoken of this affair, in which, after all, I don't see anything mysterious. I've known scores of cases where people have disappeared, and have come back after a few days or weeks, or months even, in the most natural manner possible. Be careful of what you do, my lad, or you're likely to get yourself in a tangle."

"I'll be careful, uncle. You will see me at the magistrate's court in the morning. Good night."

"Can't I persuade you to come home with me?" said Inspector Robson, in his kindest tone.

"No; my mind's quite made up on that point."

He walked towards the door, Inspector Robson looking ruefully and affectionately after him, when he turned and said,

"By the way, uncle, have you seen Mr. Reginald lately?"

"Not since last Sunday week, when he dropped in, as usual. Him and Florence went out for a walk together."

"As usual," said Dick, lightly.

"As usual," said Inspector Robson, gravely. "He's a gentlemanly young fellow."

"Yes."

"Been to France and Germany, and to good schools for education."

"Did he tell you that himself?"

"Florence told us."

"Dear little Florence!" Such wistful tenderness and regret in his voice!

"Aunt Rob thinks all the world of him," said Inspector Robson, his voice also charged with tenderness and regret.

"I know she does."

Inspector Robson stepped to Dick's side, and laid his hand caressingly on the young man's shoulder. "Dick! Dick!"

"No nonsense of that sort, uncle," said Dick, gently shaking himself free. "I've been going to ask you once or twice whether you put any other name to Reginald."

"Now you mention it, Dick, I never have."

"Has Aunt Rob, or Florence?"

"Not that I'm aware of. We've always called him Mr. Reginald. It's not a bad name, Dick."

"Not at all a bad name, but most people have two. Good night, uncle."

"Good night, Dick, if you must go." Other words were struggling to his lips, but before he could utter them Dick was off.

"It never struck me before," mused Inspector Robson, sadly. "Can that be the reason----" He did not say the reason of what, and his cogitation ended with, "Poor Dick! I hope not--I hope not!"

CHAPTER XI.

DICK REMINGTON REVIEWS THE PAST.

Dick Remington also mused as he made his way through the white mist. His thoughts, put into words, ran in this wise:

"Come, old man, let us review the past, and see how we stand. If I'm not mistaken Aunt Rob has hit the nail straight on the head, and Uncle Rob made a clumsy blow at it. But my secret is mine, and I will guard it jealously.

"Dear little Florence! My chum, my comrade, almost from the day of her birth. Boys aren't generally fond of babies, but I was of her from the first; and when as a child she promised to be my wife when she grew up I did not think of it as a thistledown promise that time would lightly blow away. At that age we do not think; our hearts, our souls, are like a prism which leaps into light and colour when light and colour shine upon it. Had I been wiser I might have believed that a more enduring flower than thistledown would grow up in its place, a flower that would bloom and shed its sweetness and fragrance upon me through all the years to come. Thank God I was not wiser, for we were very happy then. It was only when graver responsibilities forced themselves upon me that I knew, as I know now, that she and she alone could bring happiness into my life. Fate willed it otherwise. It can never be.

"Would it have been otherwise had I myself been different from what I am, been firmer of purpose, had won respect and esteem for sterling qualities that are not in my nature? Who can tell? We are the sport of circumstance, and drift, and drift, and drift--as I have drifted. You are quite right, Aunt Rob. Your nephew, Dick Remington, has no stability--but he can keep his secret.

"Does Florence suspect it? Sometimes I have thought she has a fear that the love I bear for her is not the love a brother bears for his sister; sometimes I have thought there was a dumb pity in her eyes as she looked at me. And when, with this impression upon me, I have launched into light speech and manner, as though I were incapable of deeper feeling, I have noticed the relief it gave her to learn that she was mistaken. Of one thing she may be sure. That there is no sacrifice I would hesitate to make to secure her happiness--that she may rely upon me and trust me with implicit confidence--that I am her faithful watchdog, ready to die in her service without hope of reward. Yes, dear Florence--so dear that my heart aches when I think of her--be sure of that.

"She grew into beauty incomparable, and to observe this was a daily delight to me. But I love her chiefly for her gentleness, her purity, her dear womanly ways which find their best expression in her kindness and sweetness to all around her. We lived our quiet life, disturbed only by my harum-scarum habits, and then Mr. Reginald stepped into the picture--Mr. Reginald Boyd, son of Samuel Boyd of Catchpole Square. That was before I took service with the old hunks, and it was because of the son that I sought and obtained a situation in the father's office. For I said to myself, 'Here is this young gentleman introducing himself simply as Mr. Reginald, when I, from my previous knowledge of him (of which he was not aware) know him to be the son of that man. What reason has he for the suppression?' There was no acquaintance between us. Happening to be in conversation one day with a constable in the neighbourhood of Catchpole Square a young gentleman passed with a flower in his coat. There was something in him that struck me as bearing a resemblance to myself, the advantage being on his side. A free and easy manner, a certain carelessness of gesture, an apparent disregard of conventionality, a bright smile (which I have not), a grace (which I have not). He gave the constable a friendly word and walked on without looking at me. 'Who is that gentleman?' I inquired. 'Mr. Reginald,' the constable answered, 'son of Samuel Boyd, though you would hardly believe it if you knew the pair of them.' I thought no more of the matter, and saw no more of Mr. Reginald, till he made his appearance one evening in Aunt Rob's house. He did not recognise me, but I knew him immediately.

"We were introduced by Florence. 'My cousin, Dick Remington,' she said, 'Mr. Reginald.' There was a blush on her cheek, a shy look in her eyes. I waited for his other name. Why did it not come? Because the name of Samuel Boyd was held in general detestation? It was a fair inference that that was his reason for concealing it.

"He became a regular visitor to the house, and I perceived that his visits were eagerly looked forward to by Florence. Have I delayed too long? I thought. Have I been foolishly silent as to the real feelings I entertain for the dear girl, and given another man the chance of occupying the place in her heart which it was my dearest wish to fill? The thought was torture; I seemed to awake from a dream. For had I spoken in time my love for her might have awakened a responsive echo in her breast. I cannot speak with certainty as to this, but it might have been. One day I saw Florence and Mr. Reginald walking out together, he speaking with animation, she listening modestly with head cast down. I was careful that they should not see me. They passed from my sight through the garden of hope and love, I pursued my way through an arid waste."

Some spiritual resemblance between the arid waste of his hopes and the arid waste of white mist through which he was walking seemed to strike him here. It brought a sudden chill to his heart. Love that was hopeless could have found no more emphatic illustration than the silence and desolation by which he was surrounded. The light of

heaven had died out of the world. No star shone, no moon shed its peaceful rays upon the earth, and for a few moments he allowed the deathlike lethargy of nature to overpower him. Through the silence stole a muffled voice:

"Lost, lost for ever is the love you hoped to gain. Not for you the tender look and word, the sweet embrace, love's kiss upon your going and returning, the prattle of children's voices, the patter of little feet, the clinging of little arms. Not for you the joys of Home!"

So powerfully was he affected by these melancholy thoughts that he involuntarily raised his hand, as if to avoid a blow.

CHAPTER XII.

DICK CONFESSES HOW HE BEHAVED HIMSELF IN THE SERVICE OF SAMUEL BOYD.

But Dick's nature was too elastic for morbid reflections such as these to hold possession of him for any length of time.

"Come, come, old man," ran again the tenor of his musings, "this sort of thing won't do, you know. What's the use of crying for the moon? Leave that to children. Now where did I leave off? Ah--where Mr. Reginald was a regular visitor at Aunt Rob's house. All that time the name of Boyd was not mentioned by Florence or her parents. Nor did it pass my lips.

"I took service with Mr. Samuel Boyd in order to obtain a clue to his son's suppression of his name. Before I had been with him a week I gauged his character. Devoid of the least sign of generous sentiment, crafty, tricky, mean, overbearing to those in his power, fawning to those above his station from whom he hoped to obtain some advantage--such is the character of this odious man, whose son was then winning, or had won, his way into Florence's heart. If there is any truth in the adage, 'Like father, like son,' what a fate is in store for her! Fervently do I trust that this is not so, though there are tricks of inheritance from which it is impossible to escape.

"Not once did I see Mr. Reginald in his father's house, nor did Mr. Boyd make the slightest reference to him. Had Mr. Boyd any other residence in which he and his son were in the habit of meeting? No--he lived in Catchpole Square, had his meals there, slept there, transacted his business there. Yet his son was in London, within easy distance of him. It was obvious that they were not on friendly terms. I set my wits to work to ascertain the cause, but cautious as I was, I found myself baffled at every turn. Convinced that Mr. Boyd would turn me out of the house the moment his suspicions were aroused, the task I had undertaken proved more difficult than I had anticipated. If I kept secret watch upon him he kept secret watch upon me. That he had no confidence in me is not strange, for he has no confidence in any man. And the cunning tricks he played! He would leave me alone and go downstairs and slam the street door, to make me believe that he had left the house. Then, though not another sound had reached my ears, he would suddenly enter the room, treading like a cat, and with a sly smile on his lips, and his cunning eyes would wander around to assure himself that not an article had been shifted or removed.

"I remained with him three months, and discovered--nothing. During the first two months I did not tell them at home where I was employed, and they teazed me about making a secret of it. A week or so before I left Mr. Boyd's service I fired a shot straight at Mr. Reginald. It was on a Sunday, and we were sitting together, chatting as usual, when I said suddenly, 'I don't see, Aunt Rob, why I should continue to make a mystery of the work I am doing. I am clerk to Mr. Samuel Boyd, of Catchpole Square.' Mr. Reginald flushed up, but I took no notice, and went on to say that I had resolved not to stay much longer in the place--that the pay was miserable, that the kind of business done there was disreputable and execrable, and that Samuel Boyd was one of the trickiest and cunningest fellows in all London; in fact, I gave him the worst of characters, and my only excuse is that he thoroughly deserved it. 'That's another situation thrown up,' said Aunt Rob. 'Oh, Dick, Dick, a rolling stone gathers no moss.' 'Would you advise me to stop with such a man, and gather dirt?' I asked. 'No, I would not,' she answered emphatically. 'That Samuel Boyd must be an out-and-out rascal.' 'He is,' I said. 'You would hardly believe the things I've seen in his office, the pitiless ruin he brings upon people.' Mr. Reginald said never a word; the flush died out of his face, and it turned white. I looked at Florence--no sign upon her face that she knew anything of the man we were speaking of. Here was proof positive that Mr. Reginald had introduced himself under false colours.

"As all Mr. Boyd's other clerks had done, I left at a moment's notice, but I did not give him the opportunity of discharging me. I discharged him. He had played me one of his usual tricks, pretending to leave the house and sneaking in noiselessly behind my back and looking over my shoulder. It happened that, with my thoughts on Florence and Mr. Reginald, I had idly scribbled his name on a piece of paper, Mr. Reginald Boyd. Before I could put the paper away he had seen it. 'Ah,' he said, without any show of passion, 'I have found you out at last, you scoundrel!' 'Scoundrel yourself,' I cried. 'Mr. Samuel Boyd, I discharge you. I've had about enough of you.' 'I've had more than enough of you,' he snarled. 'You came here to spy upon me, did you? You and your Mr. Reginald are confederates, are you, and you wormed yourself into my service in pursuance of some plot against me. I'll prosecute the pair of you for conspiracy.' 'You are a fool as well as a knave, Mr. Samuel Boyd,' I said, laughing in his face. 'As for prosecuting me, shall I fetch a policeman, or will you go for one? I shall have something to tell him that will get into the papers. It will make fine reading.' He turned white at this. 'Go,' he said, throwing open the door. And I went, without asking for the five days' pay due to me, to which, perhaps, I was not entitled as I left him without giving him notice.

"Now, Dick, old man, what is to be done? The straight thing is to speak first to Mr. Reginald himself, and that I'll do before I'm many days older."

Here Dick's meditations came to an end. There were no indications that the fog was clearing, but his service with Samuel Boyd had made him familiar with the neighbourhood, and he threaded his way towards Catchpole Square without much difficulty. He had not met a soul on the road; the streets were quite deserted. "A man could almost fancy," he thought, "that he was walking through the vaults of death." In Shore Street--the backs of the houses in which faced the fronts of the houses in Catchpole Square--he stumbled against a human being who caught him by the arm.

"Who are you when you're at home?" demanded the man. "Here--let's have a look at you. I've had a large dose of shadders to-night; it's a relief to get hold of bone and muscle."

He pulled out his bull's-eye lamp and held it up to Dick's face, who laughingly said, "Well, what do you make of my face? You're cleverer than I am, Applebee, if you can distinguish features on such a night as this."

"Why, if it ain't Mr. Dick Remington!" cried Constable Applebee. "Beg your pardon, sir, but I've been that put out to-night that I can't be sure of anything. If anybody was to say to me, 'Applebee, that head on your shoulders don't belong to you,' I'd half believe him, I would indeed, sir. What with shadders that wouldn't give you a civil answer when you spoke to 'em, and that you could walk right through, and taking hold of flesh and blood that slipped through your fingers like a ghost, to say nothing of the fog, which is a pretty large order--well, if all that ain't enough to worry a night policeman, I'd like to know what is."

CHAPTER XIII.

A LIGHT IN THE HOUSE OF DR. PYE.

"Worry enough, in all conscience," said Dick, "and you've got a level head, too, if any member of the force has. You're the last man I should have expected to be scared by shadows."

"Not what you might call scared," replied Constable Applebee, unwilling to admit as much to a layman; "put out, sir, put out--that's the right word. A man may be put out in so many ways. His wife may put him out--and she often does--an underdone chop may put him out--a fractious child may put him out--likewise buttons. It's what we're born to."

"Well, say put out," said Dick with a hearty laugh. "And by shadows, too, of all things in the world! Still, one might be excused on such a night as this. The mist floats, shadows rise, and there you are. All sorts of fancies crept into my head as I walked along, and if I'd been employed on duty as monotonous as yours I have no doubt I should have heard sounds and seen shapes that have no existence."

"You talk like a book, sir."

"What was the nature of the flesh and blood that slipped through your fingers like a ghost, Applebee?"

"Human nature, sir. I'll take my oath it was a woman. I had her by the arm, and presto! she was gone!"

"A woman," said Dick, thinking of Mrs. Death. "Did she have a child with her, a poor little mite with a churchyard cough?"

"I don't call to mind a child. It was in Catchpole Square it happened. I shall report it."

"Of course you will," said Dick, convinced that it was Mrs. Death, but wondering why she should have been so anxious to escape. "Talking of Catchpole Square, have you seen anything this last day or two of Mr. Samuel Boyd?"

"Haven't set eyes on him for a week past. To make sure, now--is it a week? No, it was Friday night that I saw him last. I can fix the time because a carriage pulled up at

Deadman's Court, and a lady got out. She went through the court, followed by the footman."

"Did she stop long, do you know?"

"Couldn't have stopped very long. I hung about a bit, and when I come round again the carriage was driving away. All sorts of people deal with Samuel Boyd, poor and rich, high and low. That house of his could tell tales."

"So could most houses, Applebee."

"True enough, sir. There's no city in the world so full of mystery as London. We're a strange lot, sir. I read in a book once that every house contains a skeleton. The human mind, sir," said Constable Applebee, philosophically, "the human mind is a box, and no one but the man who owns that mind knows what is shut up in it."

It was a pregnant opening for discussion, but Dick did not pursue it. He returned to the subject that was engrossing his thoughts.

"Samuel Boyd kept a clerk,----"

"And I pity the poor devil," interjected the constable.

"So do I. The name of his last clerk is Abel Death. You've noticed him, I dare say."

"Oh, yes, I've noticed him. A weedy sort of chap--looks as it he had all the cares of the world on his shoulders. I didn't know his name, though. Abel Death! If it was mine, I'd change it."

"Have you seen him lately?"

"Let me think, now. It was Friday night when I saw him last. I noticed him particularly, because he staggered a bit, walked zig-zag like, as if he'd had a glass too much. That was what I thought at first, but I altered my opinion when I caught sight of his face. It wasn't so much like a man who'd been drinking, but like one who was fairly demented. Any special reason for asking about him, sir?"

"No special reason," replied Dick, not feeling himself justified in revealing what had passed in the police station, "You would call Mr. Death a respectable person, I suppose?"

"When there's nothing against a man," said Constable Applebee, "you're bound in common fairness to call him respectable. From the little I know of him I should say, poor, but respectable. If we come to that, there's plenty of poor devils in the same boat."

"Too many, Applebee. I can't help thinking of that woman you caught by the arm. It was a curious little adventure."

"It was, sir, and I don't know that I was ever more nonplussed. There's nothing curious in her being in Catchpole Square. She might have slipped in there to sleep the night out, not having money enough to pay for a bed. Pond and me happened to meet on the boundary of our beats, and we strolled into the Square. I could have swore that she was creeping along the wall; perhaps she was scared at the sight of us, and had a reason for not wanting to fall in the hands of the law."

"That will hardly hold water," said Dick. "She could have had no clearer a sight of you than you had of her. There have been too many bad deeds committed in dark places in the dead of the night, and seeing something moving that she couldn't account for, she was frightened and ran away. Did you call out to her?"

"I did. 'Now, then,' I cried, 'what are you up to?' Not a word did she answer. Then I caught hold of her; then she vanished. Which goes to prove," said Constable Applebee, contemplatively, "that she wasn't one of the regular ones. If she'd been a regular one she'd have cheeked us. Not being a regular one, what business did she have there? Anyway Catchpole Square ain't exactly the place I would choose for a night's lodging."

"Beggars can't be choosers," remarked Dick.

"Right you are, sir. They can't."

The conversation slackened, and the men walked slowly along Shore Street, the constable, like a zealous officer, trying the doors and looking up at the windows.

"The people inside," he said, "are better off than we are. They're snugly tucked up between the sheets, dreaming of pleasanter things than tramping a thick fog."

"There's somebody there," said Dick, pointing to a first floor window, where, through the mist, a light could be dimly seen, "who isn't between the sheets. See how the light shifts, like a will-o'-the-wisp."

"That's Dr. Pye's house, where the midnight oil is always burning. Yes, he's awake, the doctor; it's my belief he never sleeps. A clever gentleman, Dr. Pye, as chockful of science as an egg is of meat. Do you happen to be acquainted with him, sir?"

"No."

"A strange character, sir. The things they tell of him is beyond belief. I've heard say that he's discovered the secret of prolonging life, and of making an old man young."

"But you haven't heard that he has ever done it."

"No, or I might have asked him what his charge was for taking ten or twenty years off. Perhaps it's as well, though, to fight shy of that sort of thing. What they say of Dr. Pye may be true, or it mayn't, but you may make sure that he's always at his experiments. Pass his house at any hour of the night you like, and you may depend upon seeing that light burning in his window."

"Those are the men who make the wonderful discoveries we hear of from time to time. Think of what the world was and what it is. How did people do without reading? How did people do without gas? How did they do without steam? How did they do without electricity? That little light burning in Dr. Pye's window may mean greater wonders than ever was found in Aladdin's cave. As Shakespeare says, Applebee, 'What a piece of work is man!'"

"Ah," observed Constable Applebee, with a profound shake of his head, "he might well say that, sir."

"Putting a supposititious case," said Dick, and as Constable Applebee remarked to his wife next day when he gave her an account of this conversation, "the way he went on and the words he used fairly flabbergasted me"--"Putting a supposititious case, let us suppose that you and I fell asleep as we are standing here, and woke up in fifty years, what astounding things we should see!"

"It won't bear thinking of, sir."

"Then we won't think of it. Applebee, I am surprised that you have not asked me why I am wandering through the streets on such a night and at such an hour, when I ought to be snug in bed, dreaming of--angels."

"Who am I, sir, that I should be putting a parcel of questions to you?"

"You exhibit a delicacy for which you deserve great credit. I will make a clean breast of it, Applebee. The fact is, I am looking for a lodging."

"You always was a bit of a wag, sir," said Constable Applebee, with twinkling eyes.

"Was I? But I assure you I am not wagging now. Do you know of a room to let in a decent house in the neighbourhood, where they would give their young man lodger a latchkey?"

"Now, are you serious, sir?"

"As a judge."

"Well, then, there's Constable Pond, sir. He's taken a house in Paradise Row, and there's a room to let in it; he mentioned it to me only to-night. If you're really in earnest he'd jump at you."

"From which metaphor," said Dick, with mock seriousness, "I judge that he would consider me an eminently fit person to be entrusted with a latchkey."

"That's the ticket, sir," said Constable Applebee, bursting with laughter. "Upon my word, you're the merriest gentleman I've ever known. It's as good as a play, it is."

"Better than many I've seen, I hope," said Dick, still with his mock serious air, which confirmed Constable Applebee in his belief that the young fellow was having a joke with him. "Am I mistaken in supposing that there is a Mrs. Pond?"

"To be sure there is, and as nice a woman as ever breathed. No family at present, but my missis tells me"--here he dropped his voice, as though he were communicating a secret of a sacred nature--"that Mrs. Pond has expectations."

"May they be realised in a happy hour! I'll pay a visit to the Ponds to-morrow, and if the room is not snapped up in the meantime by another person you will hear of me as their young man lodger. Good night, Applebee."

"Good night, sir."

Constable Applebee looked after him till he was swallowed up in the prevailing gloom, and then resumed his duties.

"What a chap that is!" he ruminated. "You can't mention a subject he ain't up in. That notion of his of falling asleep and waking up in fifty years ain't half a bad one. He does put ideas into a man's head. It's an education to talk to him."

Dick did not hesitate as to his route. Turning the corner of Shore Street he walked to Deadman's Court, and through it into Catchpole Square, where he paused before the house of Samuel Boyd.

"No midnight oil burning there," he mused, his eyes searching the windows for some sign of life. "The place is as still as death itself. I'll try Mrs. Death's dodge. If Mr. Boyd comes down I'll ask him if he has a room to let."

He smiled at the notion, and applied himself to the knocker. But though he knocked, and knocked vigorously again and again, and threw stones at the upper panes of glass, and listened at the door, he heard no movement within the house.

"There's a mystery inside these walls," said Dick, "and I'll pluck out its heart, or know the reason why. But how to obtain an entrance? The adjoining houses are empty. Is there a door loose in one of them?"

There was no door loose; even if there had been, Dick, upon reflection, did not see how it would have been of assistance to him. There was a dead wall at the back of the house.

"That way, perhaps," said Dick.

He left the Square, and groped in the direction of the dead wall. It was about ten feet in height--a smooth expanse of cement, with not a foothold in it by which he could mount to the top. A rope with a grapnel at the end would meet the case, and Dick determined to procure one, and pay another visit to the place the following night.

He lingered in the neighbourhood, sitting down on a doorstep now and again, and closing his eyes for a few minutes' doze. During these intervals of insensibility the strangest fancies presented themselves. He was with Mrs. Death and Gracie in the police station, listening to the story she had told, which now was exaggerated and distorted in a thousand different ways. "My husband, my husband!" she moaned "What shall I do without him? What will the children do without him?" The police station was instantly crowded with a great number of ragged little elfs, who, with misery in their faces, wailed, "What shall we do without him? What shall we do without him?" And then, in the midst of a sudden silence, Gracie's hoarse voice, saying, "You will find father, won't you?" An appeal immediately taken up by the horde of children, "You will find father, won't you? You will find father! You will find father!" The vision faded, and he saw Abel Death

staggering through a deserted street in which only one sickly yellow light was burning. He was talking to himself, and his face was convulsed with passion. Behind him slunk the figure of Samuel Boyd--and behind him, Mr. Reginald and Florence. Good God! What brought them into the tragic mystery? What possible or impossible part had they played in it? The torture of the dreamer's mind was momentarily arrested by the ringing out of one dread word, clear and shrill as from the mouth of a clarion!

"MURDER!"

Dick started to his feet, his forehead bathed in perspiration. Had the word really been uttered, and by whom? He stood in the midst of silence and darkness.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LADY'S HANDKERCHIEF WHICH CONSTABLE POND PICKED UP IN CATCHPOLE SQUARE.

"The Little Busy Bee" was an afternoon newspaper with a great circulation, which took for its motto the familiar lines:--

"How doth the Little Busy Bee
Improve each shining hour,
And gather honey all the day
From ev'ry opening flow'r."

To this journal Dick had been an occasional contributor, and he was responsible for a paragraph which appeared in its columns on the day following Mrs. Death's visit to the police station:

"BISHOP STREET POLICE COURT.--A respectable woman, in great distress of mind, accompanied by her little daughter, begged permission to make a statement to the magistrate. It appears that her husband, Mr. Abel Death, residing at 7, Draper's Mews, and employed as a clerk in the office of Mr. Samuel Boyd of Catchpole Square, quite suddenly received his discharge last Friday night, and came home greatly distressed by the dismissal, as well as by pecuniary difficulties and by sickness in his family. Later in the night, at about ten o'clock, he went out, with the intention, as he stated, of making an appeal to his employer to reinstate him. He did not return home, and from that night his wife has heard nothing of him. Mrs. Death has been several times to Catchpole Square, in the hope of obtaining some information from Mr. Boyd, but as her knocking at the door has met with no response the presumption is that that gentleman is out of town. The magistrate said he was sure the press would give publicity to her husband's disappearance, and there was no doubt, if the paragraphs in the papers came to Mr. Boyd's notice, that he would write and tell her what he knows of the movements of his late clerk. Compassion was aroused by the evident ill health of the child, who appears to be suffering from bronchial trouble, and whose efforts to restrain herself from coughing, in order that the court should not be disturbed, were very pitiable. The magistrate awarded the poor woman ten shillings from the poor box, and she left the court in the deepest distress, her little girl clinging to her gown."

Dick was surprised not to see his uncle in court. Inspector Robson had promised to be present, and it was seldom that he broke a promise. Ascribing his absence to official duties elsewhere, Dick parted with Mrs. Death at the police court door, and promising to

call and see her next day, he wrote his paragraph for "The Little Busy Bee," and leaving it at the office, went to Paradise Row to secure the room which Mrs. Pond had to let.

It was that little woman's washing day, and, like the maid in the nursery rhyme, she was hanging up clothes in her back yard. Hearing the knock she hurried to the door, with her sleeves tucked up to her shoulder, and wiping her hands on a towel. She wore an apron with a bib, and tucked in the bib was the lady's handkerchief which Constable Pond had picked up the previous night. She had been about to plunge it into the washtub when she heard the knock, and she had hastily slipped it in there as she hurried to the door.

"Constable Applebee tells me you have a room to let," said Dick.

"Yes, we have, sir," replied Mrs. Pond, her rosy face, which was of the apple-dumpling order, glowing with delight, "and very good it is of him to recommend us. I hope you won't mind the state I'm in. I'm doing the washing." She said this very simply; there was no false pride about Mrs. Pond.

"I shall ask you to do mine," said Dick, "if the room suits me."

"I shouldn't mind, sir. I'll show you the room if you'll be good enough to follow me."

She preceded him up the narrow flight of stairs, and opened the door. It was a small room, but it was clean and tidy, and sufficiently furnished for Dick's requirements.

"The rent?" asked Dick.

"Would three-and-six a week be too much, sir?" she asked anxiously.

"Not a bit," replied Dick, "if you'll give me a latchkey."

"We can do that, sir. Pond had an extra one made on purpose. 'If it's a gentleman,' he said, 'let him have it. If it's a lady she can't have a latchkey, no, not if she begged for it on her bended knees."

"I'll take the room, Mrs. Pond," said Dick, with a genial smile, "and I'll give you a week's rent in advance, if it's only for the confidence you place in me."

Nervously plucking at her bib as she received the money, she displaced the handkerchief, which fluttered to the ground. Dick stooped to pick it up, and his face grew white as he saw, written in marking ink in a corner, the name of "Florence." He

recognised Florence's writing; at that moment he had one at his breast, bearing the same inscription.

CHAPTER XV.

DICK COMES TO AN ARRANGEMENT WITH CONSTABLE POND.

"Dear me, sir!" said Mrs. Pond, who had noticed that he had turned pale. "Are you taken ill?"

"It is nothing, nothing," replied Dick, hurriedly, and contradicted himself by adding, "It must be the perfume on this handkerchief. There are perfumes that make me feel faint."

"I don't think there's any scent on it, sir," said Mrs. Pond, "leastways, I didn't notice any. Some scents do have that effect upon people. There's a cousin of mine who faints dead away at the smell of a hot boiled egg. There's no accounting for things, is there, sir?"

"No, there's not. May I ask if you got this handkerchief from the lady whose name is marked on it?"

"Oh, no, sir. Pond gave it me."

"Did he obtain it from the lady?"

"There!" exclaimed Mrs. Pond. "That's just what I said to him. We had a regular scene. 'You're jealous, Polly,' he said, laughing, and he worked me up so that I as good as threw it in the fire. Then he told me that he knew no more about the lady than I did, and that he picked it up in the street."

"Whereabouts, Mrs. Pond?"

"He didn't say, sir. It's pretty, ain't it? Quite a lady's. I shouldn't have minded if he'd picked up a dozen of 'em. I've got an aunt who is always picking up things. It commenced when she was a little girl. She found a farthing that had been sanded over, and thinking it was a golden sovereign she went into a milk-shop and asked for change. She cried her eyes out when they told her what it was, There's hardly a week she don't find something. Some people are made that way, sir."

"Yes, yes," said Dick, rather impatiently, "is your husband in the house? I should like to see him."

"I expect him home every minute, sir. Why, there he is, opening the street door just as we're talking of him. If you'll excuse me, sir, I'll run down to him."

"Do. And ask him to be kind enough to come up and speak to me."

She nodded, and ran from the room with a light step, leaving the handkerchief behind her in her haste to tell her husband that she had got a lodger; and presently Constable Pond's heavier step was heard on the stairs. His face beamed with satisfaction when Dick, stepping into the passage, invited him into the room.

"Can I believe my eyes, sir!" he exclaimed. "This is what I call a downright piece of good luck. Well, I am glad to see you here, sir!" His eyes fell upon the handkerchief in Dick's hand. "If I don't mistake, that's the handkerchief my missis left behind her. She asked me to fetch it down to her."

"It is about this handkerchief I wish to speak to you," said Dick; "and for the sake of all parties, Constable Pond, it is as well that our conversation should be private and confidential."

"Certainly, sir," said Constable Pond, his countenance falling at the unusual gravity of Dick's voice and manner.

"She told me you picked it up in the street."

"She told you true, sir."

Now did Constable Pond feel the sting of conscience; now did it whisper that he had been guilty of a breach of duty in not depositing the handkerchief at the police station, with an account of how he came by it; now did the thought of certain penalties afflict him. Here was Dick Remington, Inspector Robson's own nephew, opening up a case with the unuttered words, "From information received."

"I have a particular reason for wishing to know where, and when, and under what circumstances, you found it," said Dick.

"It won't go beyond this room, I hope, sir. You won't use the information against me?"

"I give you my word I will not."

"I ought to have handed it in and made my report," said Constable Pond, with a rueful air, "but I didn't think there was any harm in my giving it to the missis. Applebee and me were in Catchpole Square last night, and he was talking of shadders when he thought he saw one. He run across and caught hold of it, but it slipped from him and was gone

like a flash. He called to me and we ran after it through Deadman's Court; we couldn't see which way we were going, so we knocked our heads together, and my helmet fell off. I stooped to pick it up, and there was the handkerchief underneath it. If I had considered a moment I shouldn't have put it in my pocket, but we don't always do the thing we ought."

"You did not tell Applebee that you had found anything?"

"No, sir, I did not, and sorry enough I am for it now. It sha'n't occur again, I promise you."

"As the matter has gone so far without anybody knowing anything about it but ourselves, I don't see the necessity of mentioning it to anyone."

"If such is your wish, sir," said Constable Pond, gaining confidence, "it sha'n't be."

"And tell your wife not to speak about it."

"I'll tell her, sir."

"Because you see, Mr. Pond, as it is too late to undo what's done, it might get you into trouble."

"I see that, sir," said Constable Pond, ruefully.

"So there's an end of the matter. As for the handkerchief I'll take possession of it, and if it should happen that any question is raised concerning it--of which there is not the least probability--I will say that I found it. That will clear you entirely."

"I'm ever so much obliged to you for getting me out of the mess," said Constable Pond.

Shaking hands with him, Dick accompanied him downstairs, and after receiving the latchkey and exchanging a few pleasant words with Mrs. Pond, he left the house greatly troubled in his mind.

"There's more in this than meets the eye, Polly," said Constable Pond, when he had explained to her what had passed between him and Dick. "That young fellow spoke fair and square, but he's got something up his sleeve, for all that."

"Oh, you silly!" answered Mrs. Pond. "I know what he's got up his sleeve."

"Do you, now?" said Constable Pond, refreshing himself with a kiss. "Well, if that don't beat everything! Give it a name, old girl."

"Why, a sweetheart, you goose, and her name's Florence. He's going straight to her this minute."

"Is he? Then I hope she'll be able to satisfy him why she was in Catchpole Square last night--always supposing that it was her as dropped the handkerchief there."

Mrs. Pond was not far wrong, for Dick was now on his way to Aunt Rob's house, in the hope of seeing Florence, over whom some trouble seemed to be hanging. He tried in vain to rid himself of the belief that it was Florence whom Constable Applebee had surprised in Catchpole Square; all the probabilities pointed that way. In heaven's name what took her there at that hour of the night? Search his mind as he might, he could find no answer to the question. The handkerchief was hers, but there were a hundred ways of accounting for its being in the possession of another woman. Still, the longer he thought the heavier seemed to grow the weight of circumstantial evidence. Fearing he knew not what he accelerated his steps, as if swiftness of motion would ward off the mysterious danger which threatened the woman he adored, the woman who could never be his, but for whose dear sake he would have shed his heart's blood.

CHAPTER XVI.

LETTERS FROM FLORENCE.

Aunt Rob, a healthy, homely woman of forty-five, was standing at the door of her house, looking up and down the street for the form of one she loved, looking up to heaven for a message to ease her bruised heart. A terrible blow had fallen upon her home, and the grief, the fear, the tortured love in her eyes, were pitiable to see. Before Dick was near enough to observe these signs of distress she had caught sight of him and was running towards him, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Oh, Dick, Dick!" she cried. "You have come to tell us about Florence! Where is she? What message has she sent? Is she safe, is she well? Why don't you speak? Can't you see that I'm heartbroken, heartbroken? For God's sake, speak!"

In truth he could not. The overwhelming terror and surprise that fell upon him deprived him for a time of the power of speech; he could do nothing but stare at her in dismay and alarm. When speech was restored to him he said, in a voice as agitated as her own.

"I don't know what you mean, Aunt Rob. I have brought no message from Florence. I came to see her." Involuntarily his hand wandered to his breast, where Florence's handkerchief lay.

"You are deceiving me," she said, her limbs trembling, her face convulsed; "you are punishing me because I said it was time you looked after yourself! Perhaps I was as unhappy as you were when you left the house. If you had been a little more patient with me you would never have gone away." She turned from him, her body shaking with grief.

"Dear Aunt Rob," he said, passing his arm around her, "indeed, indeed there is no thought in my mind that is not charged with love for you and Uncle Rob and Florence. I would lay down my life for you. I see that something terrible has occurred. What is it--where is Florence? But, no, don't answer me in the street. Come inside--come, come!"

His heart beat fast and loud as he led the sobbing woman into the house.

"Don't shut the door, Dick," she sobbed. "It shall never be said that I shut my door against my child. Day and night it shall be open to her if she comes back as she went away, a good and innocent girl. But if she comes back with the loss of her good name----Oh, my God! What am I saying--what am I saying?"

"Ah," said Dick, in a tone of stern reproof, "what are you saying, indeed, Aunt Rob, when you couple Florence's name with thoughts like those? You, her mother, who have had daily proofs of her purity and goodness! My life upon her innocence--my life, my life! Though all the world were against her I would stand by her side, and strike down those who dared defame her. For shame, Aunt Rob, for shame!"

"Oh, Dick, you comfort me--you comfort me!" She took his hand, and kissed it, and he bent forward and kissed her lips. "I would not have said it, but I am torn this way and that with doubt and despair. It's the suspense, Dick, the suspense! Oh, Florence, Florence, the best, the sweetest, the dearest! Where are you, my dear, where are you?"

"Attend to me, Aunt Rob," said Dick, holding himself in control in order that he might the better control her. "You must not go on like this--you must calm yourself--for Florence's sake, for your own and Uncle Rob's. If I am to be of any assistance--and I am here for that purpose, heart and hand--I must know what has happened. Try and be calm and strong, as you have always been, and we shall be able to work our way through this trouble--yes, we shall. That's right--dry your eyes"----

"I have been unkind to you, Dick," she said, with an imploring look at him.

"You have never been unkind--to me or to anyone. It isn't in your nature. Whatever happens to me I've brought upon myself and I'm going to reform and become a pattern to all young fellows who want to be Good (with a capital G, please, Aunt Rob) and don't exactly know how to set about it."

"You'd put heart in a stone, Dick," said Aunt Rob, checking her sobs. "Let me be a minute, and I shall be all right."

The room in which they were conversing looked out upon the street, and turning his back upon his aunt while she was battling with her grief, he peered this way and that, as she had done, and listened for the sound of a familiar footstep in the passage. He raised up a picture of Florence running suddenly in, laughing, with her hair tumbling over her shoulders, as he had often seen it, and throwing her arms round her mother's neck, crying, "Why, what is all this fuss about? Can't a girl go out for a walk without turning the house upside down? Oh, you foolish people!" And then throwing her arms round his neck in her sisterly way, and asking, in pretended anger, what he meant by looking as serious as if the world was coming to an end? He could almost hear her voice. The room was filled with little mementoes of her, dumb memorials with a living spirit in them. There was a framed picture of her on the wall, a lovely face, bright and open, brown eyes in which dwelt the spirit of truth, dark brown hair with a wilful tendency to tumble down and kiss the fair neck--(the most distracting, teasing, bewitching hair; in short,

Florence's hair)--smiling mouth in which there was innocent gaiety, but no sign of weakness; the typical face of a young girl of an ingenuous, trustful nature. A close observer would have detected in it an underlying earnestness, indicating tenacity and firmness of purpose where those qualities were required, and would have judged her one who would go straight to her duty and brave the consequences, whatever they might be. Gazing at that embodiment of happy, healthy springtime Dick said inly, "Florence do anything that is not sweet, and pure, and womanly! I would not believe it if an angel from heaven came down and told me!"

Aunt Rob turned to him, calmer and more composed. "Tears have done me good, Dick," she said. "It would ease a man's heart if he could cry as we can."

"We feel as much, Aunt Rob," he replied.

"I don't doubt it, Dick. Uncle Rob went away with dry eyes in a state of distraction; he is flying everywhere in search of Florence."

"She has gone?" His voice was strange in his ears. Prepared as he was for the news it came as a shock upon him.

"She has gone," said Aunt Rob, covering her face with her hands.

"Don't give way again, aunt. Pull yourself together, and tell me all."

"I will, Dick, as much as I know. You haven't been in the house for a fortnight, or you would have noticed that Florence was changed. She seldom smiled, she neither played nor sang, her step had lost its lightness. She wouldn't let me do anything for her, and I settled it in my mind that it was a lover's quarrel. I must speak about Mr. Reginald, Dick."

"Yes, aunt, go on."

"We had seen for some time that they were fond of each other. There was no regular engagement; it hadn't come to that, but we were young ourselves once, and we knew the ways of young people. So we made Mr. Reginald welcome, and we saw how happy Florence was to have him with us. It was on the tip of my tongue more than once to ask him to tell us more about himself than we knew, but Uncle Rob stopped me. 'All in good time,' he said, 'a few months, or even a year or two, won't make much difference. I'm not in a hurry to get rid of Florence.' More was I, but I was beginning to wish that things were settled, whether it was to be a long engagement or a short one. There was a change in Mr. Reginald, too, I couldn't tell in what way, but there it was in his face. He came

and dined with us Sunday week, and since then I haven't set eyes on him. You know what last night was--the most dreadful fog we have had for years. It was at about five o'clock that I saw Florence with her hat and mantle on. 'Why, child,' I said to her, 'you are never going out in this thick fog!' 'Yes, I am, mother,' she answered. 'Don't fear that I shall be lost; I'll soon be back.' She was as good as her word, for she was home again before Uncle Rob went to the Station, and the three of us had tea together. She helped him on with his coat, and I recollected afterwards how she kissed and clung to him when he wished her good night. It was in her mind then to run away. At eight o'clock there was a knock at the street door, and Florence ran out to answer it. She often did so when she expected a letter from Mr. Reginald. She kept in the passage a little while and I heard the rustling of paper, but she had nothing in her hand when she returned to the room. Her face was very white, and she said she had a headache, and would go to bed early. I asked her if she had received a letter, and she answered, yes, she had, and said, 'Don't ask me any questions about it, please, mother.' 'Do answer me only one,' I begged. 'Have you and Mr. Reginald quarrelled?' 'Oh, no,' she answered, and I knew she was speaking the truth, or she wouldn't have answered at all. She was very gentle and quiet, and I thought to myself, 'Oh, my dear, my dear, why don't you confide in your mother who loves the ground you tread on?' But you know what Florence is, Dick. She takes after me in a good many ways. Nothing will make me speak if I make up my mind not to, and it's the same with her. See, now, how we put our own faults into our children. So we sat at the fireside, and I felt as if there was a wall between us. She had some sewing in her lap, but not a stitch did she do. There she sat, staring into the fire. Ah, I thought, if I could see what you see I should know! Suddenly she knelt down and laid her head in my lap, and it was as much as I could do to keep back my tears. I could have cried easily, but I knew that my dear was in trouble, and that my crying would make it worse. Presently she raised her head and said, 'Mother, you love father very much.' 'With all my heart, darling,' I answered. 'And you have always loved him,' she said again, 'and would have endured anything for him?' My heart fell as I said that I had always loved him, and would do anything in the world for him. She was quiet a few minutes, and then she said, 'You mustn't think I have done anything wrong, mother.' 'I don't, my dear child, I don't,' I said. 'It is only,' she said, 'that sometimes we are pulling two ways at once.' Then she rose, and sitting by my side, laid her head upon my breast. I was nursing my baby again, and would you believe it? I sang an old nursery song and kissed and kissed her, and smoothed her beautiful hair, and we sat so for quite half an hour almost in silence. It was striking nine when she said she would go to bed, and as I didn't feel inclined to sit up alone I went to bed, too. We have been to bed much earlier, Dick, since you went away. Soon after nine all the lights were out and the house was quiet. In the middle of the night I woke and went to her room, and called softly, 'Florence! Florence!' She didn't answer me, and I was glad to think she was asleep. She always keeps her bedroom door locked, or I would have gone in. I get up earlier than she does, and I was down before eight; and there on the mantelshelf was an envelope addressed, 'For Mother,' in

Florence's handwriting. There was a key inside, and my heart beat so that I thought it would jump out of my body as I flew upstairs and opened the door with it. Florence was not in the room, and her bed had not been slept in. But on the dressing table, was another envelope addressed to me. I tore it open, and this is what I found inside."

She handed a sheet of notepaper to Dick, and he read:

"Darling Mother and Father,--I have gone away for a little while because it is my duty to go. Do not be uneasy or unhappy about me. I am quite safe, and very soon--as soon as ever I can--I will let you know where I am, and what it is that took me away. It grieves me sorely to give you a moment's pain, but I am doing what I believe is right. With a heart full of love for you both, my dear, dear Mother and Father,

"Your Ever Loving and Devoted Daughter,

"Florence."

"What do you make of it, Dick?" asked Aunt Rob, her fingers twining convulsively.

"I make so much good out of it," he replied, handing the letter back to her, "that I wonder at your going on in the way you've done. She says she is quite safe, and will let you know soon what took her away. What more do you want to convince you that before long the mystery will be cleared up? Upon my word, I've a good mind to be downright angry with you."

He spoke with so much confidence that she brightened up, but this cheerful view of Florence's flight from home was not the genuine outcome of his thoughts. Had he not disguised his feelings in his desire to comfort Aunt Rob, he would have struck terror to her heart. Every incident that presented itself deepened the shadows which threatened Florence's safety and the peace and happiness of the home of which she was the pride and joy. The latest discovery, that of her flight, pointed almost to the certainty of her having been in Catchpole Square last night, and to her having dropped the handkerchief which Constable Pond had given to his wife. Thankful indeed, was Dick that the man had been guilty of a breach of duty. Had he delivered up the handkerchief at the Bishop Street Police Station, with an account of how he came by it, Florence's father would have recognised it as belonging to his daughter, and he would have had an agonising duty before him. Perplexed and bewildered as Dick was by these developments he succeeded in concealing his anxiety from Aunt Rob's observation.

"Have you any idea, Dick, what she means when she speaks of her duty?" she asked.

"None whatever," he replied. "Can you give me Mr. Reginald's address?"

"No. I never heard where he lived, and never asked him. He has written Florence a good many letters, and now and then she has read me a bit out of them, but she never gave me one to read outright myself. She has left her desk behind her. Would I be justified in breaking it open?"

"No, you would not. It would be showing a sad want of confidence in her. At what time do you expect uncle home?"

"I can't say with certainty. He may come in at any minute, or he mightn't come home till late. He's hunting high and low for Florence, and there's no knowing where he may be. He's got leave for a day's absence from the office. You're not going, Dick?" For Dick had put on his hat, and was buttoning up his coat.

"I must. I've a lot of business to attend to, and I've an idea of a clue which may lead to something."

"You'll be back as soon as you can, won't you? Your room is all ready."

"'I know. Uncle Rob told me. But I can't come back to-night."

"Oh, Dick, haven't you forgiven me for the hard words I said to you? Don't harbour animosity, lad, don't! My temper got the better of me----"

"My dear Aunt Rob," said Dick, interrupting her, "no son could love a mother more than I love you. If I were base enough to harbour animosity towards you or yours I shouldn't deserve to live. There's the postman's knock!"

They both ran out for the letter. "It's from Florence--from Florence!" cried Aunt Rob.

"My Darling Mother and Father" (Florence wrote)--"I am writing a hurried line to relieve your anxiety, only to let you know that I am safe and well, and that I will write again to-morrow. When you know all I am sure you will forgive me. Never forget, dear Mother, what I said to you last night, that I have done nothing wrong. God bless you both. With my dearest, fondest love,

"Ever your faithful and affectionate daughter,

"Florence."

"If you see Dick, give him my love, and tell him all."

"That ought to satisfy you, Aunt Rob," said Dick. "She is safe, she is well. My love to Uncle Rob."

He kissed her, waved his hand, and was gone.

The fog had entirely disappeared, and the contrast between the weather of yesterday and that of to-day struck him as no less marked than the contrast between himself of yesterday and himself of to-day. Yesterday he was one of the idlest of young fellows, lounging about with his hands in his pockets, with no work to do, and no prospect of any. To-day the hours were not long enough for the work he had to perform. As there are sluggish horses which need but the whip to make them go like steam, so there are men who cannot work without a strong incentive. Dick was of this order, and the incentive which had presented itself was in its nature so stirring as to bring into play all his mental and physical resources. Thus spurred on, you might have searched London through without meeting his match.

The immediate object he had in view was to gain an entrance into the house of Samuel Boyd, and this must be done to-night. Whatever discoveries he made there, or if he made none, the ground would to some extent be cleared. To accomplish his purpose he required a rope, with a grapnel at the end of it, strong enough to bear a man's weight. His funds were low. Of the sovereign Uncle Rob had given him, 3s. 6d. had gone for a week's rent, and 2s. for food; he had 14s. 6d. left. Knowing that there was a chance of picking up in some second-hand shop a rope and grapnel for half the money which they would cost new, he turned down the meanest streets, where humble dealers strove to eke out a living. He passed a wardrobe shop in which male and female attire of the lowest kind was exposed for sale; a rag and bone shop, stuffed with articles fit for the dunghill, and over the door of which an Aunt Sally in a perpetual slate of strangulation was spinning round and round to the tune of a March wind; a fried fish shop through the window of which he saw a frowzy, perspiring woman frying penny pieces (heads), three halfpenny pieces (tails), and two penny pieces (middles); more wardrobe shops, more fried fish shops, more rag and bone shops, with black dolls spinning and strangling. In one of these he chanced upon the very thing he needed, and after a heated discussion with a dirty-faced old man in list slippers and a greasy skull cap, he issued from the fetid air within to the scarcely less fetid air without, with the rope and grapnel wrapped in the torn copy of an evening paper.

Congratulating himself on his purchase he hurried along, and finding himself no farther than half a mile from Draper's Mews, he determined--having an hour or two to spare--to go to No. 7, where poor little Gracie and her mother resided, for the purpose of ascertaining whether anything had been discovered relating to the disappearance of Abel Death.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LITTLE WASHERWOMAN.

Had Dick timed his visit to Draper's Mews a couple of hours earlier he would have had a second instance in one day of female hands at the wash-tub--in this case not a wash-tub but a cracked and leaky basin, from the sides of which the soapy water dripped upon a very thin pair of female legs. In the second instance it would not have been a woman whom he would have seen, but a child--none other than little Gracie, who, with all the importance of budding washerwoman thick upon her (although, humanly speaking, her prospects of arriving at that stage of distinction appeared to be remote) was washing her brothers' and sisters' clothes. The garments were few and in woeful condition, the brothers and sisters were many, more or less in a state of nudity. There were Eddie, nine years of age, Bertie, eight, Nellie, six, Connie, five, Louie, three, Geordie, eighteen months. Six children, who, with Gracie, the eldest, comprised the young shoots of the genealogical tree belonging to the family of the Deaths. Their home comprised two small rooms, with holes in the wall that divided them.

All the children, with the exception of Gracie, were in bed, huddling together for warmth, and waiting for the drying of their clothes, which Gracie hung upon a line stretching from wall to wall, after wringing them out. The youngsters were not unhappy; the ten shillings from the poor box which the benevolent magistrate had given to Mrs. Death dropped upon her like manna from heaven. On their way home she and Gracie had spent fifteen pence, and the children had had a full meal. What cause for unhappiness when their little stomachs were filled? That is the test stone. Think of it, comfortable ones of the earth. Fifteen pence to make seven children happy!

Gracie alone recognised what was meant by the disappearance of their father, the breadwinner, their father with his anxious face and threadbare clothes. The other children could not understand. It was merciful. Father had gone away; he would come back again with a little paper bag of brandy balls for them to suck. Abel Death was fond of his children, and once a week he gave them this treat. How they looked forward to it--how they watched for his coming--how their faces would light up when he pulled the bag out of his pocket! Brandy balls are an economical sweet; there is a magic in the very name. Brandy balls! They are hard, not to say stony, and if they are sucked fair they last a long time. Eddie once bolted one whole. He never forgot it; the taste of the physic he was made to swallow, the shaking and the slapping, made him very repentant; but he thought of it ever afterwards with a fearful joy, as of one who had performed a rash and daring deed, and came out of it alive. Sometimes the children were in rivalry as to which

brandy ball would last the longest. Sad to relate, the exultation of the victor made the others cry. The way of conquerors is always watered with tears.

On this afternoon Gracie was the mistress of the house. Mrs. Death had heard of a half day's washing-up of plates and dishes at a German club in the neighbourhood where a festival was being held; and she dared not neglect the opportunity of earning ninepence. She left careful instructions that if father should happen to come back during her absence Gracie was to run like lightning to the club and fetch her home. She had no hope of it, but she had read of miracles in the Bible.

So the child stood at the wash-tub, soaping poor little petticoats and stockings with zeal and diligence, holding each garment up to the light and criticising its condition with the eye of an expert. Now and then she shook her head, as though in answer to a question whether this or that tattered article of clothing could be mended; and, the point being settled, plunged it into the wash-tub again for an extra soaping to make up for tatters. And the marvellous patience with which she pursued her task, the absence of anything in the shape of rebellion or protest that she, so young in years, should be set to it! If ever suffering mortal deserved a medal for duty done in the teeth of adverse circumstance, against odds so terrible that the coldest heart must have been moved to pity to witness it, Gracie surely had earned it. But there is no established order on earth for the bestowal of honours in such a cause. Crosses and broad ribbons and sparkling stars are for deeds far different from the devoted heroism she displayed. But a record is kept in Heaven, Gracie, and angels are looking down upon you. How astonished would she have been to know it! She suffered--ah, how she suffered! Every few minutes she was compelled to stop and fight the demon in her chest that scraped and scraped her brittle bones with fiendish cruelty--tearing at her, choking her, robbing her of breath, while she stamped her feet and beat her hands together.

"Oh, I say! Gracie's going it," observed Bertie, the low comedian and mimic of the family, and as is the case with better known low comedians when they give utterance to nothing particularly witty, the young audience began to laugh.

"Show us, Bertie," they cried. "Do it!"

Whereupon, with his own vocal organs, Bertie reproduced Gracie's racking cough. The other children attempted the imitation, but none with success, and he accompanied the cough, moreover, with such an expression of woe upon his face, that the children were lost in admiration. Spurred to greater efforts by their approval he wound up with so faithful a reproduction of Gracie in the last exhausting stage of a paroxysm that it brought down the house.

"Is that like it, Gracie?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, with unmoved face, "that's like it."

One of the children, burning with envy at her brother's histrionic triumph, expressed her feelings with her legs.

"Connie's kicking me, Gracie," cried Bertie, at the same time returning the kicks beneath the bedclothes.

"If you don't leave off," said Gracie, impassively, "I'll come and slap you."

She had to be very careful with the children's underclothing. So full of holes and rents were they that the least violence would have wrought irremediable havoc among them--and where was mother to get the money from to buy new ones?

"There," she said, hanging the last garment on the line, and wiping her hands and arms on her wet apron, "that job's done."

The children raised a cheer, and simultaneously sat up in bed in a state of eager expectation. Six little heads nestling close, six eager faces turned towards Gracie. They had not a clear view of her, because night was coming on.

"Wait a bit," she said, "we must have a light, and I must make up the fire."

It was a very small fire, the capacity of the stove being circumscribed by a large brick on either side, placed there for the sake of economy. Gracie put on half a dozen little pieces of coal with miser-like care, taking as much pains to arrange them as if they were precious stones, as indeed they were. A tiny flame shot out and shone upon her face; with her black eyes and black hair she looked like a goblin beneath this fitful illumination. Then she rose and lighted a tallow candle, placing it on a deal table, which she drew close to the bed. The table was bare of covering, and presented a bald white space, Gracie having given it a good scrubbing before she commenced her washing. Seating herself on a wooden chair she took from a drawer some broken ends of chalk of different colours, yellow, green, and vermilion being the predominant hues. The excitement of the children grew to fever height.

Gracie had a gift which comes by nature. She was magnetic, and could tell a story in such a manner as to absorb the attention of her hearers. It is true that she only told stories to her brothers and sisters, who might have been considered a partial audience, but that she was capable of taking their imaginations captive and leading them in any

direction she pleased--through gilded hall or dismal dungeon, through enchanted forest or dark morass--may be accepted as a token that, grown to womanhood and appealing to a more experienced audience, her success would be no less complete. To look at that apparently insensible face and at that coal black eye, unillumined by the fire of fancy, and to listen to that listless voice when she discoursed upon mundane affairs, no one would have imagined that it was in her power to rivet the attention, to fascinate and absorb. It is, however, just those faces which go towards the making of a great actor. A blank space waiting to be written upon, ready for the kindling of the spark which unlocks the gates of imagination and lays all the world of fancy open to the view. Then do merry elves peep out from beds of flowers, and fairy forms dance in the light of moon and stars; then do enchanted castles gleam in the eye of the sun, and gloomy caverns open wide their jaws and breathe destruction on all who venture within their shadowed walls.

Many such romances had Gracie told the children, with appropriate pictorial illustration in colours, but she came down to earth occasionally, and condescended to use materials more modern; but even these familiar subjects were decorated with flowers of quaint fancy and invested by her with captivating charm. Sometimes she mingled the two together, and produced the oddest effects.

The secret of the coloured chalks was this. Not long ago there lived in the house an artist who strove to earn a living by painting on the pavements of the city the impossible salmon and the equally impossible sunset. But though he used the most lurid colours he did not find himself appreciated, and, taking a liking to Gracie, he poured into her ears tales of disappointed ambition and unrecognised genius, to which she listened with sympathetic soul. Emulous of his gifts she coaxed him into giving her a few lessons, and in a short time could also paint the impossible salmon and the equally impossible sunset. One day he said, "Gracie, I am leaving this wretched country, which is not a country for artists. I bequeath to you my genius and my stock of coloured chalks. But do not deceive yourself; they will bring you only disappointment, and do not blame me if you die unhonoured, and unwept, and unsung." With these despairing words he bade her an affectionate, if gloomy, farewell. Gracie did not share his despair, and had little understanding of the words in which it was expressed. The legacy was a God-send to her and to the children whom she would enthral with her flights of imagination, with coloured illustrations on the deal table.

She related to them now some weird tale of a beautiful young princess--(behold the beautiful young princess, with vermilion lips and cheeks, green eyes starting out of her head, and yellow hair trailing to her heels)--and a gallant young prince--(behold the gallant young prince, with vermilion lips and cheeks, staring green eyes, and yellow hair carefully parted in the middle)--mounted on a fiery steed--(behold the fiery steed, its

legs very wide apart, also with green eyes, vermilion nostrils, and a long yellow tail)--who, with certain wicked personages, went through astounding adventures, which doubtless would all have come right in the end had Gracie not been seized with a fit of coughing so violent that she fell back in her chair, spasmodically catching and fighting for her breath.

Two persons mounted the stairs at this crisis, a man and a woman, and both hastened their steps at these sounds of distress. Mrs. Death flung the door open and hastened to Gracie's side not noticing Dick, who followed her.

"My dear child--my dear child!" said Mrs. Death, taking her clammy hand and holding the exhausted girl in her motherly arms.

"I'm all right, mother," gasped Gracie, presently, regaining her breath. "Don't you worry about me. There--I'm better already!" She was the first to see Dick, and she started up. "Mother--look! The gentleman from the police station! Have you found father, sir?"

"I beg your pardon for intruding," said Dick to the woman. "I came to speak to you, and when I was wondering which part of the house you lived in I heard your little girl coughing, and I followed you upstairs." He gazed in amazement at the astonishing pictures on the table. "Did Gracie draw these?"

Six little heads popped up from the bed, and six young voices piped, "Yes, she did. Ain't she clever? And she was telling us such a beautiful story!"

"Be quiet, children," said Mrs. Death; and turning anxiously to Dick, "Have you any news of my husband, sir?"

"I am sorry to say I have not," he replied; "but your visit to the magistrate is in the papers, and good is sure to come of it. Have you got a teaspoon?"

With a pitying remembrance of Gracie's cough he had purchased a bottle of syrup of squills, a teaspoonful of which he administered to the child, who looked up into his face with gratitude in her soul if not in her eyes.

"It's nice and warm," she said, rubbing her chest. "It goes right to the spot."

"Let her take it from time to time," said Dick to Mrs. Death. "I will bring another bottle in a day or two. Now can I have a few words with you about your husband?"

"Yes, sir, if you'll step into the next room."

"I like brandy balls," cried Connie.

"So do I--so do I!" in a clamour of voices from the other children.

"And so do I," said Dick. "You shall have some."

"Hush, children!" said Mrs. Death. "I'm ashamed of you! I hope you'll excuse them, sir. Keep them quiet, Gracie, while the gentleman and I are talking. It doesn't do, sir,"--this in a low tone to Dick as he followed her into the adjoining room--"to speak too freely before children about trouble. It will come quickly enough to them, poor things!"

Dick nodded. "I wish you to believe, Mrs. Death, that I earnestly desire to help you out of your trouble, and that I may be of more assistance to you than most people. I say this to satisfy you that I am not here out of mere idle curiosity."

"I am sure you are not, sir, and I'm ever so much obliged to you for the kindness you've shown. The syrup of squills has done Gracie a lot of good already; but I don't see how you can help us."

"It may be in my power, if you will give me your confidence."

"I'd be sorry to throw away a chance, sir. What is it you want to know?"

"I want you to tell me the reason why Mr. Samuel Boyd discharged your husband."

"There's not much to tell, sir. Where shall I commence?"

"On Friday morning, when your husband went to the office: and don't keep anything back that comes to your mind."

"I won't, sir. He went away as usual, and it was our belief that he had given Mr. Boyd every satisfaction. I told you at the police station how we had hopes that Mr. Boyd would lend us a few pounds to get us out of our difficulty with the moneylender. I'm afraid every minute of the home being sold over our heads. We've only got a few bits of sticks, but we shouldn't know what to do without them. Mr. Boyd's a hard master, sir, and regularly every Saturday, when he paid my husband his wages, he grumbled that he was being robbed. My poor husband worked for him like a slave, and over and over again was kept in the office till ten and eleven o'clock at night without getting a sixpence overtime. It wasn't a bed of roses, I tell you that, sir; nothing but finding fault from morning to night, and he was always on the watch to catch my husband in some neglect

of duty. On Friday afternoon, when he went out of the house on some business or other, his orders to my husband were that he was not to stir out of the office; if people knocked at the street door let them knock; he wasn't to answer them, but to keep himself shut up in the office. Those were the orders given, and my husband was careful to obey them. Two or three hours after Mr. Boyd was gone there came a knock at the street door, and my husband took no notice. The knock was repeated two or three times, but still he took no notice. Presently he heard a step on the stairs, and he thought it was Mr. Boyd come back, and who had knocked at the door to try him. It wasn't Mr. Boyd, sir. The gentleman who came into the room was Mr. Reginald."

Taken by surprise at this unexpected piece of information, Dick cried, "Mr. Reginald!"

"Mr. Boyd's son, sir. He and his father had a quarrel a long while ago, and Mr. Boyd turned him out of the house."

"But if the street door was not opened to Mr. Reginald, how did he get in?"

"He had a latchkey, which he told my husband he had taken with him when his father turned him off."

A light seemed to be breaking upon Dick; all this was new to him. "At what time did you say Mr. Reginald entered his father's house?"

"It must have been about six o'clock. When he heard that his father was not at home he said he would wait; but my husband begged him not to, and asked him to go away. He seemed so bent upon seeing his father--he used the word 'must,' my husband told me--that it was hard to persuade him, but at last he consented, and said he would call again at ten o'clock, when Mr. Boyd would be sure to be alone."

The light grew stronger, and it was only by an effort that Dick was able to suppress his agitation. He recalled the conversation he had had with his uncle the previous night at the police station, and the remark that towards the elucidation of the mystery there were many doors open. Here was another door which seemed to furnish a pregnant clue, and it terrified him to think that it might lead to a discovery in which all hopes of Florence's happiness would be destroyed.

"Yes," he said, "at ten o'clock, when Mr. Boyd would be sure to be alone."

"Then my husband, remembering the caution given him by Mr. Boyd that nobody was to be allowed to enter the house during his absence, asked the young gentleman not to mention to his father that he had already paid one visit to the house. You see, sir, my

husband feared that he would be blamed for it, and be turned away, as the other clerks had been, for Mr. Boyd is of that suspicious nature that he doesn't believe a word any man says. The young gentleman gave the promise and went away."

"Did Mr. Reginald say why he wanted to see his father?"

"Not directly, sir; but my husband gathered that the young gentleman had come down in the world, and was in need of money."

"Ah! Go on, please."

"When Mr. Boyd came back he asked if any one had called; my husband answered no. 'Then no person has been in the house while I was away?' he said, and my husband said no person had been there. Upon that my husband was surprised by his being asked to put his office slippers on the table, and was still more surprised to see Mr. Boyd examining the soles through a magnifying glass. Oh, but he is a cunning gentleman is Mr. Samuel Boyd! And when the examination was over he gave my poor husband his discharge, without a single word of warning. My husband was dumbfounded, and asked what he was being sent away in that manner for. Then the hardhearted gentleman said he had set a trap for him; that before he left the house he had put on the stairs eight little pieces of paper with bits of wax on the top of them, so that any one treading on them would be sure to take them up on the soles of his boots; and that when he came back six of the eight pieces were gone. It was an artful trick, wasn't it, sir? My poor husband did then what he ought to have done at first; he confessed the truth, that Mr. Reginald had been there. When Mr. Boyd heard that his son had been in the house he got into a fearful rage, and said that Mr. Reginald and my husband were in a conspiracy to rob him, which, of course, my husband denied. He begged Mr. Boyd to take back the discharge, but he would not listen to him, and the end of it was that he came home brokenhearted. You see our home, sir; wasn't the prospect of not being able to earn bread for us enough to break any man's heart?"

"Indeed it was," said Dick. "And that is all you can tell me?"

"It is all I know, sir."

"I think you said last night that it was about half-past nine when Mr. Death went to Catchpole Square the second time."

"As near as I can remember, sir."

"Within half an hour," he thought, "of Mr. Reginald's second visit." "Thank you, Mrs. Death," he said; "you may depend upon my doing my best to clear things up, and you shall soon hear from me again. I may call upon you without ceremony."

"You will be always welcome, sir, but it's a poor place for you to come to."

"I don't live in a palace myself," he said, with an attempt at gaiety. Taking his rope and grapnel, still wrapped in the evening paper, he held out his hand to wish her good-night (with the kind thought in his mind of sending a doctor to Gracie), when a man's voice was heard in the passage, inquiring in a gentle voice whether Mrs. Death lived there.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DR. PYE'S FRIEND, OF THE NAME OF VINSEN.

They went out together to ascertain who it was, and the man repeated his question, and observed that it was very dark there.

"I'll get a light, sir," said Mrs. Death in an agitated tone. "I hope you haven't brought me bad news."

"No," the man answered, "good news I trust you will find it. I have come to attend to your little girl, who, I hear, has a bad attack of bronchitis."

"Are you a doctor, sir?" she asked.

"Yes, I am a doctor," he answered. "Dr. Vinsen."

"It's very good of you, sir, and Gracie is suffering awfully, but I am afraid there is some mistake. I didn't send for you."

"Now why did you not send for me," he said, in a tone of gentle banter. "In the first place, because you don't know where I live. In the second place, because you can't afford to pay me; but that will not matter. Why should it? Dear, dear, dear! What is money? Dross--nothing more. Never mind the light; I can see very well--very well."

They were now in the room where the children were, who, sitting up in bed, stared open-mouthed at the gentleman with his glossy silk hat and his yellow kid gloves, and his double gold watchchain hanging across his waistcoat. He was a portly gentleman, and when he took off his hat he exhibited a bald head, with a yellow fringe of hair round it, like a halo. His face was fleshy and of mild expression, his eyes rather small and sleepy, and there was, in those features and in his general appearance, an air of benevolent prosperity.

"Pictures," he said, looking at the coloured drawings on the table. "Most interesting. And the artist?"

"My little girl, sir," said Mrs. Death, looking anxiously at him; "she does it to amuse the children."

"Remarkably clever," he said. "Re-markably clever. Dear, dear, dear! A budding genius--quite a bud-ding ge-nius. But time presses. Allow me to explain."

"Won't you take a chair, sir?" said Mrs. Death, wiping one with her apron, and placing it for him.

"Thank you. The explanation is as follows--as follows. A friend of mine reading in the evening papers an account of your application at the Bishop Street Police Court this morning--pray accept my sympathy, my dear madam, my sym-pathy--and of the evident illness of the little girl who accompanied you, has asked me to call and see if I can do anything for you--anything for you." His habit of repeating his words, and of occasionally splitting them into accented syllables, seemed to fit in with his gentle voice and his generally benevolent air.

"May I inquire the name of your kind friend?" asked Mrs. Death.

"Certainly--cer-tainly," replied Dr. Vinsen. "It is Dr. Pye, of Shore Street."

"The scientist," said Dick.

"The scientist," said Dr. Vinsen. "A man of science and a man of heart. The two things are not incompatible--not incom-patible. He asked me also to ascertain whether you have heard anything of your husband."

"I have heard nothing of him, sir," said Mrs. Death, with a sob in her throat.

"Sad, sad, sad! But have hope, my dear madam. There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow, and you may depend upon it that this special providence is watching over you, and will bring your husband back--your husband back." He turned to Dick. "Related to the family, I presume?"

"No," said Dick, "I am here simply as a friend, to assist Mrs. Death in her search for her husband."

"A very worthy endeavour. Would it be considered impertinent if I inquired the name of the gentleman who evinces so deep an interest in this very distressing matter?"

"My name is Dick Remington. I've grown so accustomed to Dick that I should hardly know myself as Richard."

Dr. Vinsen's eyes gave faint indications of amusement--eyes so sleepy could do no more than that--and he passed his hands over and over each other, as though, like Miss Kilmansegg's father, he was washing them with invisible soap in imperceptible water. At this point Gracie, who had been trying with all her might and main to hold herself in, burst into a furious fit of coughing. "Dear, dear, dear!" said Dr. Vinsen. "Let us see what we can do for you, my child."

Taking a stethoscope out of his hat he proceeded to make an examination of Gracie's lungs and chest, a proceeding which Gracie viewed with indifference and the other children with awe. In the course of his examination he made such comments, under his breath, as--

"Dear, dear, dear! Nothing but skin and bone--but skin and bone! Sad, very sad! Neglected another week the result would have been--but I will not distress you. Wrap yourself up, child. My dear madam, you must keep little Gracie--sweet name--in bed for a few days. Doubtless you have a bronchitis kettle."

"No, sir," said Mrs. Death, with a forlorn look.

"Don't you worry, mother," protested Gracie. "I don't want any kettles. What's the use of kettles? I'm all right, I am."

"No, my dear child," said Dr. Vinsen, "allow me to know. You must have a linseed poultice on--your mother will see to it--and when I come again I will bring you some medicine. Permit me, Mrs. Death--a few words in private--a corner of the room will do."

They withdrew into a corner, and Dick heard the chink of coin.

"I will call to-morrow," said Dr. Vinsen, the private conference ended, "to see how we are getting on--how we are get-ting on. Nay, my dear madam--tears!--summon your fortitude, your strength of mind--but still, a gratifying tribute--a gra-ti-fy-ing tri-bute." Hat in hand, he shook hands with all in the room, a ceremony attended by considerable difficulty in consequence of the shyness of the children, but he would not let them off. "Dear, dear, dear! One, two, three, four, five, six, and our little Gracie makes seven--really, my dear madam, really! Good evening, Mr.--Mr.--dear me, my memory!"

"Dick Remington," said Dick.

"To be sure. Mr. Dick Remington. Good evening." Mrs. Death, candle in hand, waited to light him down. "So kind of you, but the passages are rather dark." Those left in the darkened room heard his voice dying away in the words, "Are ra-ther dark."

When Mrs. Death re-entered the room, her face was flushed. Beckoning Dick aside she said in an excited tone, "He has given me two sovereigns. God bless him! It is like a light shining upon me. If only I could find my husband! Children, be good, and you shall have something nice for supper."

"I'll run and get the linseed for you," said Dick, "while you put Gracie to bed."

He was soon back, and Mrs. Death met him in the passage.

"I can manage now, sir, thank you," she said, "but Gracie wants to wish you good night."

Gracie coming to the door with an old blanket round her, he bent down and put his lips to her white face.

"That's what I wanted," she whispered, and kissed him. "You're a good sort, you are." He slipped a paper bag into her hand. "What's this for?"

"Brandy balls for the young 'uns," he answered, and scudded away.

"Oh, you are a one!" she shouted hoarsely.

"God bless you, Gracie!" he shouted back.

"That's a windfall for Mrs. Death," he muttered when he was clear of Draper's Mews, "and may be the saving of Gracie. Dear little mite! Almost a skeleton, and the heart of a lion. Learn a lesson from her, Dick, and meet your own troubles like a man, and do your work, my lad, like one. It's brutal to be ungrateful, but still

"I do not like thee, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell,
But this I know, and know full well,
I do not like thee, Dr. Fell."
Now, who could Dick have been referring to as he repeated these lines with a thoughtful face? Certainly not to Dr. Fell. He was not acquainted with that gentleman.

CHAPTER XIX.

DICK PREPARES FOR A SIEGE AND COMMENCES SERIOUS OPERATIONS.

The night was well on by this time, and though he did not intend to commence operations in Catchpole Square before midnight, there was plenty for him to do in the meantime. He made his way, therefore, with all expedition to his lodgings, fortifying himself on the road with a substantial meal at a cheap restaurant, and purchasing candles, matches, and half a pint of brandy. His spirits rose at the prospect of adventure; there is nothing like the uncertain to keep the blood at fever heat.

Mrs. Applebee was keeping Mrs. Pond company when he put his latchkey in the street door. Mrs. Pond had told Mrs. Applebee of her good fortune in securing so eligible a lodger, and Mrs. Applebee had narrated the conversation which Dick and her husband had had on the previous night.

"Applebee said he never did hear a young man go on so," said Mrs. Applebee. "All I hope is he won't give you any trouble."

"What makes you say that?" inquired Mrs. Pond.

"Well, my dear, it was a queer time for a young man to be looking for lodgings on a night like that, when he couldn't see a yard before him."

"That was only his joke," responded Mrs. Pond; "he's as nice a gentleman as ever you set eyes on. I do believe that's him coming in now. I must give him a candle."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Pond," said Dick, taking the candlestick from her.

"Can I do anything for you, sir?" she asked.

"Well, yes. Perhaps you can oblige me with an empty bottle, a large one with a cork."

She had one in the cupboard, and she brought it out to him.

"It's had vinegar it, sir."

"That won't matter. Many thanks."

In the room above Dick set about his preparations for an invasion of Samuel Boyd's house. He made a careful examination of the rope and grapnel, and was satisfied that the rope would bear his weight and the grapnel catch on the top of the wall. Everything being ready, he waited for midnight, deeming it advisable not to go out till then, for there was no object in his roaming about the streets. He heard Mrs. Applebee bid Mrs. Pond good night, which was only preliminary to a long chat between the ladies, first in the passage, afterwards at the street door. Then he heard the door closed, and listened to hear if his landlady locked it. No sound of this reached his ears, and shortly afterwards all was silent in the house, Mrs. Pond having retired to rest. For a reason which he could not have explained he tumbled the bedclothes about, as if they had been slept in. He did not possess a watch, and he had to judge the time as well as he could. When he believed it to be near the hour he softly left the room, locked it, pocketed the key, and stepping like a cat, went downstairs and opened the street door. Hoping that it would not alarm Mrs. Pond he shut it as quietly as was possible, and, with the rope round his waistcoat and concealed by his coat, he turned his face in the direction of Catchpole Square. "I'm in for it now," he thought. "I feel like a burglar, out on his first job."

CHAPTER XX.

DICK MAKES A DISCOVERY.

His familiarity with the regulations and movements of the police hailing from the Bishop Street Police Station was of assistance to him. He knew that one end of Constable Applebee's beat was close to Catchpole Square, and his design was to watch for that officer's approach, and to remain hidden till he turned in the opposite direction. This would ensure him freedom of action for some fifteen or twenty minutes, time sufficient to enable him to mount the wall. He experienced little difficulty in the execution of this design. Constable Applebee sauntered to the end of his beat, lingered a moment or two, and then began to retrace his steps. Dick now prepared for action. "I really think," he mused, "that I should shine as a burglar."

There were few persons in the streets, and none in the thoroughfare on which the dead wall abutted. The first step to be taken was to ascertain if any person was in the house. He turned, therefore, into Catchpole Square, and looked up at the windows. There was no light in them, and from the position in which he stood he could discern no signs of life within. No long neglected cemetery could have presented a more desolate appearance. He knocked at the door, and his summons, many times repeated, met with no response. Dick did all this in a leisurely manner, being prepared with an answer in case an explanation was demanded. So absolutely imperative was it that he should be convinced that the house was uninhabited before he forced an entrance that he kept in the Square fully a quarter of an hour, at the expiration of which he passed through Deadman's Court, and was once more in front of the dead wall Stealing to each end of the thoroughfare to see that no person was in view, he unwound the rope from his body, and fixed upon the spot to fling the grapnel. The first throw was unsuccessful; and the second; but at the third the grapnel caught, and Dick pulled at it hard in order to be sure that it was fast. Then, moistening the palms of his hands, and muttering, "Now, then, old Jack and the beanstalk," he commenced to climb.

It was not an easy task, partly in consequence of his inexperience at this kind of work, and partly because of the bulging of the large bottle of water under his waistcoat. But Dick was not to be beaten; not only were all the latent forces of his mind in full play, but all the latent forces of his body, and though his hands were chafed in the execution of the task, and the perspiration streamed down his face, he reached the top of the wall in safety, and with the bottle unbroken.

"Bravo, Dick," he gasped, pausing to recover his breath. "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, I hope Humpty Dumpty won't have a bad fall. Take care of yourself, Dick, for my sake."

Drawing up the rope he reversed the grapnel, fixed it tight, let the rope drop on the inner side of the wall, and slid nimbly down.

He looked around. There were windows at the back, most of them masked with inside shutters, as they had been for years. To each of the six houses there was a back yard, and each yard was separated from its neighbour on either side by a wall as high as high as that which enclosed them all in the rear. Thus Dick found himself shut out from the world, as it were, with little likelihood of his movements being detected from any of the houses except the one he intended to break into--and that was as still and lifeless as death itself.

"Now, my lad," he said, "just to put life into you, for this desert of Sahara is enough to give any man the blue devils, I'll treat you to a drink. Is it agreed to? Passed unanimously."

Then came the difficult task of unhooking the grapnel, for it would never do to leave it on the wall. He made several futile attempts to loosen and bring it down, and had he not discovered in a corner a forked pole which at some remote period had probably been used as a clothes' prop, there would have been nothing for it but to leave it there and run the risk of discovery. With the aid of the pole, however, he succeeded in unhooking it, so suddenly that it fell to the ground with a crash and nearly gave him a crack on the head.

Gathering up the rope and slinging it over his arm, Dick searched for a means of effecting an entrance into the house. From the evidences of decay all around he judged that no use had been made of the back of the premises for a considerable time past; during his service with Samuel Boyd he had had no acquaintance of the rooms which looked out upon the yard, his duties confining him to the office in which the secretarial work was done. Above a door, which he tried in vain to open, was a small window which seemed less secure than the others; and when he reached up to it (standing on a rickety bench against the wall), this proved to be the case; but though the frame rattled when he shook it he saw no means of getting out of the difficulty except by breaking a pane of glass. Half measures would not serve now, and he adopted this bold expedient, pausing to listen, when the shattered glass fell upon the floor within, whether the crash had raised an alarm. There was no indication of it.

Passing his hand through the aperture he managed to unfasten the window and to raise the sash. Much more difficult was it to raise his body to the level of the window; he had no safe foothold, the rickety bench upon which he stood threatened every moment to fall to pieces, and indeed in his violent efforts this actually happened, and he was left clinging to the window-sill by his fingers and nails; by a desperate effort he got his knees

upon the sill, and tumbled or scrambled into a small dark room. He could not now proceed without a light, and he congratulated himself again on his forethought in bringing candles and matches, for Dick was not a smoker, and these articles might easily have been overlooked.

Having obtained a light he took a survey of the room. The walls were bare, and there was no furniture in it. Casting his eyes upon the floor he was horrified to see it stained with fresh red blood upon which he was treading. He was so startled that he involuntarily pressed his left hand upon his heart, and raised his right hand, in which he held the lighted candle, in anticipation of a sudden attack. Then he discovered that he had cut that hand, and that the blood on the floor was his own. In his excitement he had not felt the pain of the wound. Wrapping his handkerchief round it, and drawing a deep breath of relief, he opened a door at the end of the room, and emerged into a passage, with a staircase leading to the rooms above. Ascending, he passed through another door which shut off this staircase from the better parts of the house, and found himself on a landing with which he was familiar, for on this floor was situated the office in which he used to work, another staircase at the end of the landing leading down to the front entrance. He knew now where he was, and in which direction to proceed.

All his movements had been made with extreme caution, and almost at every step he took he paused and prepared for a surprise. But he was not interrupted in any way, and there was nothing to indicate that he was not master of the situation. It troubled him to observe that his footsteps left traces of blood behind them; these dark stains conveyed a suggestion that he had been engaged in a guilty deed. "Do I look like a murderer?" he thought. "I feel like one."

Before he entered the office he descended to the ground floor passage to ascertain if the street door was fast, and he was surprised to see the key lying on the mat. It was a sign of some significance, for had Samuel Boyd left his house for any length of time he would most certainly have locked the door from the outside and taken the key with him. But, assuming that this was not the case, why was not the key in the lock, and assuming, further, that Samuel Boyd had retired to rest, why was not the door bolted and chained?

Confused by the thought, Dick turned the key in the lock, opened the door an inch or two, and looked out upon Catchpole Square. All was silent and still. Dark clouds were scudding across the sky, with a heavy-hearted presage in them; such was the impression the gloom of night produced upon Dick. He reclosed and locked the door, and returned to the passage above.

When he turned the handle of the office door and entered the room in which he used to work he could hear the beating of his heart. In the dim light he could almost fancy that

his skeleton was sitting on the old stool at the desk; but no being, human or spectral, with the exception of himself was there. Against the walls and in the corners lay the strange medley of articles which gave so singular a character to the apartment. There were no signs of confusion or disturbance; everything was in order. The drawers in desk and tables were closed, the safe in its old position, and to all appearance untampered with; beneath a paperweight of Japanese metal, representing a hideous mask, lay some papers which Dick did not stop to examine. Some of the articles in the collection had not been there during his term of service. The wine and the grand pianoforte were new to him. But who was that sitting in a chair, dressed in a flowered gaberdine?

"I beg your pardon," stammered Dick.

The figure did not answer him, and approaching nearer with stealthy steps he beheld the wax figure of the Chinaman, in an attitude of collapse, as it had fallen into the chair on the night of the 1st of March, when it was shot through the heart.

"In heaven's name how came you here?" muttered Dick. "Speak up like a man, in pigeon-English if you like."

He could scarcely have been more amazed had the figure lifted its head and addressed him. A sense of tragedy weighed heavily upon his spirits, and the air seemed charged with significance and dreadful import. The occurrences of the last twenty-four hours: the disappearance of Abel Death, his wife's agonised appeal at the police station, Florence's flight from home, the discovery of her handkerchief in Catchpole Square, even--unreasonable as was the inclusion--the visit of Dr. Vinsen to the Death family--all seemed to converge to one point in this room, with its deathlike stillness, and to the strong probability of their explanation being found there. It partook more of a fancy from a madman's brain than that of a sane person, and yet Dick, candle in hand, peered in all directions for a clue to the elucidation of these mysteries. That he saw none did not weaken the impression under which he laboured. The dusky figures of knight and lady in the hangings of tapestry, the quaint carvings of man and beast on the mantel and fireplace, the paintings of flying angels on the ceiling, mocked and gibed at him whichever way he turned, and tended to increase the fever of his blood.

There were three communicating doors in the apartment--one leading to the passage, one to Mr. Boyd's bedroom, one to a room which had always been kept locked. Against the wall between that room and the office the grand piano was placed, and Dick recollected that in his time a large screen had been there, covering the space now occupied by the back of the piano. Very cautiously and slowly he opened the door of the bedroom. Wrought to a pitch of intense excitement it was not surprising that his hand

shook--to such an extent, indeed, had he lost control of himself that the candle dropped to the ground and was extinguished. He was plunged in darkness.

In the brief glance he had directed to the bed he fancied he had seen the outline of a sleeping form, and as he knelt to search for the candle he called aloud, "Mr. Boyd!" and trembled at the sound of his voice. "Mr. Boyd! Mr. Boyd!" he called again in louder tones, and his heated fancy created a muffled echo of the name, "Mr. Boyd! Mr. Boyd!" Finding the candle he relighted it, and rising to his feet, slowly approached the bed.

A dumb form was there, its back towards him. The bed was in the middle of the room, the head against the wall. Treading very gently he passed to the other side, and bending forward, with the candle in his upstretched hand, he saw a man's face--the face of Samuel Boyd, cold and dead!