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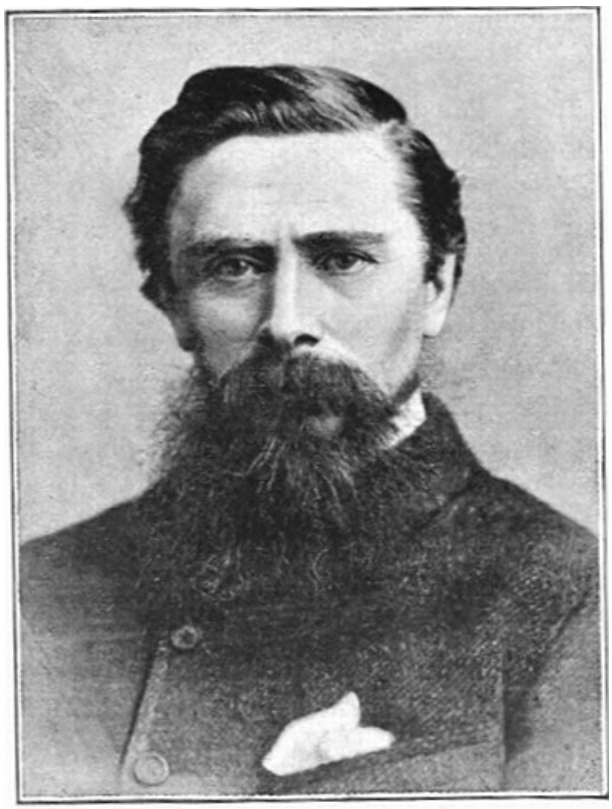
George Manville Fenn

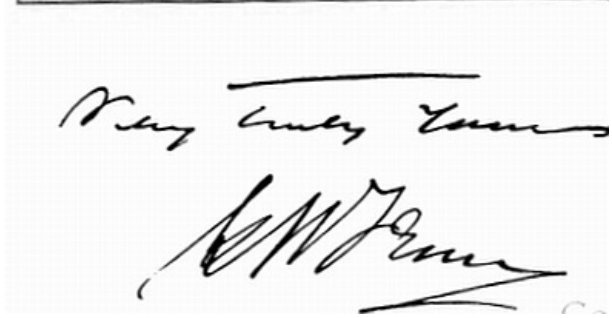
"Sawn Off"

"A Tale of a Family Tree"

Volume One—Chapter One.

Naboth and his Vineyard.





"Well, I'm—"

"Papa!"

“Hi! don’t, Very. Let me breathe,” cried Doctor Salado, removing a very pretty little hand from over his mouth, and kissing the owner, as pretty a little girl as ever stepped; though just then her pretty creamy face was puckered into the most lovable of dimples, and there was trouble in her great dark eyes, over which were lashes and brows as black as the great clusters and waves of luxuriant hair.

“You shall not.”

“I was only going to say ‘blessed.’”

“You were not, papa. You were going to use that dreadful word again.”

“So I was, Very, and enough to make me,” said the Doctor, passing his hand over his high bold forehead and crown. “Why, it completely cuts off our view of the park and the manor-house at the end of the beautiful vista of oaks.”

“Never mind, dear; we’ll take to the drawing-room, and look out at the back at the grand old pines.”

“Well, upon my soul,” said the Doctor again. “Of all the malicious bits of impudence! They must have been at it all night.”

“Yes, papa; I heard them knocking, and I could not sleep.”

“Hang me if I don’t take an axe and cut the old thing down,” cried the Doctor again, as he stood gazing out of his breakfast-room window at where—just across the road, and exactly opposite his delightful little cottage—half a dozen carpenters and labourers were rapidly completing a great range of hoarding fifty feet long and full twenty high.

“You mustn’t, papa. We are not in South America now.”

“No. I wish it was. But—Well, that beats all! Well, I *am*—Very, my pet, let me swear once. I shall feel so much better then.”

“You shall not, papa. But what a shame!”

“Worse than that, my darling. It’s all a confounded planned insult, got up by my lord and that sneaking scoundrel of an agent,” he continued, as he watched a bill-sticker busy at work pasting placards on the new raw deal boards just nailed on the rough pine poles. “Selling off, etc. To be sold by auction,” read the Doctor, “Guy Bunting’s boots.”

“Oh! is this a land of liberty, where one is to be insulted like this, and not even allowed the British prerogative of a good honest—”

Veronica’s lips were pressed upon the speaker’s lips, as near as they could get for the crisp, grey, shaggy hair of an enormous moustache, and said,—

“You shall not say it, papa; and you are too proud and dignified to notice such contemptible treatment. Now come and have your breakfast. The cutlets are getting cold.”

“Then Teddington Weir him!” said the Doctor.

“What do you mean, dear?”

“Never mind. Hah! I am hungry. But look here, Pussy—more sugar, please—and milk. It’s all your fault.”

“It is not, papa,” said Veronica, colouring a little. “It was through your buying this cottage.”

“Well, how was I to know he wanted it? Suppose the grounds do run like a wedge into the estate. Hang the blackguardly Ahab! Can’t a poor miserable Naboth like myself have his own vineyard without his wanting it for a garden of herbs? Bitter herbs I’ll make them for him!”

“No, you will not, papa.”

“Yes, I will, tyrant. The next thing will be his confounded Jezebel of a wife setting him to—”

“Papa! I cannot sit here and listen to you,” cried Veronica, flushing deeply now. “Lady Pinemount is a sweet, lovable woman.”

“How do you know?”

“Everybody says so.”

“Including her son?”

“Papa dear!” cried the girl, with her eyes filling with tears.

“There, my dear, I don’t want to hurt your feelings; but the old man will never consent to it, and I’m going to forbid Mr Rolleston the house.”

Veronica was silent, but such a look of hopeless misery came into her face that the Doctor got up from his chair and went and knelt on one knee by his child’s chair, drawing her beautiful head down on his shoulder and softly stroking her cheek.

“And you—after turning up this pretty little nose at all the gallant young Spanish dons and settlers about the Pampas—to come and strike your colours like this, Very! I say, are you so very fond of him?”

“I—I think so, papa; I can’t help it.”

“Humph! But he’s an Englishman born and bred, and you’re half a Spaniard, Very.”

“But you are an Englishman, papa.”

“I suppose so. But thirty years in South America seem to have altered me. Yah! hammer away. What a blackguardly trick of his father!”

“Don’t talk about it, papa. Mr Rolleston said Lord Pinemount was furious with his steward for not bidding higher and buying this estate.”

“More fool he! I’d have bid his head off. He’d never have got it.”

“And he was very angry, too, because you refused his offer afterwards to take it off your hands.”

“I don’t care for his anger. I came over to England to end my days in peace. I bought the Sandleighs, and I mean to keep it.”

“Papa!”

“There, then—there, don’t cry, and I will not make use of bad language about that hoarding; but if this is the behaviour of an English nobleman, I’m glad I’m plain Doctor Salado. Now breakfast; and my coffee’s cold.”

Volume One—Chapter Two.

His Lordship is Angry.

“I say it’s a shame, father, and a disgrace to you.”

“And I say you are a confounded insolent young puppy; and if you dare to speak to me again like that—”

“Oh, hush, Edward dear! Denis, my boy, pray don’t!”

“But I shall be ashamed to go about the place, mamma. It is so mean and petty.”

“How dare you, sir! how dare you!” cried Lord Pinemount. “Don’t dictate to me. I’ve put up with too much, and I mean to end it all. How dare he—a confounded Yankee!”

“Doctor Salado is an English gentleman, father.”

“Nothing of the sort, sir. Look at his name. Comes here from nobody knows where.”

“Yes, they do, sir. He comes here from Iquique, and he is one of the most famous naturalists of the day.”

“I don’t care what he is. Comes here, I say; and just as at last that wretched old woman dies, and the Sandleighs is in the market—a place that ought by rights to belong to the manor—he must bid over that idiot Markby’s head, and secure the place. I told Markby distinctly that I wanted that cottage and grounds. Went at such a price, he said. Fool! And then, when I offered this miserable foreign adventurer five hundred pounds to give it up, he must send me an insulting message.”

“It was only a quiet letter, my dear,” said Lady Pinemount, “to say that he had taken a fancy to the place, and preferred to keep it.”

“You mind your own business,” said his lordship, his florid face growing slightly apoplectic of aspect. “I’m not blind. But I won’t have it. You write and ask the Elsgraves here; and you, Denis, recollect that I expect you to be civil to Hilda Elsgrave. The Earl and I quite understand each other about that.”

“If you expect me to begin paying attentions to a girl whom I dislike, and who dislikes me, sir,” said the young man firmly, “I’m afraid you will be disappointed.”

“No, sir: look here—”

“Edward, my love—”

“Hold—your—tongue. I’m master while I live, and I’ll have my way. You, Denis, you’ve got to marry Hilda; and if I hear of your hanging about the Sandleighs again, and talking to that half-bred Spanish hussy—”

“Look here, father: when you insult Miss Salado, you insult me.”

“Silence, sir!” roared his lordship. “Listen to what I say. Insult you! Puppy! How dare you! The father’s an adventurer, and you’re mad after a big-eyed adventuress.”

“She is a lady, sir.”

“Silence! And as for you, Lady Pinemount, you must have been mad to call upon them. That was the beginning of the mischief.”

“Miss Salado is a very sweet, refined girl, Edward,” said her ladyship quietly, “and it was a social duty to call.”

“Then you’ve done your duty, and there’s an end of it. I won’t have it, and I won’t have the fellow staring over into my park. Coming and sticking himself there! Won’t sell the place again, won’t he? Never another inch of timber or head of beasts does that auctioneer sell for me.”

The Honourable Denis Rolleston was about to speak, but a meaning look from handsome, dignified Lady Pinemount silenced him, and the angry head of the family rose from his half finished lunch and paced the room.

“Taken a fancy to the place, has he? I’ll make him take a fancy to go. The sooner he’s out of Lescombe the better. Like to buy the manor, perhaps? But I’ll make it too hot for him. And you, Denis, understand me at once. I can’t interfere about the title; but look here, sir, you marry as I wish you to,—keep up the dignity of our family tree. You are the head, sir, but if you don’t do as I tell you, sir, not a penny do you have to support the title, for I’ll disinherit you. Yes, sir, you think you’re a devilish fine branch, no doubt, but damme, I’ll saw you off!”

As his lordship spoke, he bounced out of the dining-room, banged the door, and directly after mother and son saw him going straight across the fields to inspect the hoarding he had ordered to be put up.

“I am very sorry, Denis, my dear,” said Lady Pinemount.

“Can’t be helped, mother dear,” said the young man, passing his arm round her and walking up towards the window, where they stood watching his lordship’s diminishing figure. “I want to be a good son, and I never kick against the dad’s eccentricities, except when they are too bad. That is such a petty, ungentlemanly trick—an insult to as fine a fellow as ever breathed, and—”

“You do love Veronica, my boy?” said Lady Pinemount, gazing wistfully at her son.

“Love her?” said the young man, with his frank, handsome English face lighting. “Mother dear, could I pick out a sweeter wife?”

Lady Pinemount sighed, and kissed her son.

Volume One—Chapter Three.

How the Doctor Hit.

“Down again, Very!” cried the Doctor, a week later, as he came in from a botanical ramble to breakfast. “Why, eh?—yes—no: it has been burned.”

“Yes, papa: didn’t you see the flames?”

“Not I. Slept like a top, and I went out through the sandpits and among the fir trees this morning.”

He hurried out of the French window, and out into the road, and looked over the hedge into the park and then returned.

“Seems to have been splashed with petroleum or paraffin. Twice cut down, and once burned. Well, somebody else does not like the hoarding.”

“But, papa, you gave orders for it to be destroyed!”

“I? Hang it all, Very, am I the sort of man to do such a shabby thing?”

“No, papa: I beg your pardon.”

“Granted, pet. Some one in the village thinks it’s a paltry thing to do, and has constituted himself our champion. Confound his insolence! What did he say in his letter?”

“That if you dared to destroy his property, he would prosecute you, papa,” said Veronica.

“Yes, and he has sent me a summons.”

“Oh, papa!”

“Fact, my dear; and I shall be puzzled as to how to defend myself and prove my innocency. I say, Very, my dear, this looks bad for you.”

The girl sighed, and bent over her cup.

“Wouldn’t be a pleasant alliance, my dear, even if it could come off,” continued the Doctor, watching his child furtively. “Ah, dear me! how strangely things do work! Who’d have thought, when we landed in England, that there was the heir to a baron bold waiting to go down on bended knee to my little tyrant, and make her an offer of his heart and hand?”

“Oh, papa, how you do delight in teasing me!”

“Teasing you? Well, isn’t it a fact? You shot him through and through first time we were at church, and your victim has been our humble servant ever since.”

“But, papa, do you think Thomas could have destroyed the hoarding?”

“Well, I don’t know, my dear. He was very indignant about it, and said if this was his place he would soon down with the obstruction.”

“Then it must have been he. You ought to scold him well.”

“What, for getting rid of a nuisance?”

“No: for getting you into such trouble with Lord Pinemount.”

“Hah!” said the Doctor dreamily; “it’s a strange world, Very. Perhaps we had better go back to Iquique.”

“Oh, papa!” cried the girl in dismay.

“Don’t you want to go?”

“What, leave this lovely place, where it is always green, and the flowers are everywhere, for that dreadful dry desert place where one is parched to death? Ah, no, no, no!”

“Humph!” said the Doctor—“always green. Don’t seem so, Very: something, to my mind, is getting ripe at a tremendous rate.”

“I don’t know what you mean, dear,” said the girl consciously.

“Don’t you? Ah well, never mind. But you need not be uneasy,—I do not mean to go back: this place will just suit me to write my book, and I’m not going to stir for all the Lord Pinemounts in England.”

“I wonder how you could ever leave so beautiful a country as England, papa,” said Veronica, as the breakfast went on.

“You wouldn’t wonder, if you knew all,” said the Doctor thoughtfully.

“All, papa?—all what?”

The Doctor was silent, and his child respected his silence. The breakfast was ended, and the paper was thrown down.

“I don’t see why you should not know, my dear. You are a woman now, and thinking about such things.”

Veronica looked across at him wonderingly.

“You asked me why I left England, or some such question. It was because of the woman I loved, my dear.”

“Mamma? To join her at Iquique?”

“No,” said the Doctor thoughtfully; “it was before I knew of her existence.”

“Ah, papa!”

“Yes, my dear. I was desperately in love with a lady before I knew your dear mother.”

Veronica rose with wondering eyes, and knelt down beside her father, resting her elbows on his knees and gazing up in his face.

“Do people—? You loved mamma very dearly, papa?” she whispered.

“Very, my child; and we were very happy till it pleased Heaven to take her away. She taught a poor, weak, foolish man what a good woman really is.”

There was a long pause, and then Veronica said,—

“Do people love more than once, papa?”

“I don’t know, dear,” he said, smiling. “I loved here in England very desperately, and when the lady I worshipped threw me over for another, I swore I would never look a woman in the face again with the idea of wedding; and in utter disgust left England, and all I knew, to roam for a time in the Malay Archipelago; and from thence I went to South America, following out my natural history tasks. Then I found out I had been a fool.”

“I do not understand you, papa.”

“I found, my darling, that I had wasted the strength of a young man’s first love upon a miserable handsome coquette.”

“How did you find that out, papa?”

“By meeting your dear mother, who was everything a true woman should be; and instead of my life proving to be a miserable state of exile, it was all that joy could give till the day of the great pain.”

There was another long pause, and then the Doctor said cheerfully,—

“And that’s why Doctor Salado went away from England. By the way, Very, I’m not a regular doctor, though I studied medicine after I left England very hard.”

“How can you say so, dear, when you know how all the poor people cried at your going away? They said no one would ever cure them of the fever again as you did. Why, they always called you the great doctor.”

“Yes, my dear: but people here would call me the great quack. There, I’m going for my walk round. But—hullo! here’s his lordship to see the burnt hoarding.”

For just at that moment Lord Pinemount’s loud, harsh voice floated in at the window.

“Disgraceful!” he cried.

Then there was a murmur of another voice, and again of another, as if two men were respectfully addressing his lordship.

“An old scoundrel!” came in at the window again.

“He means me!” cried the Doctor excitedly, rising.

“No, no, papa—please, please!” whispered Veronica, clinging to him.

“But I’m sure he does, Very.”

“I mean, don’t go out, papa dear: you would be so angry.”

“Would be? I am!—furiously angry. How dare he call me an old scoundrel!”

“Pray, pray don’t quarrel with him, dear.”

“I’m not going to, pet; but I’ll knock his head off for him.”

“No, no; you shall not go out, dear. I will not have my dear father disgrace himself like that.”

“I declare, Very, you are worse than your poor mother used to be. I must go and hit him, or I shall explode.”

“Then please explode here, papa dear, at me.”

“You’re a strange girl, Very, ’pon my soul,” cried the Doctor.

“Yes, papa dear,” she said quietly, but clinging tightly to his arm.

“How dare he come and damage my property!” floated in through the window.

“Buzz-buzz-buzz,” from another voice.

“But I will, sir. How dare he? I’ll lay the horsewhip across the scoundrel’s back!”

“Buzz-buzz—buzz-buzz.”

“Law or no law, he shall have the horsewhip first and the fine or imprisonment afterwards. These foreign rowdy ways shall not be tolerated here.”

“Let go, Very. I can’t stand it, I tell you,” said the Doctor. But Veronica threw her arms now about his neck, and laid her head close to his cheek, and clung there.

“Will you let go?”

“No, papa.”

“Do you want me to hit you?”

“Yes, papa dear.”

“Hang it, Very, it’s too bad! You’re a coward. You know I can’t.”

“Yes, papa dear; I know you’d sooner cut off your hand.”

“A blackguardly old scoundrel!” floated through the window.

“Yes? my lord.”

“Ah! I am, am I?” cried the Doctor. “Let go, Very.”

“No, papa dear: never.”

“Out, I suppose?” came, as if shouted for the inmates of the cottage to hear.

“I will be directly, you pompous, titled bully,” muttered the Doctor.

“Buzz-buzz—buzz-buzz,” in two different keys.

“Yes, I suppose so,” cried his lordship; “but if he thinks he is going to defeat me he is sadly mistaken.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Very! will you untie those wretched little arms of yours from about my neck?”

“No, papa dear; and I’m not afraid of your hitting me.”

“Then, if you don’t let go, I’ll hit myself.”

Veronica raised her head a little, and kissed him.

“No: at home, and dare not show his face!” roared Lord Pinemount.

“There!” cried the Doctor. “Every word is a stinging blow in the face, Very.”

“Yes, papa; but I’m kissing the places to make them well,” said Veronica, suiting the action to the word.

“But I’ll let him see.”

“Buzz-buzz-buzz,—boozz-boozz-boozz,” and the sound of horse’s hoofs slowly dying away.

“Gone!” cried the Doctor passionately. “Very, you’ve made me seem like a miserable cowards that man will despise me, and insult us more than ever.”

“You are angry, papa dear; but when you grow calm you will tell me I’ve done quite right.”

“Humph! I’ll tell you so now, my darling,” said the Doctor, kissing her affectionately; “but my fingers itched to knock him down.”

“And when you had done so, you would have been very sorry, papa dear; for you would have hurt yourself.”

“What, my knuckles?”

“No, papa—your dignity as a gentleman; and you would have hurt me, too, very much.”

“You’re a witch, Very,” said the Doctor, drawing a long sigh. “What an overbearing brute it is! and I’ll be bound to say that son of his will develop into just such another animal.”

“Papa!”

“Hallo! what have I said?” cried the Doctor, with his eyes winking.

“Hit me after all,” said Very to herself, as she ran sobbing out of the room, but only to be caught upon the stairs and tenderly kissed and petted till her eyes grew dry, and the hysterical sobs which would rise to her lips had cleared.

Volume One—Chapter Four.

Stop!

About a couple of hours later the Doctor was down in his garden with a large note-book in his hand, a pen behind his ear, and an exciseman’s ink-bottle suspended by a piece of silk ribbon to his button-hole. Every now and then, as he walked up and down the gravel walk, he stopped to gaze away south at the lovely prospect, his eyes resting longest on a magnificent clump of fir trees which grew just beyond the bottom of the grounds, and hid from sight some very, shabby sand pits, which had something to do with the place being called “Sandleighs.”

They were splendid old trees, every one having grown straight and clean, for the sandy soil suited them, and a timber merchant would have looked at them longingly, and thought what fine sticks of timber they were, and what fine broad planks they would make if borne to a saw-mill.

Veronica was busy too, but not too busy to run to her father from time to time, as she saw that he took his pen from behind his ear, dipped it, and carefully wrote some note for his work. This note he would read aloud to her, and ask her opinion; after which Veronica hurried back to her work, pricking her fingers in spite of her thick gloves, as she carefully went over her rose trees to free them from the enemies with which they swarmed.

Close at hand, upon his knees, which were protected by an old mat, was Thomas, the old gardener, who was diligently extracting little tufts of weed from the gravel walk, and making observations to his young mistress as he went on.

“Make a deal o’ fuss at the Manor ’bout her ladyship’s roses; but they ain’t nowt to yourn.”

“Indeed!”

“Nowt, miss. You see that this guaney jooce as I waters ’em with is reg’lar hessence, and I saves it up. Seven gard’ners, ’cloodin’ a boy, they keeps there; but they can’t touch us in roses, miss.”

Chod!

“What’s that?” said Veronica, looking up as a peculiar sound struck her ear.

Chud! Then *chad*! and directly after, *chod*!

Thomas was kneeling bolt upright now, and took off his very shabby cap, and began from habit to scratch his head with the blunt point of the old weed knife.

“Don’t you hear, Thomas?” cried Veronica, keeping a rose grub in suspense between her finger and thumb; and as she spoke the sounds came at regular intervals.

“Ay, miss: sounds like some ’un a choppin’ ’ard.”

“Ah!” ejaculated Veronica, as she caught sight of a couple of men through an opening in the shrubbery at the bottom of the lawn, and she ran to where her father was busily writing down a note, speaking aloud as he went on.

“In the half-ruined capsule—”

“Papa!”

“One moment, my dear. ‘The sun causes the outer covering to contract, and assume the form of a shiny and—’”

“Papa, they’re cutting down those beautiful old trees.”

“What!” cried the Doctor, turning in the direction of the clump. “Oh no; it must be a mistake.”

Chod! A tremendous chop.

“By Gladstone!” he roared; and, thrusting his book into his pocket, he ran down the lawn, and, leaping the hedge, passed through to the open, furzy piece of land, where, full in view now, two men were plying their woodmen’s axes rapidly, and making the white chips fly as a ghastly notch began to appear in the side of one of the outer trees.

“Hi! what are you doing?” roared the Doctor, just as Veronica reached the bottom and looked over.

The two men stopped, and rested the heads of their axes on the ground as they grinned.

“Cuttin’ down the trees, sir,” said one of the men.

“What! By whose orders?”

“Lordship’s, sir. Sent us up, and he’s comin’ hisself soon.”

“Do you mean to say that his lordship gave orders for this beautiful clump of trees to be cut down?”

“Yes, sir.”

“But it will disfigure the estate horribly.”

“Well, sir, my mate and the head gardener said as it were a pity.”

“Oh, it’s a mistake, man. You are cutting down the wrong trees.”

“Nay, sir; these here’s right. Lordship said bottom o’ the Sandleighs garden. Can’t be no mistake about that.”

“Then it’s an insult to me,” said the Doctor furiously; “and it shall not be done. Here, come away directly.”

The men looked at one another, and smiled uneasily.

“Do you hear? I say it shall not be done.”

“But his lordship said—”

“Something his lordship!” roared the Doctor. “You strike a blow, either of you, again on one of those trees, and I’ll strike you. There!”

“Papa!” cried Veronica from the garden; but the Doctor was too angry to hear that or anything else.

“Beg pardon, sir, here is his lordship,” whispered one of the men; and Lord Pinemount came cantering up over the short turf and furze.

“Here, what’s the meaning of this?” he cried. “Why are you not going on with your work? Two of these trees ought to be down by now. Who is this man?”

He had so far ignored the Doctor; and as Veronica saw the impending collision she tried to get through the hedge, but stuck fast.

The Doctor flushed, but spoke very quietly, as he raised his hat.

“Lord Pinemount, I believe?” he said.

“Yes,” said Lord Pinemount. “Who the devil are you? How dare you trespass on my grounds and delay my workpeople?”

The Doctor’s lips worked under his stiff beard, and he could not speak for a moment.

“Do you hear me, sir? Be off!” cried his lordship, who was pale with rage. “You men get on with your job.”

The men touched their hats, spat in their hands, and swung up their axes; and Veronica saw things through a mist, but started as much as Lord Pinemount did, for the Doctor roared, in a voice of thunder,—

“Stop!”

And the men stopped.

“How dare you!” cried his lordship, white now with fury. “What the devil do you mean? Of all the insolence! Go on, men, at once; and as for you, sir, I have already instructed the police for your destruction of my property. Now I shall proceed against you for trespass.”

“Stop!” roared the Doctor again, as the men swung up their axes; and Veronica turned cold, and felt as if her delightful love-dream was at an end.

Lord Pinemount dragged his horse’s head round, and rode closer to the Doctor.

“What do you mean, fellow?” he roared.

“Have the goodness to recollect that you are addressing a gentleman. Stop those men. I will not have my property disfigured by these trees being cut down.”

“Oh, papa, papa!” sighed Veronica.

“What, you dare!” cried his lordship. “Your property—disfigured!”

“Then I will not have the Manor disfigured by that timber being taken down.”

“Are you mad?” yelled his lordship.

“No, sir; but from your display of temper, and your insulting language, I presume that you are,” said the Doctor, who grew more cool and dignified as his lordship became incoherent with passion. “Have the goodness to remember that you hold this estate upon certain conditions, and that you have no right to impoverish or destroy. I say that your action now would injure this property as well as mine beyond that hedge. Cut down a single tree more, and I’ll make you smart for it in a way in which you little expect. Now order your workpeople off home, and—No: cut down that disfigured tree now, and grub up the stump. But if you touch another, Lord Pinemount, you will have to reckon with me. Go on, my lads, and be quick and get your hateful job done.”

For a few minutes his lordship could not speak. Then, growing more incoherent minute by minute,—

“Where is Mr Rolleston?” he cried.

“Went round with the head-keeper, my lord,” said one of the men.

“Blue cap spinney, I think, my lord,” ventured the second man.

“Are we to cut down one tree, my lord?” said the first man, touching his hat.

Lord Pinemount said something decidedly strong, drove his spurs into his horse’s side, and went off at a furious gallop; while the two men grinned, and, as if moved by one spirit, wiped their noses on their bare arms.

“This here’s a rum game,” whispered one to the other.

“Come, my lads,” cried the Doctor, “down with that tree, get the stump cut down and the chips cleared away by to-night, and I’ll give you five shillings for beer.”

“Thankye, sir,” they cried in duet, and then set to work vigorously; while the Doctor, who looked very knowing and severe, went slowly back to where Veronica stood, pale and troubled.

“Oh, papa dear!” she whispered, “what have you done?”

“Given Lord Pinemount a lesson that he has needed for a long time, my dear. I thought I could cow him.”

“Yes, papa; but how can you ever be friends at the Manor now?”

“Eh? Denis? Humph! I never thought of that,” said the Doctor, passing his arm round his child, and walking with her slowly up the lawn, passing Thomas, who, as soon as the encounter was over, slipped back from where he had been watching it, and was now extracting weeds at a furious rate, chuckling to himself, and with his opinion of his master wonderfully heightened, while he thought of how he would tell them at the “Half-Moon” at night about the way in

which the Doctor had taken his lordship down.

“Humph!” muttered the Doctor, “how can we be friends at the Manor now? Very, my dear, have I made a mistake? No. I must bring him to his senses. This has been too much to bear.”

Veronica looked wonderingly at the stern, commanding face before her; but she could not help her own trouble, and the countenance of Denis Rolleston creeping in like a dissolving view, which grew plainer and plainer, and then died out again, her vision being blurred by tears.

Volume One—Chapter Five.

Denis Apologises.

“Eh, Miss ’Ronica, but the master ought to ha’ been a lord!” said old Thomas some days later, as he was nailing up some loose strands of clematis against the house; and he stopped for a moment to take a couple of garden nails from his mouth, for they hindered his speech, though he had removed a third from his lips when he began.

He was up on the ladder, ten feet from the ground, and kept looking down at Veronica for instructions.

“Nonsense, Thomas!” she said, rather pettishly; “and raise that long spray higher; I want it to go close up by my window.”

“You shall have him just where you like, miss; and I’ll give him some jooce at the roots to make him run faster. Hallo! what, have I got you, my fine fellow?” he continued, as he pounced upon a great snail which was having its day sleep after a heavy night’s feed, close up under the window-sill.

He descended the ladder slowly with his prize, and was about to crush it under his heel on the gravel path, when Veronica interposed.

“No, no!” she cried; “don’t do that. It is so horrid. I hate to see things killed.”

“But sneels do so much mischief, miss.”

“Never mind; throw it out into the field.”

“To be sure,” said the Doctor, coming along. “Do you know what Uncle Toby said, Thomas, to the fly?”

“Your Uncle Toby, sir? Nay.”

“Everybody’s Uncle Toby. He told the fly there was room enough for both of them in the world.”

“Mebbe, sir,” said Thomas, scratching his head with the claws of his wall-hammer; “and I doan’t say nowt again flies; but if Uncle Toby had grown lettershes and strorbrys he wouldn’t ha’ said as there was room for sneels and slugs in his garden.”

The Doctor laughed, and went on down his favourite path, while, after jerking the snail over the hedge, Thomas returned to the ladder.

“Let him eat his lordship’s stuff,” he said, with a chuckle. “An’ the master ought to ha’ been a lord, miss. The way he put down his lordship’s amazen. They do nowt but talk about it every night at the ‘Half-Moon.’”

“Now, nail up that long loose strand, Thomas,” said Veronica hastily.

“Ay, miss, I’ll nail him,” said the man, climbing the ladder once more; “but would you mind asking the master, miss, to give me something for my back?”

“Why don’t you ask him yourself?”

“I did, miss, four times over; and he always says the same. ‘Go to the properly qualified doctor,’ he says,—just as if there was any one in these parts o’ such guid quality as he is. Nay, miss, you might speak to him for me: he did me a wonderful lot o’ guid once. Mint iles is nothing to that tincture as he gives me. I say it, and I’ll say it agen—Wo ho!”

(This to the ladder, which shifted a little, and had to be rearranged against the wall.)

”—Agen anybody,” continued Thomas, with a shred in his lips. “The master’s a wonderful doctor, and he ought to ha’ been a lord.”

Just then the Doctor called his child.

“Coming, papa.”

“Here’s young Master Rolleston coming along the road, miss,” continued Thomas, hammering away at his bines. “Not much like his father, he ain’t. Wouldn’t ha’ ketched him sticking shutter-boards up in the very front o’ people’s houses, and wanting to cut down the trees. Nice young gent, he is, as ever stepped, miss. Very different to my lord, and—Hullo, when did she go?” said the gardener, looking round to find that his young mistress had gone.

“Ah! I see. Gone into the house ’cause Mr Rolleston’s coming. Tck! Shouldn’t be a bit surprised to hear them two

asked in church some day; and a very pretty pair they'd make. Mum! here's the master."

Thomas went on hammering away; for the Doctor, who had been to the gate to meet his visitor, had received him coldly, and slowly led him into the room where Veronica was seated.

"Well, Mr Rolleston, may I ask the meaning of this visit?" he said, after a conscious greeting between the young people.

"Doctor Salado, pray, pray don't take that tone with me!" cried Denis appealingly.

"What other tone can you expect, after the treatment I have received?"

"I know, sir. It has been most painful; but I have come to apologise." As he spoke he glanced at Veronica, who was seated, looking pale and troubled, with her eyes cast down.

"Oho! An apology? That alters the case. Then his lordship is apologetic, and acknowledges that he is in the wrong?"

The young man flushed.

"I—I regret to say, sir, that my father does not know of my visit."

"Then you have came to apologise for him without his leave?"

"No, sir; I have come to apologise for myself, and to ask you not to think ill of my father."

"Humph! Very right of you to defend your father, young man."

"He is a little hasty and irritable, sir. He has been put out ever since you took this place, for he had set his mind upon it for years. It was a disappointment to him, sir."

"I had set my mind upon having the place, and it would have been a bitter disappointment to me to have missed it. Let me see, Mr Rolleston: with the paddock, garden, and orchard there are about six acres."

"So I have heard, sir."

"And your father has thousands of acres?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he grudges me my little bit. Hardly fair, eh?"

"I can make no defence, sir. I only throw myself upon your mercy. My father is too unwell and irritable to see the matter in the light I do."

"Ah! you are a prejudiced observer," said the Doctor drily.

"I hope not, sir: I wish to be just; and I ask you not to think ill of us for this affair."

"Humph! And are you apologising for Lady Pinemount too?"

"For my mother, sir? There is no need."

"Oh! Why, I thought when Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard, the queen—"

"Doctor Salado!" cried Denis, springing from his seat with flashing eyes, "how dare you. It is an insult to my dear mother, who is as pained and grieved as I am."

"I beg her ladyship's pardon humbly," said the Doctor, as he saw Denis glance again at Veronica, and that she made him an imploring sign.

"I—I beg yours, sir," faltered Denis.

"What for, my lad? Defending your mother? It was quite right. Shake hands."

Denis caught the Doctor's hand, and Veronica uttered a sigh of relief.

"There now, sit down, and let's talk sensibly; and next time a man insults Lady Pinemount like that, knock him down. So you have come to apologise, eh?"

"Yes, sir. It is most painful to me. I have no authority, but I know you to be a straightforward English gentleman who sees my position, and I ask you to be lenient with my father and forbearing towards him."

"But you see this is all selfishness, Denis Rolleston."

"Yes, sir; but you don't know all."

"All what? That you have a silly, boyish liking for my child."

"Silly! boyish!" cried the young man, flushing. "Don't you be hard upon me too."

“It’s the simple truth,” said the Doctor drily; “and very simple too. Here are you, son of the nobleman who holds this handsome estate, with a right to look very high in a matrimonial alliance, and yet you come hanging about here after a young lady, daughter of such a nobody as an eccentric old naturalist who has spent the past thirty years abroad. You must be very weak-minded, young man.”

“Words, sir,” cried Denis eagerly. “You know in your heart you think I am as wise as I know I am.”

His eyes met Veronica’s again, and there was a proud look of happiness in his glance.

“Bah—bah—bah! Heroics, sentiment. Rubbish!” cried the Doctor. “Come, be frank. Your father knows of your inclinations?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And he flew into a rage when he found it out?”

Denis was silent.

“Of course he did, and threatened to disown you, eh? There, you need not answer: I know it all by heart. Quite natural. You expect to be Lord Pinemount some day, and must choose a suitable wife.”

“You told me not to indulge in heroics, sir, so I will remain silent.”

“Quite right. It will not do. Your father threatened to disown you, disinherit you, and all that sort of thing, eh?” Denis made no answer.

“There, you see, Veronica, my child. You have done wrong in encouraging this young man so far. You don’t want to blight his prospects?”

“Ah, no, papa,” cried Veronica, with the tears slowly welling over from her eyes.

“Then you are quite ready to forget what has passed?” Veronica slowly covered her eyes with her hands, and was silent, while Denis stepped to her side and took her hand.

“Let me answer for her, sir,” he said firmly. “I have never spoken out plainly to her in the happy days I have known your daughter. It has seemed enough to be near her, and to feel that I might hope; but I do speak out now, and say —‘Veronica, I love you dearly: let me tell your father that you care for me, and will never change.’”

“Very pretty and sentimental,” said the Doctor coldly, “but I cannot let this go on. I believe your father would disinherit you if you persisted in this—this—this *mésalliance*.”

“On your child’s part, sir?” said Denis, smiling, and then giving her a loving look.

“No, the other way, sir. I’m not going to let my child stoop to enter a family where they look down upon her; and I’m not going to let a young fellow in your position ruin himself with his father for her sake. No, no: no more—that will do. Lord and Lady Pinemount must come and ask for the alliance; so now you had better go.”

“Yes, sir, I’ll go,” said the young man quietly, as he raised Veronica’s hands to his lips,—“I’ll go, for I don’t feel downhearted. I tell you this, though, that I will never give her up. I’m going to wait.”

“Humph!”

“And now, before I go, sir, I want to apologise again for the annoyance I have given you.”

“You? none at all. Always were civil enough.”

“You don’t know, sir, so I will confess. It was I who destroyed those hoardings.”

“You!” cried the Doctor; and Veronica started.

“I was so annoyed, sir, that I came twice over and sawed the supports, and let them down; and as they were put up again, I came last night, deluged the hateful boards with spirits, and set fire to them.”

“And a pretty mess you have got me in, sir,” cried the Doctor angrily. “Do you know I am summoned to appear before the magistrates?”

“That’s all over, sir, for I shall tell my father it was my doing. Good-bye, Veronica: I shall wait. You will shake hands, sir?”

“Humph! oughtn’t to, after such a scampish trick. Well, there, good-bye, my lad. Don’t come here again till you are asked.”

There was a sad and long pressure of two hands directly after; and Denis went off back towards the Manor, while Veronica, after kissing her father, stole up to her room for the maiden’s consolation—salt and water, warm, shed copiously into a piece of cambric.

“Can’t help liking the young dog,” said the Doctor. “Humph!” he added, laughing: “nice son to destroy his father’s ungodly works! So it was he?”

Volume One—Chapter Six.

Sawn Off.

Lord Pinemount was seated in his library, biting his nails mentally, as he lay back in his easy chair glaring at his steward, who stood before him wishing he could get another post, where his master would not be a tyrant, and thinking that, if it had not been for the fact that he had a large wife and a small family at home, he would resign at once.

“And you are sure?”

“Oh yes, my lord—quite.”

“Went straight there?”

“Yes, my lord; and I hope your lordship considers I have done my duty in telling you according to your orders.”

“I consider, sir, that you have behaved like a miserable, contemptible sneak.”

“But your lordship told me to—”

“Don’t talk to me, sir. Leave the room.”

The steward left the room, and as he closed the door he turned round, showing his teeth, and shook his fist.

“Old beast!” he said aloud: “I’ll serve you out for this some day.”

Then his countenance changed, his jaw dropped, and he drew to one side to allow Lady Pinemount to pass, fully conscious that she must have heard his words and seen the expression on his face.

“It’s all over,” he groaned, as her ladyship passed into the library. “I’m a ruined man. She’ll tell him, and—oh dear, oh dear! The workhouse stares us all in the face.”

But Lady Pinemount did not tell her husband, for she knew that the unfortunate steward must have been smarting from one of the injuries his lordship knew so well how to inflict. In fact, if she had felt so disposed she would not have had the opportunity, for the moment she had closed the door she was addressed.

“Ah, here you are!” cried her lord. “I hope you are satisfied.”

“Satisfied, dear?”

“Dear? Bah! You’ve encouraged and sided with that scoundrel of a boy, till he is in open rebellion against me; and then you call me dear.”

“I have not encouraged him,” said Lady Pinemount. “I have always tried to set you two at one. What is the matter now?”

“Why, I’ve found out this morning that Denis himself cut down and burned that hoarding.”

“Over whose destruction you insulted Doctor Salado.”

“I made a mistake,” said his lordship. “I daresay even angels make mistakes sometimes.”

“I don’t know,” said her ladyship quietly. “Of course you will apologise to the Doctor?”

“The Doctor? The quack! No, madam, I am not going to stoop to that.”

Lady Pinemount sighed.

“And that’s not the worst of it. I forbade the young scoundrel to go near those people again. Did I, or did I not?”

“You did, dear, emphatically. But if Denis really cares for Miss Salado—”

“He sha’n’t have her—there! I forbade him to go there; and, not content with insulting me by grubbing down and burning the hoarding I erected to keep off obnoxious people, he has gone there again and again, encouraged by the adventurer of a father.”

“I am very sorry, dear.”

“Sorry? What good does that do? And he’s there now.”

“No, my dear,” said Lady Pinemount; “he is just coming across the park.”

“Ah! is he?” cried Lord Pinemount, leaping up and running to the window. “Here,—hi! Denis! Come here!”

The young man came calmly enough up to the window.

“Ah, mamma!” he said. “You want me, sir?”

“Yes. Where the devil have you been?”

“Over to Sandleighs, sir. And have the goodness to remember, in addressing me, that I am not one of the grooms.”

“Denis!”

“All right, mamma. I am not a child now, and if his lordship addresses me in that tone I shall resent it.”

“Ah, indeed!” said the father sarcastically. “May I respectfully inquire, then, why you have been over to Sandleighs?”

“To apologise to Doctor Salado for causing him so much annoyance.”

“Say Don Salado, my dear son,” cried his lordship: “and may I ask how you have annoyed him? By making eyes at the adventurer’s daughter—bah! wench!”

The young man’s eyes flashed, but he spoke quite calmly.

“I apologised for causing him to be suspected of destroying that hoarding which I cut down and burned.”

“Yes, I know you did, sir.”

“I am not surprised, father. I thought one of your spies would be watching me.”

“Oh, Denis, Denis!” cried Lady Pinemount appealingly. “Right, mother dear. I’ll speak and act quite calmly; but I will not be treated as a schoolboy.”

“Then you have apologised to Doctor Salado, the Spanish-American adventurer, and you are going to espouse his daughter, I presume?”

“Yes, father. I love her very dearly, and—”

“That will do, thank you,” said his lordship quietly, though he was pale with suppressed fury. “I have no time to listen to silly sentiment. Good morning: there is the door.”

Lady Pinemount ran to her son’s side.

“Don’t quarrel, Denis, for my sake,” she whispered; and he pressed her hand.

“Did you hear me, Mr Rolleston? Have the goodness to go. Of course you will get the title when I die, and the estate. But not a penny do you have from me beside; and the estate will nearly ruin you, without money to keep it up. You say you are a man: act like one, and go.”

“You wish me to leave your house finally, sir?”

“Wish? I order you to go; and until you come over humbly and ask leave to pay your addresses to the Lady Jenny, never darken my doors again.”

“Very well, sir. I will see you again, mother, before I go.”

“Denis! Husband, pray, pray do not let this trouble come upon us.”

“Mr Rolleston, being angry makes me ill. I wish to behave politely and calmly to you. Please to go.”

Denis caught his mother to his breast, and then hurried out of the room, to go and order the valet to pack up his portmanteau and send it across to the station; and then he went off across the park, to see the Salados and say good-bye.

Volume One—Chapter Seven.

Good-Bye.

“Back again so soon, Mr Rolleston?” said the Doctor, as Denis presented himself before the father and daughter; Veronica having risen from her seat and laid her hand upon her father’s shoulder, reading at once in their visitor’s eyes that something serious was the cause of his visit.

“Yes, sir: I have come to say good-bye to you both.”

“For good?” said the Doctor, taking his child’s hand and pressing it warmly.

“I hope for good,” said Denis, smiling encouragingly at Veronica. “I am going abroad.”

“What for?”

“The same reason that others go for, sir. To make my fortune.”

“You! I thought you were Lord Pinemount’s heir.”

“So I am, sir; but my father may live twenty or thirty years,—I hope he may,—and I have nothing now except what I

earn.”

“Humph! then you have come to an open rupture with him?”

“No, sir; he has come to an open rupture with me.”

“Because you come here?”

“Because I refuse to obey him and make matrimonial overtures to a lady I dislike.”

“Overture to a very bad opera, eh?”

“I could not do it, sir. It would be base, contemptible, and—There—you know.”

“Humph! Then you have beggared yourself because you think you care for Veronica?”

“No, sir; I am ordered away till I go and beg pardon and promise to marry as my father orders; so there is a breach that will never be healed.”

“Better go and heal it. This is all very fresh. Very will soon forget you, and you’ll forget her.”

“Doctor Salado!”

“Well, I know the world, sir. Sad thing for a young man like you to sacrifice his prospects.”

“I don’t agree with you, sir. It is the best thing that could have happened, and will make a man of me. I shall go to Canada or Vancouver, I think; and in justice to Miss Salado I have come to say that I bind her by no promise,—I only trust in her faith. Some day I shall return to ask her to be my wife. Till then—”

He could not finish, but stood with his lips compressed.

“Humph! Well, I think you are quite right, sir. Come, Very, be a woman. How much capital have you to take with you?”

“None, sir.”

“Then you’ll want some five hundred or a thousand. I have the latter amount, and no particular use for it. I’ll lend it to you at five per cent.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Denis warmly, “but I must decline. I’ll go and fight the battle for myself, and prove to my father that I am not the weak boy he thinks.”

“Quite right. Go and fight the battle for yourself.”

“Papa!” whispered Veronica, with a look of agony in her eyes.

“Yes, my dear; it’s the best thing he can do. You both feel a bit sore, but you will soon forget the trouble. Good-bye, Denis Rolleston. You’re more of a man than I thought you. Write to me now and then, and let me hear how you are getting on. We shall both be very pleased to hear of your welfare. It’s a pity your father is so severe; but there—all fathers are. I am. Good-bye, my lad. I’d select a good ship, and I wouldn’t go steerage.”

“Why not?” said Denis, through his set teeth. “Better begin at the bottom, sir.”

“Well, yes, my lad, perhaps you had. Now, Very, my dear, say good-bye to him like a woman, and wish him well. Some day in the future you two will meet at dinner and laugh at this rosy-posy boy-and-girl love business. And by the way, Rolleston, my lad, keep your eyes open, and send me any little natural history specimen you find.”

“Good-bye, Veronica,” said Denis, who did not seem to hear the Doctor’s words.

“Good-bye,” she said, giving him a wistful look; and her voice was almost inaudible, while her eyes looked dull and her cheeks ashy pale.

He took her cold limp hand, held it for a few moments in his, then turned and rushed out of the house.

“Papa! Father!”

Only two words; but their tone was enough for the Doctor, who caught her to his heart, then placed her in a chair and turned to the window.

“Hi! Denis!” he roared; and the young man turned, coming back in obedience to the signals the Doctor made, and standing once more in the room.

“Look here, sir, you had better have that money: you’ll want it over yonder.”

“Did you call me back for that, sir?” said the young man bitterly—“to go through this agony again? No: I will make the money I want myself.”

“Bravo!” cried the Doctor, seizing his hand. “But you sha’n’t go!”

Denis stared.

“Do you think I am going to have my little pet here die of a broken heart, for the sake of you, you ugly young scoundrel? No! you sha’n’t go. Here: you stop and comfort Very, and I’ll go over to the Manor and bring my Lord Pinemount to his knees.”

“Doctor Salado!” cried Denis excitedly. “No, no: it is impossible. You must not go. You would be insulted.”

“Then I’ll insult him. Here, Very, my pretty: I’m not to let this boy go, am I?”

For answer the girl flung herself upon Denis’ breast, and clung there sobbing.

“This—this is too hard, sir!” cried Denis passionately.

“I am only man, after all.”

“Well, what do you want to be, boy? There, I don’t like you, and I don’t like your father; but I’m not going to let that stand in the way. I’m going over to the Manor to bring my lord to his knees.”

“You don’t know what you are saying,” cried Denis. “Veronica, he must not go.”

“I do know what I’m saying. Am I not Doctor Salado—a moral magician in my way? Did I not make him give up cutting down the trees?”

“Yes, sir; but you cannot make him retract from driving me off the family tree for a time,” said Denis, with a sad smile. “I am only a beggar now, and I must go.”

“Indeed you will not. And as for being a beggar, Very here will have plenty for you both.”

“Which I could not take.”

“Then, confound you, sir!” cried the Doctor, with mock fury, “I’ll bring an action against you for breach of promise of marriage. There, pet, don’t cry: you shall have your pretty boy.”

“Doctor Salado, you must not go. You don’t know my father.”

“Thoroughly, my lad. There—take heart, both of you. Denis, my lad, you sha’n’t be a pensioner on my bounty. Come, I’ll bet you five pounds that your father and mother dine here with us to-night, and talk to my Very here as if she were their child, as she has to be.”

“Doctor Salado, are you mad?”

“Yes, my lad. I have been all my life, but I’m not at all dangerous. God bless you, my lad! I believe in you, and when I come back you’ll believe in me.”

Volume One—Chapter Eight.

Doctor Salado’s Magic.

“Take the good the gods provide you,” seemed to be Denis Rolleston’s motto, for he was very happy with Veronica, while the Doctor made off across the park, gave the bell at the open door a tremendous tug, and then waited till a serious-looking butler came to the front.

“Tell his lordship I want to see him directly.”

“Not at home, sir,” said the man stolidly.

“Tell his lordship I want to see him directly,” cried the Doctor sternly. “He’s in the library: I heard his laugh as I came up to the house.”

“But—”

“Stand aside, fellow!” cried the Doctor; and he marched in, flung open the library door, and shut it sharply, as Lord Pinemount rose from his chair pale with rage.

“Morning,” said the Doctor. “Sit down. I want a chat with you.”

He took a seat coolly, and looked critically at the angry man before him, who was breathless with passion.

“How dare you!” he said at last—“how dare you force your presence here! Go, sir, before I send for the police.”

“Don’t make a fool of yourself, sir: sit down. You must know that the business is important, or I should not act like this.”

“You are a madman, sir!”

“Yes, perhaps: sit down.”

There was such a tone of authority in the Doctor’s words that his lordship dropped back in his chair wondering at his own action.

“That’s better. Now then, Pinemount, let’s look the state of affairs in the face. Your boy loves my child.”

“I have no son, sir. I have cut him off.”

“Humph! All talk, sir. Can’t be done. He loves my girl, and she loves him. He is up at my house now; and after I have talked to you I want you to bring her ladyship over to the young people, and make things comfortable.”

“Yes, you are mad,” said his lordship, reassuring himself. “How dare you presume like this! Leave my house, sir!”

“Don’t raise your voice, man, and let all the servants know you are in a passion.”

“The insolence—the presumption! Look here, sir: if you are not mad, who and what are you, that you dare to come and make such a proposition to me?”

“Ah!” said the Doctor, as Lady Pinemount entered, looking anxiously from one to the other, while the visitor advanced to meet her, took her hand, kissed it with courtly grace, and led her to a chair.

“I repeat, sir, who and what are you, that you presume to come and sow dissension in my peaceful village—heartburnings in my home? Who are you?”

“Your cousin Richard, who died abroad.”

“What!” roared his lordship. “Impostor, you lie!”

“No, sir: you are the impostor, or rather usurper. I grieve to say, madam—Mrs Rolleston—that I am Lord Pinemount, and that your husband has no right whatever here.”

“I—”

“Silence, sir!” said Lord Pinemount, with dignity. “Accept the position, and hear what I have to say.”

“Is this true, sir?” faltered the lady.

“You will know if you listen, madam. Nay, you both must know, by the inquiries that were made before your husband succeeded to the title and estates. I saw all the papers with the advertisements; but I was happy, was rich, and detested England for an old association, and I preferred to remain dead to all who had known me. When at last I did return to England, for my child’s sake—a widower—I came down here. The Sandleighs was for sale, and I bought it.”

There was something like a groan here, and the lady gazed wildly at her husband.

“Of course I thought of claiming the title; but I met you and your son, and I said to myself, ‘Why should I make his family wretched?’ Then, as you know, while I was in doubt, Love came and cleared away the difficulty and decided me. If I had claimed the title it would have been for Veronica’s sake. Well, Denis loves her; and in due time—a long time hence, if your husband will study his health and not cut his life short by passion and apoplexy—Denis will be My Lord,—my child My Lady. That is enough for me. I am contented to be the Doctor and go on as the naturalist still.”

“But—but—” faltered the lady. “My husband—Mr Rolleston, if what you say is true—”

“He knows it is true. But not Mr Rolleston,—Lord Pinemount still. Madam, I tell you I am very rich, and my wants are very few. The title is nothing to me. Yes, it is—it is my one secret. There, Pinemount, am I an impostor now?”

“I am stunned,” faltered the bearer of the title.

“Bah! that will soon go off. Lady Pinemount, our esteem, I am sure, is mutual, and I believe you like your son’s choice.”

“Indeed, indeed I do!” cried Lady Pinemount eagerly.

“You would not be a woman if you did not,” said the Doctor warmly. “There, Pinemount, you may take my word—the more easily that you see I want nothing from you but your cousinship. Still the family lawyers can see papers that would convince the greatest sceptic living. Let bygones be forgotten. Give me your hand.”

The said hand was raised doubtingly, but it was seized and warmly grasped.

“Now then,” said the Doctor, “I promised your son to bring you up to ask my child to be your son’s wife.”

“Is this some dream?” said Lord Pinemount, in a subdued voice.

“No, sir—the broad sunlight of fact. There, my dear cousin, Lady Pinemount, is eager to take my darling in her arms, and you are as eager to grasp the hand of as true and brave a young fellow as ever stepped. Will you order the carriage, Lady Pinemount?”

“But—but,” faltered Lord Pinemount, “do I understand that you will not ask me to give up the title—the estate?”

“Only when the great end comes, and your son reigns in your stead—and ours, sir. God bless him! for I love him as if he was my son. Lady Pinemount—cousin, sister—you will come on at once?”

She could not speak, but pressed the hand he gave her and held it to her lips.

“But what magic is this?” whispered Denis two hours later, when he had felt the warm grasp of his father’s hand, and seen him kiss and bless Veronica, who was now seated on a couch with Lady Pinemount’s arm round her waist “Doctor Salado’s magic, my dear boy. Some day I will give you the recipe. There—never mind now. You will represent the family tree, and its finest limb is not sawn off.”

Volume Two—Chapter One.

The Gilded Pill—A Homely Comedy.

Dove and Daws.

“Richard Shingle, Shoemaker. Repairs neatly executed.”

This legend was written in yellow letters, shaded with blue, upon an oval red board. Red, blue, and yellow form a pleasing combination to some eyes; but when the yellow is drab, the blue dirty, and the scarlet of a brick-dusty tint, the harmony is not pleasing. Moreover, the literary artist could not be complimented upon his skill in writing in pigment with a camel-hair brush; for, not content to be staid and steadfast in Roman characters, he had indulged in wild flourishes, which gave the signboard the appearance of a battle-field, upon which certain ordinary letters were staggering about, while three or four tyrannical capitals were catching them with lassoes, which twined wildly, round their heads and legs.

For instance, the first “d” was in difficulties, the “g” was pulled out of place, the “h” and “o” tied tightly together, while just below, the “repairs” seemed to be neatly executed indeed, for the “r” had a yellow rope round its neck, having been hung by “Richard,” beneath which word it was suspended, with the rest of the letters kicking frantically because that initial was at its last gasp.

But this idea, probably, did not present itself to the inhabitants of Crowder’s Buildings, a pleasant *cul de sac* in the neighbourhood of the Angel at Islington. Crowder, once upon a time, bought two houses in a front street, between and under which there was an entrance like a tunnel, leading to the back gardens and back doors of the said houses; and Crowder—now dead and numbered with the just—being a man of frugal mind, gazed at the gardens of his freehold messuage and tenements, and saw that they were useful as cat walks, to make beds growing oyster and other shells, and vegetables of the most melancholy kind. He let the fact dawn upon his understanding that the vegetables grown might be bought better for sixpence per annum, and resolved that he would utilise the space.

To do this, he built up two rows of staring-eyed, four-roomed tenements, sixteen in all, separated by twelve feet of pavement, whitewashed them as they stood staring at one another, and turned the two garden deserts into a busy, thrifty hive, where some twenty or thirty families flourished and grew dirty.

The occupants of the two houses in the street complained, and left; but Crowder let the houses at a higher rent without the gardens—let the little tenements each at ten shillings a week, and turned out those who did not pay; and for the rest of his life collected his own dues, did his own painting and whitewashing—even plastered upon occasion; and at last, while repairing a chimney-stack and putting on a new pot, at the age of seventy-five, like a thrifty soul as he was, he slipped from the ladder, rolled off the roof of Number 10, fell into the open paved space, with his head in the centre gutter, where the soapsuds ran down, and his heels on a scraper—every house had a scraper, to make it complete—and was so much injured that Nature gave him notice to quit his earthly habitation, evicted him, and, save in name, the buildings knew him no more.

For they passed into the hands of Maximilian Shingle, “broker and setrer,” as his brother said—a most worthy member of society: a sticky-fingered man, who, through this last quality, was enabled to lay up honey in store. In fact, he was so well off that, when Crowder’s Buildings were brought to the hammer by Crowder’s heirs, executors, administrators and assigns, the hammer that knocked them down knocked them into Max Shingle’s possession, and they were paid for with Mrs Fraser’s money—a certain amount in thousands which she bestowed, with her two sons Fred and Tom—upon the man who re-won her heart six months after Fred Fraser senior’s death.

It was a retired spot after passing through the tunnel, and hence it became the popular playground of the children of the neighbourhood, who chalked the pavement, broke their knees and heads upon its harsher corners, and made it the scene of the festive dance when a dark-visaged organ-man came down to grind the last new airs of the day.

By a great act of benevolence, Maximilian Shingle, who was a lowly, good man, a shining light at his chapel, where he was deacon, had, though inundated with applications for Number 4 when it became empty, let it to his unlucky brother Richard, who flourished under the sign that heads this chapter, made boots and shoes, and neatly executed the repairs in the dilapidated Oxonians and strong working-men’s bluchers that came to his lot.

It was first-floor front-room cleaning-up day at Richard Shingle’s; and Mrs Shingle—familiarly spoken to as “mother”—was in her glory, having what she called “a good rummage.” Had her home possessed a back yard or a front garden, every article of furniture would have been turned out; but as there was not an inch of back yard, and the front garden was very small, being limited to six flowerpots behind a small green fence on the upstairs window-sill, Mrs Shingle was debarred from that general clearance.

But she did the best she could to get at the floor for a busy scrub while her husband and daughter were away; and the consequence was that the side-table had its petticoats tucked up round its waist, thereby revealing the fact that its legs were not mahogany, but deal; the hearthrug was rolled up, and sitting in the big-armed Windsor chair; the fender had gone to bed in the back room; and the chairs seemed to be playing at being acrobats, and were standing one upon the other; while the chimney ornaments—shepherds and shepherdesses for the most part—were placed as spectators on the top of the little cupboard to look on.

Mrs Shingle finished her task of cleaning up before descending, carrying a pail which had to be emptied and rinsed out before her hands were dried.

Mrs Shingle was a pleasant, plump woman, who had run a good deal to dimple; in fact, the backs of her hands were full of coy little pits, where the water hid when she washed, and her wedding ring lay in a kind of furrow, from not having grown with her hands.

She gave a few touches with a duster to the lower room, which was half sitting, one-fourth kitchen, and one-fourth workshop, inasmuch as there was a low shoemaker's bench, with its tools, under the window, beneath which, and secured to the wall by a strap, were lasts, knives, awls, pincers, and various other implements of the shoemaker's art. On a stand close by stood a sewing machine, and on the table were patches of kid and patent leather, evidently awaiting the needle.

Mrs Shingle had finished her hurried cleaning, and the furniture was put back; had been to the glass and arranged her hair, and finished off by taking out three pins, which she stuck in her mouth, as if it were a cushion, giving herself a shake, which caused her dress, that had been round her waist, to fall into its customary folds; and then, sitting down she was busy at work binding boot-tops, when the open door was darkened, and a fashionably dressed young man, of five-and-twenty, tapped on the panel with the end of his stick, entered with a languid walk, said, "How do, aunt?" and seated himself on the edge of the table.

The visitor's clothes were very good, but they had a slangy cut, and might have been made for some Leviathan of a music-hall, who intended to delineate what he termed "a swell." For the cuffs of the excessively short coat nearly hid the young fellow's hands, even as the ends of his trousers almost concealed his feet; his shirt front was ornamented with large crimson zigzag patterns, and his hat was so arranged on the back of his head that it pressed down over his forehead a series of unhappy, greasy-looking little curls, which came down to his eyebrows.

Mrs Shingle nodded, and stabbed a boot-top very viciously as the young man saluted her.

"Old man out?" he said.

"You know he is," retorted Mrs Shingle, "else you wouldn't have come."

"Don't be hard on a fellow, aunt. You know I can't help coming. Where's Jessie?"

"Out," said Mrs Shingle, sharply.

"She always is out when I come," drawled the young man, tapping his teeth with his cane. "I believe she is upstairs now."

"Then you'd better go up and see," exclaimed Mrs Shingle. "Look here, Fred, I'm sure your father don't approve of your coming here."

"I can't help what the governor likes," was the reply.

"I'm not going to ask him where I'm to go. Is Jessie out?"

"I told you she was, sir."

"Don't be so jolly cross, aunt. It's all right, you know. The old man will kick a bit, but he'll soon come round. Don't you be rusty about it. You ought to be pleased, you know; because she ain't likely to have a chance to do half so well. I shall go and meet her."

As he spoke, the young man—to wit, Frederick Fraser, step-son of Maximilian Shingle, Esq, of Oblong Square, Pentonville—slowly descended from the table, glanced at himself in the glass, and made for the door.

"She's gone down the Goswell Road, I know," said the young man, turning to show his teeth in a grin.

"No, no," exclaimed Mrs Shingle hastily.

"Thank ye, I know," said the young fellow, with a wink, and he passed out.

"Bother the boy!" exclaimed Mrs Shingle petulantly. "Now he'll meet her, and she'll be upset, and Dick will be cross, and Tom look hurt. Oh, dear, dear, dear, I wish she'd been as ugly as sin!"

There was an interval of angry stitching, as if the needle was at enmity with the soft leather, and determined to do it to death, and then Mrs Shingle cried, "Here she is!"

"Ah, my precious!" she added, as a trim, neat little figure came hurrying in snatched off her hat and hung it behind the door.

She was only in a dark brown stuff dress, but it was the very pattern of neatness, as it hung in the most graceful of folds; while over all shone as sweet a face as could be seen from east to west, with the bright innocence looking out of dark grey eyes.

"Back again, mother," accompanied by a hasty kiss, was the reply to Mrs Shingle's salute.

Then, brushing the crisp fair hair back from her white temples, the girl popped herself into a chair, opened a packet, drew close to the sewing machine, and in response to the pressure of a couple of little feet, that would have made anything but cold crystallised iron thrill, the wheel revolved, and with a clinking rattle the needle darted up and down.

“Have I been long?”

“No, my dear—quick as quick!” said Mrs Shingle, watching her child curiously.

“I wanted to get back and finish this, so as to take it in,” said the girl, making the machine rattle like distant firing.

“Did you meet Mr Fred?”

“Fred? No, mother,” was the reply, as the girl started, coloured, and the consequence was a tangle of the threads and a halt. “Has he been here?” she continued, as with busy fingers she tried to set the work free once more.

“Yes, just now, and set out to meet you. I wonder how you could have missed him.”

There was a busy pause for a few minutes, during which some work was hastily finished; and while Mrs Shingle kept watching her child from time to time uneasily, the latter rose from the machine, and began to double up the jacket upon which she had been at work, and to place it with a couple more lying close by on a black cloth.

“I hope you don’t encourage him, Jessie,” said Mrs Shingle at last.

“Mother!” exclaimed the girl, and her face became like crimson—“how can you?”

“Well, there, there, I’ll say no more,” exclaimed Mrs Shingle—“only it worries me. Now, make haste, there’s a dear, or you’ll be late. Don’t stop about, Jessie; and, whatever you do, don’t come back without the money. Your uncle’d sure to come or send to-day, and it’s so unpleasant not being ready.”

“I’ll be as quick as I can, mother,” said Jessie briskly.

“And you won’t stop, dear?”

“I don’t know what you mean, mother,” said the girl, with a tell-tale blush on her cheek.

“How innocent we are, to be sure!” exclaimed Mrs Shingle, tartly. Then, smiling, she continued, “There, I’m not cross, but I don’t quite like it. Of course, Tom don’t know when you go to the warehouse, and won’t be waiting. There, I suppose young folks will be young folks.”

“I can’t help it, mother, if Mr Fraser meets me by accident,” said Jessie, blushing very rosily, and pouting her lips.

“But he mustn’t meet you by accident; and it oughtn’t to be. Uncle Max would be furious if he knew of it, and those two boys will be playing at Cain and Abel about you, and you mustn’t think anything about either of them.”

“Mother!” exclaimed Jessie.

“I can’t help it, my dear; I must speak, and put a stop to it. Your father would be very angry if he knew.”

“Oh, don’t say so, mother!” pleaded Jessie, with a troubled look.

“But I must say it, my dear, before matters get serious; and I’ve been thinking about it all, and I’ve come to the conclusion that it must all be stopped. There! what impudence, to be sure! I believe that’s him come again.”

“May I come in?” said a voice, after a light tap at the door. And a frank, bearded face appeared in the opening.

“Yes, you can come in,” said Mrs Shingle sharply. But, in spite of her knitted brows, she could not keep back a smile of welcome as the owner of the frank face entered the room, kissed her, and then turned and caught Jessie’s hands in his, with the result that the parcel she was making up slipped off the table to the ground.

“There, how clumsy I am!” he exclaimed, picking up the fallen package, and nearly striking his head against Jessie’s, as, flushed and agitated, she stooped too. “Well, aunt dear, how are you?”

“Oh, I’m well enough,” said Mrs Shingle tartly, as she stretched a piece of silk between her fingers and her teeth, and made it twang like a guitar string. “What do you want here?”

“What do I want, aunt? All right, Jessie—I’ll tie the string. Thought I’d come in and carry Jessie’s parcel.”

“Oh, there!” exclaimed the girl.

“Now, look here, Mr Tom Fraser,” said Mrs Shingle, holding up her needle as if it were a weapon of offence: “you two have been planning this.”

“Mother!” cried Jessie.

“Oh no, we did not, aunt,” cried the young man; “it was all my doing. No, no, Jessie—I’ll carry the parcel.”

“No, no, Tom; indeed you must not.”

“I should think not, indeed!” cried Mrs Shingle, who, as she glanced from one to the other, and thought of her own early days, plainly read the love that was growing up between the young people; but could not see that her first visitor, Fred, had come back, and was standing gazing, with a sallow, vicious look upon his face, at what was going on inside, before going off with his teeth set and an ugly glare in his eyes.

“Tom Fraser,” continued the lady of the house, “I mean Mr Tom—Mr Thomas Fraser—you ought to be ashamed of yourself, to behave in this way. You quite the gentleman, and under Government, and coming to poor peopled houses, and wanting to carry parcels, and all like a poor errand-boy!”

“Stuff and nonsense, aunt!—I’m not a gentleman, and I’m only your nephew; and whilst I’m here I’m not going to see Jessie go through the street carrying a parcel, when I can do it for her.”

“But you must not, indeed, Tom—I mean Mr Fraser,” said Jessie, half-tearful, half-laughing. “I’m going to the warehouse, and I must carry it myself.”

“I know you are going to the warehouse,” said Tom, laughing; “but you must not carry the parcel yourself.”

“But, my dear boy,” said Mrs Shingle, who was evidently softening, “think of what your father would say.”

“I can’t help what he would say, aunt,” said the young man, earnestly; “I only know I can’t help coming here, and I don’t think you want to be cruel and drive me away.”

“No—no—no,” said Mrs Shingle, “but—”

“Do you, Jessie?”

“No, Tom—Mr Fraser,” faltered Jessie. “But—”

“But—but!” exclaimed the young man impatiently. “Bother Mr Fraser! My dear Jessie, why are you turning so cold here before your mother? Are you ashamed of me?”

“No—no, Tom,” she cried eagerly.

“And you know how dearly I love you?”

“Yes, Tom,” faltered Jessie sadly; “but it must be only as cousins.”

“And why?” said the young man sternly.

“Because,” said Jessie, laying her hand upon his arm, “I’m only a very poor girl, Tom, and half educated.”

“What a wicked story, Jessie!” cried Mrs Shingle, who had her apron to her eyes, but now spoke up indignantly —“why, you write beautiful!”

“And,” continued Jessie, “your father—my father would never consent to it; for I’m not a suitable choice for you to make.”

“Why, Jessie,” cried the young man, “you talk like a persecuted young lady in a book. What nonsense! Uncle Richard, if he felt sure that I should make you a good husband, would consent. And, as to my step-father—”

“Now, look here, you two,” said Mrs Shingle, “it’s important that Jessie should get to the warehouse with those things, and you’re stopping idling. It’s late as it is.”

“Come along, then,” cried Tom, seizing the parcel.

“No, no,” cried Jessie, who looked pale, and trembled.

“No, indeed; he must not go with you,” said Mrs Shingle.

“Don’t be cruel, aunt,” said Tom appealingly. “I don’t like Jessie to go by herself.”

“There, then, she’s not going by herself; I’m going with her,” exclaimed Mrs Shingle.

“Then let me go instead.”

“No, no,” cried Jessie, getting agitated; “you must not.”

“You have some reason, Jessie,” said Tom, looking at her suspiciously.

“No, no, Tom. Don’t look at me like that,” she cried.

“Then tell me why,” he said, sternly.

“The man at the warehouse made remarks last time you came,” said Jessie, hesitating.

“I’ll make marks and remarks on him, if he does,” cried Tom. “Aunt,” he continued angrily, “I can’t bear it. It’s not right for Jessie to go alone; and I don’t believe you were going. It makes me half mad to think that she may be insulted by some puppy or another, and I not be there to knock him down.”

“But no one will insult her, my boy,” said Mrs Shingle, looking at him admiringly.

“But people do, and have,” cried Tom, grinding his teeth. “She has told me so. Because she goes with a parcel through the streets, every unmanly rascal seems to consider she is fair game for him; and—hang it, aunt, I can’t help it!—if any scoundrel does it again, I’ll half kill him!”

“Oh, Tom, Tom!” whispered Jessie, as he strode up and down, with the veins in his forehead starting, and then uttered a sob.

“I can’t help it,” he cried; “it’s more than a fellow can bear. I’m not ashamed to own it. I love Jessie dearly; and if she’ll be my little wife I don’t care what anybody says. Poor girl, indeed! Where’s the lady in our set that can stand before her?”

“Not many, I know,” said Mrs Shingle proudly.

“She can’t help uncle being poor, and I can’t help my step-father being rich. Come, aunt, you’ll let me go?”

“I mustn’t.”

“Then it’s because that brother of mine has been here,” cried Tom angrily.

“No, no, no!” cried Mrs Shingle; “indeed it isn’t, my dear boy. But I mustn’t allow it—I mustn’t indeed. Your father will never forgive me.”

“Jessie dear,” cried the young man, taking her hand, “you know I love you.”

“I know you say you do,” she faltered.

“And I think you care for me—a little.”

“Oh no, I don’t think I do—not a bit,” she said, half archly, half with the tears in her sweet eyes, as they would look tenderly at him, and seemed to say how much she would like him to come and protect her.

“I do not believe you, my darling,” he cried impetuously. “I’m quite satisfied about that. Aunt dear, you’ll let me go with her?”

“I don’t like it,” said Mrs Shingle; “and I’m sure it will lead to trouble.”

“Not it. Come, Jessie!”

“No, no, no!” cried Jessie. “Indeed you ought not to come, Tom.”

“Tom! Well, I must come after that,” he cried.

“Oh no: I did not mean it.”

“Well, look here,” said the young fellow. “Listen, both of you. If you will not let me walk with you side by side, I’ll follow like a shadow.”

“Shadows can’t carry parcels,” said Jessie merrily.

“This one can, and will.”

“There, go along, do, both of you,” said Mrs Shingle, whose eyes twinkled with pleasure as she looked on Tom’s eager face. “You’ll be dreadfully late.”

“All right,” cried Tom joyfully; “we’ll make haste, and if we are going to be late we’ll take a cab.”

“Because we are ashamed of the parcel,” said Jessie demurely.

“Ashamed!” cried Tom. “Why, if you’ll come with me I’ll take the parcel under one arm and you under the other, and walk all round the quadrangle at Somerset House when the clerks are leaving, just to make them all envious.”

“Go along, do!” cried Mrs Shingle. And she stood gazing after them as there was a playful struggle for the parcel at the door; while, as they disappeared, the plump little woman took up her shoe-binding, began stitching, and sighed—

“Heigho! I’m afraid I’ve done very wrong.”

Volume Two—Chapter Two.

Hopper—Ship’s Husband.

“Halloa, you sir!” said a snarling voice; “mind where you’re running to.”

“Beg pardon! Halloa, Mr Hopper, is it you?” exclaimed Tom.

“Eh? What? Yes, it is me, you rough, ill-mannered cub. Tom Fraser, if you were my son, hang it, sir, I’d thrash you, sir—trying to knock down a respectable wayfarer who is getting old and infirm.”

The speaker shook the ugly stick he carried at the young man as he spoke, and his great massive head, with its unkempt grizzled hair and untended beard and whiskers, looked anything but pleasant; for from beneath his shaggy, overhanging brows his eyes seemed to flash again.

“I didn’t try to knock you down,” shouted Tom, putting his face close to that of the old fellow, who looked as if his

seventy years had been spent in gathering dirt more than in cleaning it off.

“Don’t shout. I’m not so deaf as all that, you ugly ruffian. Pick up those boots.”

Tom stooped, and picked up a very old pair of unpolished boots that the other had been carrying beneath his arm, and had let fall on the pavement in the collision.

“There you are, Mr Hopper, and I beg your pardon, and I’m very sorry,” said Tom, smiling pleasantly. “There you are,” he continued, tucking the boots under his arm. “It’s all right now.”

“What are you halloaing like that for, you ugly young bull-calf?” snarled the old fellow, shaking his stick. “Do you think I want all the people in the Buildings to come out and listen? Don’t I tell you I’m not so deaf as all that, hang you? What are you going to do with that girl?”

“Only going down into the City,” replied Tom.

“Hey?” said the old fellow.

“City!” shouted Tom.

“Oh! Does your father know you’re going with her?” cried the old fellow, with a malevolent grin beginning to overspread his countenance.

“No,” said Tom, flushing slightly; while Jessie began to look troubled.

“Hey?”

“No!” shouted Tom.

“Does her father know you’ve come?” said the old fellow, pointing at Jessie with his stick.

“No!” said Tom stoutly, and beginning to grow indignant.

“Then,” continued the old man, chuckling, and rubbing his hands together, and dropping first his stick and then his boots, which Jessie hastened to pick up, “I’ll go and see Mr Shingle to-night, and tell him; and I’ll wait here till Richard Shingle comes home, and I’ll tell him; and there’ll be the devilishest devil of a row about it that ever was. You’ve no business here, and you know it, you scoundrel. She isn’t good enough for you. You’re to marry the fair Violante—the violent girl. There’ll be a storm for you to-night, young fellow; so look out.”

“I’ll trouble you to mind your own business, Mr Hopper,” exclaimed Tom hotly.

“Hey?” said the old fellow, holding a boot up to his right ear, like a speaking trumpet.

“I say, if you get interfering with my affairs, Mr Hopper,” cried Tom angrily, and paying no heed to a whispered remonstrance from Jessie, “I’ll—”

“I can’t hear a word you say: try the right side.”

As he spoke, he held the other boot to his left ear, and leaned forward in an irritating manner, grinning the while at the speaker.

“I say that if you dare to—”

“Tchsh! I can’t hear a word if you mumble like that. Oh, be off with you: I’ve got no time to waste. I’m seventy, and if I’m lucky I’ve got ten years to live. You’re five-and-twenty, and got fifty-five, so you are wasteful of your time, and spend it in running after girls who don’t want you—like your beautiful brother Fred. Bless him! if I had any money to leave I’d put him down in my will for it—an artful, designing scoundrel!”

“Look here, Mr Hopper,” cried Tom hotly, “you can abuse me as much as you like, and tell tales as much as you like, and play the sneak; but because you’ve known me from a child I won’t stand here and hear my brother maligned.”

“There, it’s no use, I can’t hear a word you say,” grumbled the old fellow; “but it don’t matter,—I can see by your manner that you are abusing a poor helpless old man, the friend of your mother and that girl’s father, and you are keeping her back, so that she’ll be late with her parcel, and make her lose the work, and then you’ll be happy.”

“Confound—” began Tom. “Here, come along, Jessie,” he cried, snatching her arm through his; and the old man stood chuckling to himself as he watched them out through the tunnel, before he made for the door with the red sign, and giving a sharp rap with his stick entered at once, nodding quietly at Mrs Shingle.

“Here, I’ve brought Dick a job,” he said, carrying the old pair of boots to the bench. “He’s to do them directly, and they’re to be sixpence—I won’t pay another penny. Are you listening?”

Mrs Shingle nodded, and went on with her work.

“He’s to put a good big corn on the last of the left-hand foot, and then cut away the leather, well beat a patch and put it on. My left foot hurts me horrid.”

“You ought to have a new pair,” said Mrs Shingle.

“Hey?”

“You ought to have a new pair,” she continued, a trifle more loudly.

“Have a new pair?”

Mrs Shingle nodded.

“Bah! How can I afford a new pair? Times are hard. Ships’ husbands don’t make money like they used. New pair, indeed! They’re good enough for me. Tell him to mend ’em well, and they are to be sixpence, d’yer hear?” Mrs Shingle nodded, with her silk in her mouth, gave it a twang, and went on.

“You’ll break your teeth one of these days,” said the old fellow, taking off his hat, placing it on his stick, and standing it in a corner. Then, going in a slow, bent way to the well waxed and polished Windsor chair, he gave the chintz cushion a punch, took a long clay pipe off the chimney-piece, made it chirrup, reached an old leaden tobacco-box from the same place, set it up on the table, and sat down.

“My teeth are used to it,” said Mrs Shingle, smiling pleasantly, as if she were quite accustomed to the old fellow’s proceedings.

“Hey?”

“I say my teeth are used to it,” repeated Mrs Shingle.

“Oh!—Don’t shout.—I say, this tobacco’s as dry as a chip,” he continued, filling his pipe.

Mrs Shingle sighed.

“Dick’s been going it awfully,” grumbled the old fellow; “there was nearly half an ounce here last night.”

Mrs Shingle rose, took the matches from the chimney-piece, struck a light, and held it to the bowl of the pipe; the visitor puffed the tobacco into a state of incandescence, and then subsided into his chair with a satisfied grunt, and sat staring straight before him, while Mrs Shingle sighed and went on with her stitching.

“I met those two,” said the old fellow, after a pause.

Mrs Shingle looked up sharply.

“Won’t do,” said her visitor.

“What won’t do?”

“Hey?”

“I say, what won’t do?” said Mrs Shingle, colouring, and looking at him anxiously.

“I can hear you—don’t shout,” said the old fellow. “I say that won’t do. Has Tom been here much?”

“No, not much,” said Mrs Shingle.

“I don’t quite understand Tom,” said the old fellow. “But I think he’s a scamp.”

“Indeed, I’m sure he’s not!” cried Mrs Shingle excitedly. “Sure he’s not?” chuckled the old fellow. “Of course. Just like you women. You take a fancy to a man, and the blacker he is the more you say he’s white.”

“I’m sure Tom is a very good, gentlemanly young fellow.”

“Of course. But it won’t do, Polly—it won’t do.”

“I don’t see why it shouldn’t do,” said Mrs Shingle, tossing her head. “They’re both young and nice-looking.”

“Bah! will that fill their insides?”

“And they’re getting very fond of each other.”

“More shame for you to let ’em,” said the old man composedly. And his eyes twinkled with malicious glee as he saw the little woman begin to grow ruffled, like a mother hen, and the colour come into her wattles and comb.

“And pray why?” said Mrs Shingle loudly.

“Don’t shout,” said the old fellow. “Why, indeed! What will Max say when he knows of it?”

“Ah!” sighed Mrs Shingle, “what indeed!”

“He’ll boil over in his confounded sanctified way, and kick Tom out of the house without a shilling of his mother’s money.”

“Oh, dear, dear, dear,” said Mrs Shingle, letting her work fall into her lap and wringing her hands; “that’s what I’ve been thinking, and I’ve tried all I could to stop it; but the more I try, the fonder they get of one another.”

“Of course they do. That’s their way—the young fools!” snarled the visitor; “and if you let ’em alone, Jessie will marry the young noodle, fill his house full of children, and make him a poor man all his life.”

“That wouldn’t matter much if they were happy,” sighed Mrs Shingle.

“Same as you’ve kept poor old Dicky?”

“Indeed! and we never had but one little one,” said Mrs Shingle indignantly.

“Hey?”

“I say we never had but one little one—Jessie,” said Mrs Shingle indignantly.

“Gross piece of extravagance, too. You couldn’t afford children.”

“No, indeed,” sighed Mrs Shingle.

“And now you’re encouraging that pretty young baggage, who coaxes and carneys round you, to get herself in the same mess, and then you’ll be happy.”

“Oh, dear, dear, dear, dear me! I wish I knew what to do,” sighed Mrs Shingle.

“What to do!” chorused the old fellow. “No business to have married. I didn’t, and I’ve saved just enough to live on with strict economy; and see how happy I am.”

“You don’t seem to be,” said Mrs Shingle tartly; “for you’re always finding fault.”

“Finding fault?”

Mrs Shingle nodded.

“Makes me happy. Then I come and smoke a pipe here one day, and one at Max’s another day; and you’re both so glad to see me that that makes me happy too. Ha! you’ve spoiled that girl of yours, or she wouldn’t go on like she does.”

“I’m sure Jessie couldn’t |be a better behaved girl!” exclaimed Mrs Shingle.

“Stuff! You never whipped her well, and Max never trained those boys. Good thing flogging! Makes the skin soft and elastic. Gives room to grow. Where’s Dick?”

“Gone to his brother’s.”

“Gone to his brother’s?”

Mrs Shingle nodded.

“What’s he gone there for?”

“Take home a pair of new boots.”

“What! did Max give Dick an order for a new pair?” Mrs Shingle nodded.

“Wonderful! Max is getting more virtuous than ever. I’ll praise him next time I go.”

“No, don’t—please,” said Mrs Shingle earnestly. “Every little does help so just now; and we can’t afford to offend Max.”

“So you make traps, and put Jessie in for a bait, and try to catch his wife’s two boys, eh?”

“Indeed I did not,” cried Mrs Shingle; “it was all Tom’s own doing.”

“Ah, I dare say it was; but young Fred’s always hanging about here too; and as soon as-ever Max hears of it, there will be no end of a row. I shall put him on his guard.”

“Pray say nothing!” cried Mrs Shingle imploringly. “Why not? Best for both the young noodles to be brought to their senses.”

“No, no; it would make them so unhappy. Let matters take their course. It will be quite time enough for the trouble to come when Maximilian finds it out for himself. Hush! here’s Dick.”

“Hulloa! What’s that? The old game. Woman all over. Keeping secrets from your husband. Glad I never married!”

Mrs Shingle darted an indignant look at him, and no doubt a sharp retort was on her lips; but it was checked by a voice outside, and Richard Shingle, the occupier of the house, the mechanic who made boots and shoes and neatly executed repairs, entered the room, followed by his boy, with “Hallo, Hoppy, old man, how are you? Glad to see you. Too soon for the B flat yet; but you stop all day, and we’ll polish that bit off to rights.”

“How are you, Dick—how are you?” said the old man quietly. And then refilling his pipe, he lit up, half turned his back, and seemed to ignore that which followed, and to be totally ignored, on account of his deafness.

Richard Shingle was not an ill-looking man of forty; but he had a rather weak, vacillating expression of countenance, over which predominated a curious, puzzled look, which was due to something you could not make out. One moment you felt sure it was his eyes, but the next you said decidedly it was his mouth, while just as likely you set it down to his fair hair or his rather hollow cheeks, or the turn of his chin. The fact was, it was due to all his features, his figure, and his every attitude; for Richard Shingle, as he stood before you, seemed as if he had just taken you by the button-hole and said in full sincerity, as applied to the general scheme of life and man's position on earth: "I say, what does it all mean?"

For he was one of those men who had never "got on." He said he wanted to get on, and he worked very hard; but the world was too much for him, and he was always left behind. If he had lived at the equator, where it is hot, and man naturally feels inert, while the world races round at the rate of a thousand miles an hour, it is only natural to suppose that he might have been left behind; but it would have been just the same if Richard Shingle's existence had been upon the very Pole itself, north or south, where he would only have been called upon to turn once round in twenty-four hours. As he lived in that part of the temperate zone known as Islington, where the medium rate of progress is in force, it remained then, that not only could poor Dick never get ahead, but was always, in spite of his misplaced efforts, getting a little more and a little more behind.

And yet he looked a sharp, animated man, full of action, as on this occasion, when he turned to his wife with "Well, mother, here we are again, boots and all!"

"But you've not brought them back again, Dick?" said Mrs Shingle, looking anxiously up from her work.

"What do you call that, then?" said Dick, taking a blue bag from the doleful-looking, thin, white-faced boy with very short hair, and turning the receptacle upside down, so that the contents fell out on the floor with a bang.

"Oh, Dick!"

"He said they were the wussest-made pair of boots he ever see. After all the pains as I took with 'em," said the speaker, gloomily picking up the freshly polished leather, and examining it.

"Oh, Dick—how tiresome!"

"And swore he couldn't get his feet into 'em,—leastwise," he added correctively, "he didn't swear—Max is too good to swear—he said as he couldn't get his feet in 'em."

"Tut—tut—tut!" ejaculated Mrs Shingle, stitching away at her work.

"He blowed me up fine; said I wasn't fit to shoe a horse, let alone a Christian man. When—look at 'em. Did you ever see a prettier pair—eh, Hoppy?" he shouted.

The old man glanced at the boots and grunted, turning away again directly.

"Look at 'em, mother—rights and lefts, and the soles polished off smooth; and see how prettily they put out their tongues at you, all lined with a bit o' scarlet basil. Called me a cobbler, too, he did; and after laying myself out on the artistic tack, so as to get his future patronage, and that of Mrs S.'s two boys."

"Oh, Dick, Dick!"

"Yes, it is 'Oh, Dick, Dick!' Bad, too, as we want the money. Wouldn't fit you, I suppose, Hoppy?"

"Hey?"

"I say they wouldn't fit you, would they? You should have 'em cheap."

"Bah, no! I couldn't wear boots like these. Couldn't afford it—couldn't afford it. There's a pair for you to mend."

"All right, old man—all right; I'll do 'em. Of course they wouldn't do for you," he continued; "bad, too, as we want the money. Said it was what always came of employing relatives; but he did it out of charitable feeling—so as to give me a lift. Called me a bungler, too, when, look here, mother, how nicely I made a little mountain on that side to hold his bunion, and a little Greenwich-hill on that side to accommodate his favourite corn. That's working for relations, that is. Dressed up a bit, too, this morning to take 'em home, so as not to disgrace him by looking too shabby, and made Union Jack walk behind to carry the blue bag, same as if I was a sooperior kind of tradesman, and his servants shouldn't look down on me. Said I was Mr Richard Shingle, too, when the maid opened the door. But it was all no go. Another of my failures, old gal. Tell you what it is, mother, it'll be what the drapers call a terrific crash if it goes on like this."

"But, Dick dear, you don't mean that he won't have the boots at all?"

"That's just what I do mean. He's shied 'em on my hands. 'Taint as if he'd shied 'em on my feet."

"Oh, dear, dear, dear!" ejaculated Mrs Shingle. "Dear!" said Dick, trying to raise a feeble laugh. "That's just what they are. I can't afford to wear a pair of handsome boots like them. Only look at 'em. Leather cost me nine shillings before I put in a stitch."

"I declare, it's too bad, Dick," whimpered Mrs Shingle; "and us so badly off too. Brother, indeed! He's worse than—"

"There, that'll do," said Dick, taking off his coat, "Don't you get letting on about him, mother, because he is my brother, you know. Blood *is* thicker than water."

“I don’t see what that’s got to do with it, Dick, if it’s ten times as thick,” said Mrs Shingle, stabbing away at her boot-binding as if the kid leather were Maximilian Shingle’s skin.

“No, you don’t,” said Dick, rolling up his sleeves, and tying on his leather apron, before going to the chimney glass, and putting a piece of ribbon round his rather long hair, apparently to embellish his countenance, but really to keep the locks out of his eyes when he bent down over his work. “No, mother; that’s because you’re put out, and cross, and won’t see it; but blood is thicker than water, ain’t it, Hoppy?”

“Hey?” said the old fellow, taking his pipe out of his mouth.

“I say blood is thicker than water, ain’t it?”

“Ever so much,” growled the old fellow, going on with his smoking; while Dick, glancing over his shoulder, and seeing that his wife’s attention was taken up with the binding, slipped a half-ounce packet of tobacco into his old friend’s hand, with a nod and a wink, to indicate that the strictest secrecy must be observed.

“Yes,” continued Dick, retiring towards his bench; “that’s what I always say—brothers is brothers, and blood’s thicker than water. And as to Max—well, it’s a way he’s got, and he can’t help it.”

“Stuff!” ejaculated Mrs Shingle sharply.

“No, no, mother, it ain’t stuff neither; so don’t talk like that. Here, you sir,” he cried to the boy, who was standing staring from one to the other, “get to work, you luxurious young rascal. That ain’t the way to improve your shining hours. Wax up and get ready a pair of fine points to mend them old shoes.”

“All right, master,” said the boy. And, slipping off his threadbare jacket, he sat down on a stool, and began to unwind a ball of hemp.

“I don’t believe in such brothers,” said Mrs Shingle bitterly. “Brothers, indeed!”

“No, that’s it, mother; it’s because you are a bit put out. But you’ll see it in the right light soon.”

“Ah!” he continued, rearranging the band round his forehead; and then, catching sight of a letter tucked behind the glass, “Now, if old Uncle Rounce’s money—or present, as he calls it—would drop in now, it would be welcome.”

As he spoke he opened the often-perused letter, which was written on thin paper and bore Australian postmarks, and began to read aloud:

”‘Thinking that a little money might be useful, I have sent you a present’—and so on. Now, I wonder when that money’s coming.”

“Never,” said Mrs Shingle tartly.

“Now, there’s where you are so wrong, mother,” said Dick. “It’s very kind of the old fellow, who must have got on famously to be able to send us a few pounds—it’s sure to be pounds when it does come.”

“And it won’t never come,” said Mrs Shingle; “for you’ve had that letter nine months.”

“Well, if it don’t, mother, it don’t—that’s all; but what I say is, blood is thicker than water, or else old Uncle Eb—as I never see, only heard o—wouldn’t have said he’d send me a present—would he, Hoppy?”

“Hey?”

“I say Uncle Rounce wouldn’t have said he’d send me a present if blood warn’t thicker than water.”

“No. Have you got it yet?” said the old fellow.

“No, not yet. I asked Max about it, and he said he didn’t believe it would come.”

“He said that, did he?”

“Yes, he said that,” replied Dick, doubling the letter again, and replacing it behind the old looking-glass. “I dessay it’ll come, though, some day.”

“You had better try and sell those boots at once,” said Mrs Shingle rather impatiently, and as if she had not much faith in the coming money.

“Sell ’em? Yes; but who’s to buy ’em? There’s only two feet in London as will fit ’em, and they’re Max’s.”

“I declare it’s too bad, Dick dear, and we so pressed for money. The rent’s due, you know. Rolling in riches, as he is, and to behave so to his poor brother, who works so hard.”

“Gently, mother, gently: it’s only a way he’s got. But I do work pretty hard, don’t I?—only I’m so unlucky.”

“Why don’t you make a good dash at something, instead of plodding, then?” said Hopper suddenly.

“Come, now,” cried Dick, with an ill-used look and tone, “don’t you turn round on me, Hoppy, old man. We’re too good friends for that. It’s what Max always says; and I ain’t clever, so how can I?”

Hopper relapsed into silence.

“There, there, I shall get over it,” continued Dick, working away; “and as to rolling in riches, why, Max can’t help rolling in riches, any more than I can help rolling in nothing. It’s his way. But I say, mother, if we had riches, I think I could roll in ’em with the best.”

“Don’t talk nonsense, Dick,” said Mrs Shingle, “when we’re so worried too. There,” she added, in a whisper, as their visitor rose, “we’re driving him away.”

“Going, Hoppy, old man?” said Dick, as their visitor rose and laid aside his pipe.

“Yes, going now,” said the old fellow. “I’ll drop in, perhaps, in the evening.”

“We haven’t put you out, have we?” said Dick.

“No, no, my lad; it’s all right. Dick, just lend me sixpence. My money is not due till Monday.”

Dick’s countenance fell, and he glanced at his wife.

“Have you got a sixpence, Polly?” he said.

“Not one,” was the reply.

“I’m very sorry, Hoppy, old man,” said Dick, looking more puzzled than ever, and as if this time he really could not understand why he should be so poor and his brother so rich—“but really I haven’t got it.”

“Never mind,” said the old fellow—“never mind; I dare say I can do without.”

And, grumbling and muttering, he took up his hat and stick, and went off.

Volume Two—Chapter Three.

A Poor Judge on the Bench.

“Now he’s put out,” said Dick, looking puzzled at his wife. “I did not mean to upset him; but a man can’t lend another man what he hasn’t got, can he, mother?” There was no answer—only the clicking of Mrs Shingle’s needle against her thimble.

“I say a man can’t lend what he hasn’t got, can he, mother?” said Dick again, as he bent over some strange performance that he was achieving with an awl and some wax-end.

“I wasn’t thinking of that, Dick,” said his wife, with a sigh, “but of the money for the boots.”

“There, you needn’t fidget about that,” said Dick, throwing out his arms so as to draw the hemp tight; “for we shouldn’t have had the money if he had kept the boots.”

“Not had the money?”

“No—he meant to keep it for the rent. He said so.”

“There!” exclaimed Mrs Shingle. “Well, that comes of having your brother for your landlord. He’s as hard again as any one else.”

“Well, Max always was a hard one, certainly, my dear. Ever since we were boys together, ‘Merry, merry boys—since we were boys together,’” he sang. Then, descending once more to everyday-life conversation, he went on, “He was a hard one, Max was; and as to money, he’d always have a penny or twopence when I had none, even if he borrowed it of me.”

“And never paid it again,” said his wife contemptuously. “Well, it was a way he had,” said Dick.

“I haven’t patience with him.”

“No, my dear, you never did have patience with Max. Clever chap too. Marries his widow with lots of tin and a pair of boots—boys I mean—ready made. Why didn’t I?”

“Ah! why indeed?” said Mrs Shingle sharply.

“Because I was a fool,” said Dick, smiling pleasantly. “Fools are best off too, mother. I say, fancy me with a wife like Max’s!”

The idea seemed to please Dick so that he laughed and wiped one eye.

“There are worse women than Mrs Max,” said Mrs Shingle.

“Yes, and there’s better ones than you, I suppose, mother. But I’m contented, and never wanted a divorce yet.”

“Dick, how can you talk so before that boy?”

“All right! but I say, mother—Here, go on with your work, you young rascal. Keeping your ears staring wide open like that!”

“Please, master, I couldn’t help hearing,” said the boy dolefully. “I’m a-learning my trade, and trying to obey my pastors and masters as hard as ever I can.”

“Now, lookye here,” said Dick, taking up his hammer and gazing threateningly at the boy, “I never have given it to you yet, John Johnson, or, as I familiarly call you, from where you came and the stripes you had on you when you came, Union Jack—”

“No, master,” whined the boy, “you’ve been very kind indeed to me.”

“I have, you hungry young alligator,” said Dick. “So look here, I won’t have it; I’m as bad as Mr Hopper that way,—I hate people to preach and sling catechism at me so don’t you do it again.”

“No, master; please, I’ll try very hard indeed, and obey you, as it is my dooty to.”

“Will you leave off?” roared Dick, striking his bench with the hammer, so that the tools and nails jumped almost as much as the boy. “You’re at it again, talking in that canting, whining, tread-underfoot, workhouse style; and I won’t have it. What did I tell you you was?”

“A free-born Briton, please, master.”

“Then why don’t you act as such, and say ‘Yes, sir,’ and ‘No, sir,’ outright and down straight?—not whine and grovel like a worm without any sting in his tail.”

“Please, master, I’ll try and order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters.”

“Now, just hark at him!” cried Dick to his wife.

“Please, master, I’m very—”

“Ah!” shouted Dick.

“All right, master,” said the boy; and he bent to his work.

“I say, mother;” said Dick, “Max is a bit put out with us.”

“So it seems,” said Mrs Shingle, biting her silk and stitching away. “I think he’d be glad if we starved to death.”

“Well, I don’t know about that, my girl, because it wouldn’t be nice to look at, and he never liked unpleasant things; but he’s a bit put out about our Jess.”

“What?” said Mrs Shingle, turning very red.

“About our Jess,” said Dick, hammering away very viciously at an inoffensive-looking bit of leather. “He’s got to know about those boys being so fond of coming here.”

“Our Jessie’s as good as his boys,” said Mrs Shingle sharply, and ready to stand her ground, now that the truth was out.

“So she is, my gal—so she is, every bit; but she’s only copper, and they’re silver-gilt in his eyes, if they ain’t gold.—Here, you sir, you’re listening again, instead of working,” he shouted to the boy, who began to gum his hands liberally with wax and roll the threads on his lath-like knees.—“But Max has been on to me about it, and he says he won’t have it; and I always told them so, ’specially Tom. ‘Tom,’ I says, ‘your governor won’t like your coming here,’ I says; ‘and he’ll think all sorts of things about it.’”

“Just as if money need make any difference!” exclaimed Mrs Shingle.

“It needn’t, my gal,” said Dick, grunting over his work; “but it do—it makes all the difference; you see if it don’t. For if you don’t go off with that bit of shoe-binding of yours, and bring back the money, we sha’n’t get any dinner, and that’s very different to having it. But where’s Jessie?”

“Gone to the warehouse.”

“What, all-alone! Now, look here, mother—I won’t have it. She’s too young and pretty to go there all alone, and I won’t have her left to be followed and annoyed by counter-jumpers, and that fellow as gives out the work. You know she came home crying on Friday. Why didn’t you go with her?”

“I had this to finish, Dick.”

“You’ve always got *this* to finish,” said Dick testily. “Then you should have kept her till I came back.”

“But it would have been too late, Dick. Where are you going?” she cried, as he rose and began to untie his apron. “To meet her,” he exclaimed angrily.

“But she hasn’t gone alone, Dick,” said the wife softly.

“If you’ve let her go there with that Fred Fraser, Polly, I’ll never forgive you,” cried Dick.

“She’s gone with Tom, dear.”

“Tom, dear, indeed! It isn’t ‘Tom, dear,’ and it isn’t going to be ‘Tom, dear,’” exclaimed Dick, re-tying his apron viciously.

“But he came, dear, just as she was starting, and he begged so hard that I was obliged to let him take her.”

“There you go!” cried Dick, hammering again at the piece of unoffending leather. “You’ll ruin me before you’ve done. Here’s Max says only this morning, says he, ‘I won’t have that gal of yours hanging about after my wife’s sons.’ He said ‘*gal*’ and ‘my wife’s sons.’ And I, feeling a bit up, says back, ‘Lookye here, Max, I can’t help your *boys* coming to my house. I’m not going to send my *daughter* away.’ I think that was pretty sharp on him, you know; when, ‘Damn your impudence,’ he says.—Look here, Jack,” continued Dick, pointing at the boy with his hammer, “I promised the workhouse authorities as I’d bring you up moral, so don’t you go telling anybody as your master swears, because that was some one else.”

“All right, master,” said the boy smartly.

“That’s better,” cried Dick; “don’t whine. Well, mother, then he gets in a towering rage, and showed me what was the matter with the boots. They’d got Jessie in ’em; that’s where they wouldn’t fit. ‘How dare you speak to me in that familiar way, sir!’ he says, sticking himself out and looking big, like a poor-law guardian. ‘When I employ you, sir, as an humble tradesman, I desire you pay me proper respect.’ And now, mother, you’ve been and made worse of it. Hang me, if I don’t turn burglar, or something to make money, if things don’t mend! I’m sick of being poor.”

“No, don’t, please, master,” said the boy, with a whine. “Honesty’s the best policy. And he who steals comes to a bad end.”

“Now, just look here, young fellow,” cried Dick, with a serio-comic look on his face, as he raised his hammer once more, “burglary’s bad enough, but killing’s worse. There was a man once who had a boy from a workus, just as I’ve had you, to teach you a trade—”

“Yes, master,” said the boy, with eyes and mouth wide open.

“Well, he killed him with ill-usage, that’s all. I shouldn’t like to kill you, you know, so don’t you get chucking any more of your copy-book texts at me again.”

“All right, master,” said the boy, wiping his eyes.

“Now, look here, mother: once for all, I won’t have it. I’m as poor as I can be to get along; and though we’ve swallowed my watch, and the sugar-tongs and spoons, I haven’t swallowed my little bit of pride; and the next time that Tom or that Fred comes here, see if I don’t call him a son of a purse-proud, stuck-up father, and slam the door in his face.—Now, you be off.”

“Yes, Dick,” said his wife meekly; and she rose and gathered together her work. “But, Dick, you’re not very cross with me?”

“Well, perhaps not,” he said; and his eyes endorsed his words.

“But, look here, Dick: if Tom comes back with Jessie, you won’t say anything unkind to him—for her sake?”

“Won’t I?” cried Dick sharply. “I’ll shy the lapstone at him! If he’s too good for my Jessie, she’s too good for him.”

“But don’t hurt their feelings, Dick,” she whispered, so that the boy should not hear.

“I don’t want to hurt her feelings,” said Dick, yielding to his wife’s influence. “But there, you’re trying to come the soft on me again, as you always do, and I won’t have it. Now be off.”

“Yes, Dick—I’m going,” she said quickly, as she put on her bonnet and shawl. “But I know you won’t be unkind.”

“Won’t I?” said Dick, as the door closed. “I’ll show some of them yet! I can be a regular savage when I like—can’t I, Jack?”

“Please, what did you say, master?” whined the boy.

“I can be a regular savage when I like—can’t I?” shouted Dick.

“Yes, master.—Please, master, I’m so hungry.”

“So what?”

“So hungry, please, master.”

“Hungry? Why, the boy’s mad!” cried Dick, looking up in mock astonishment. “How dare you, sir? Hungry, indeed! There, take that wax-out of your mouth. You’re always trying to ruin me by eating the wax or chewing leather.”

“I can’t help it, master,” said the boy. “Please, I’m so hungry.”

“Hungry!” exclaimed Dick, with mock heroic diction. “Brought up, too, as you were, at one of the first workhouses in the kingdom!”

“Please, master, I can’t help it,” said the boy. “I feel so hollow inside.”

“Hollow? Nonsense, sir! It’s bad tendencies, or desire for gluttony and wine-bibbing. And after I’ve been such a good master to you!”

“Yes, master; and I’ll never, never, never—”

”‘Never, never, never shall be slaves,’” sang Dick, in his musical tenor voice. “But don’t you say that, Jack, my boy; because if you keep on running out of your trousers as you do, and looking like something growing out of two beans, which is your boots, and then joining in the middle and running up to a head, I sha’n’t want you, specially if you’re going to be hollow, and want filling out.”

“But I don’t want filling out, master, only just a little sometimes. I can’t help feeling hollow, and as if something was gnawing me.”

“Gnawing? Yes, that’s it,” cried Dick. “I always told you so. That’s it. You will devour your food in such a way that it don’t digest; and that’s what you feel, sir—gnawing pains. There, fix up them bristles. You ain’t hungry.”

“It feels very much like as I used to feel at the House, master,” said the boy. “We all of us used to feel hollow there sometimes on rice days. I can’t help it, please.”

“Now, look ye here, my fine fellow, it won’t do, so I tell you. I’m your master, ain’t I?”

“Yes, please,” said the boy, making a scoop with his hand. “Leave off! I won’t have it!” cried Dick. “You ain’t to bow to me. I say as your master I ought to know best, and I say you ain’t hungry; and, look here, don’t you chew wax and leather any more, because they’re my property, and you’ll be tempted to swallow them, when it will not only be petty larceny, but they’ll disagree with you. Now, go on sorting out the best o’ them bits o’ leather.”

“Yes, master,” said the boy.

Dick rose from his bench, and went to the cupboard to see if there was a crust of bread and some butter to give to the boy; but it was quite empty, and he began to walk up and down, talking to himself.

“It’s very hard,” he muttered dolefully; “but the more I try to get on the more I don’t, and if things don’t mend God knows what’s to become of us. Poor Polly! she frets a deal, only she hides it; and as for Jessie—There, there, there, I can’t bear to think of it!” he groaned. “I must have been a fool, and so can’t get on.”

He scuffled back to his seat, for a familiar step was heard in the court; and, taking up his work, he began to sing merrily, after adjuring the boy to go on ahead.

“Hollo, mother!” he cried, as his wife entered the room: “brought the money?”

“No, Dick,” said Mrs Shingle sadly; “they don’t pay till next week.”

“Don’t pay for a week!” said Dick, letting his hands drop, but recovering himself directly. “All right!” he cried,—“so much in store.—‘Cheer up, Sam, and don’t let your spirits go down,’” he sang. “I say, mother, ain’t it time that Jessie was back?”

“Yes,” said Mrs Shingle sadly; “she’ll be back soon. It’s very hard, though, and it seems as if it never rained but it poured.”

“Never does,” said Dick cheerily; ”‘So put up your gingham and drive away care,’” he sang. “Hang it, mother, I hope it won’t really rain before she comes back. Did she take the big umbrella?”

“No, father.”

“Ah! bad job; but never mind—perhaps it won’t rain. Go along, Jack, my lad: you don’t feel hollow inside now, do you?”

“Yes, please, master—ever so much hollower,” said the boy pitifully.

“I never see such a boy,” cried Dick. “Here, open the door, mother,—it’s Jessie. Hollo!” he cried, jumping up; “what’s the matter?”

“Oh, father, father!” sobbed the girl, running to his arms.

“Why, my precious!” he exclaimed, patting her cheek, “what is it? Has any one dared? Oh, that’s it, is it?” he muttered; for his brother, closely followed by his younger step-son, entered the room.

Volume Two—Chapter Four.

A Brothers’ Quarrel.

Maximilian Shingle was a heavy, broad-faced man, very cleanly shaven, and with grey hair very smoothly brushed. His black suit was as glossy as a first-class undertakers, and he always wore an old-style bunch of seals beneath his vest, with which he played as he spoke, spinning them round, while his other hand flourished a black ebony stick, with a gold top and a good deal of tassel.

Metaphorically speaking, there was a good deal of tassel all about Maximilian, for he swung and flourished about in his words and deeds, and always seemed to be more showy than substantial; and even now, when he was very white, and evidently in a towering passion, he flourished his seals and stick, and turned threateningly upon his brother; whilst the boy, who seemed to see in him a workhouse official or Poor-law guardian, softly stole into the back room, and surveyed the proceedings through the crack of the door.

In fact, the moment you saw Max Shingle, you said to yourself, “What a splendid man for a beadle!” And so he was: put him in uniform, and he would have been simply perfect—from the soft roll of fat under his chin to the well-rounded calf of his leg, which showed so prominently through his well-cut trousers. His very appearance aggravated you, and caused an itching beneath the nail of your right toe; for he was one of those men whom nature out of pure beneficence moulded to be kicked as a relief to abnormal irritation. His appearance at every turn suggested it, inasmuch as he was padded with tissue of the most elastic nature, such as would yield easily to the foot; and thus the kicker would run no risks either of hurting himself or committing homicide, while he obtained the satisfaction all the same.

“Now, sir,” began Max, fiercely addressing his brother, “what have you to say?”

“Well, I don’t know yet,” said Dick, looking in a puzzled way from one to the other. “What is it?”

“Don’t know!” cried Max. “Didn’t I speak to you, sir, an hour or two back?”

“Was it an hour or two back?” said Dick, who still held and soothed Jessie, as she clung to him.

“Yes, it was, sir!” cried Max, who was surprised that his brother did not cower, according to his wont. “I told you an hour or two ago that I would not have these disgraceful proceedings.”

“What disgraceful proceedings?” said Dick sullenly.

“These,” cried Max, pointing with his stick first at Jessie and then at Tom. “I speak to you, and warn you—”

“Let me say a word,” began Tom.

“Hold your tongue, sir!” cried Max, holding up his stick; but the young man did not flinch. “I say, I speak to you and warn you, and directly after I find your girl arm-in-arm with this foolish son of mine in the open street, sir—in the open street.”

“Well, Max, you can’t have the streets shut up,” said Dick quietly.

“How dare you address me, sir, like that?” cried Max. “Will you listen, Mr Shingle?” cried Tom, who was losing patience—“it was all my fault.”

“Silence, sir! I will not hear a word. Your conduct is disgraceful, and after the Christian example that has been set you —”

“I don’t see anything unchristianlike in loving a good, sweet girl, sir,” said the young man stoutly. “I cannot stand here and let you speak like this.”

“Then go, sir, go; and never dare to enter beneath this roof again while these people are here,” cried Max. “I suppose you have had baits set to coax you into the trap, you silly pigeon?”

“Indeed—”

“But let me tell them all,” said Max, looking round with supreme disgust, “that if their nefarious scheme had succeeded, you would not have received a shilling from me.” Dick broke in here. He had been ready to explode several times, but had been kept back by wife and child. Now he could contain himself no longer.

“Here, let me say a word,” he exclaimed. “He hasn’t been coaxed here, nor anything of the sort, Mr Max. We don’t want him, and won’t have him; so there now.”

“Oh, father!” exclaimed Jessie.

“You hold your tongue, miss,” cried Dick, “and just try and have some pride in you.”

“How dare you speak to me like that, sir!” cried Max, frowning portentously—“how dare you! You, whom I’ve tried to raise out of the mud, but who always would persist in grovelling!”

“I shouldn’t have had to grovel so much if people paid me for the boots they ordered,” said Dick.

“You contemptible wretch!” cried Max. “You cloven-hoofed viper, who persists in turning and biting the hand that helped you! And after all we meant to do for you to try and raise you!—to endeavour to clothe and educate your neglected child, whose conduct as a work-girl is most reprehensible.”

“Look here,” cried Dick, whose face was working with anger.

“Silence, sir!” cried Max, thumping his stick upon the floor. “You grow lower and lower year by year, and now try to reward me by making this despicable plan to drag yourself up to my level. Now, look here. I’ve warned you, and it has been of no use. I have let you occupy this house, when I might have had a better tenant, and you have got in arrears.”

“Only two weeks,” cried Mrs Shingle indignantly.

“Silence, woman!” cried Max.

“Don’t bully her, Max, or there’ll be a row,” exclaimed Dick fiercely.

“Silence, both of you! I say I’ve let you get in arrears of rent for my property; and now you shall leave it. I’ll let the house to honest people who will pay—”

“Oh, Mr Max!” cried Mrs Shingle imploringly.

“And then I shall see the last of you, and have no more of these disgraceful meetings.”

“Mr Shingle, this is too bad,” cried Tom.

“Silence, boy!” said Max, placing one hand in the breast of his glossy frock-coat, and scowling round at all in turn. “Does any one here think I’d disgrace my honourable wife by permitting such an alliance?”

“Nice brotherly behaviour, this!” cried Dick indignantly.

“Brotherly?” cried Max. “Sir, I disown all relationship with you. You’ve hung on to my skirts too long, and now I’ll be free of you. Miserable, grovelling beggar!”

“I never begged or borrowed of you,” said Dick.

“No; because I checked the impulse, or I should have had to keep you. And now you want to disgrace me and mine.”

“I’m sure no man could have been more industrious,” put in Mrs Shingle.

“Industrious?” cried Max, looking round at the shabby half workshop, half sitting-room. “Industrious? Yes, always idling in his wretched slough, instead of trying to improve his position—to get on. But I’ll have no more of it: leave this place you shall at once.”

“Oh, Mr Shingle—Uncle Max!” cried Jessie piteously, “it was all my fault: I ought to have known better. Don’t turn poor father and mother out. They work and try so hard.”

“Bah!” ejaculated Max contemptuously; while Tom made for Jessie, but a heavy arm was laid across his chest.

“Don’t—pray don’t,” sobbed Jessie, joining her hands and looking piteously up in the smooth, smug face. “Don’t do that, and I’ll promise never to see—never to see Tom. No, no: I can’t—I can’t—I can’t!” she cried, bursting into an agony of weeping.

“You shall promise no such thing, Jessie—dear cousin,” cried Tom, in a manly way, as, extricating himself, he stepped up to her side and tried to take her hand; but she shrank from him and clung to her mother. “Jessie,” he exclaimed, “as I’m a man, I’ll be true to you in spite of everything.”

“This is your work,” cried Max furiously, as he turned to his brother. “Do you see now what you have done?”

“That was well spoke, Tom, and I never thought better of you than I do now,” said Dick, rousing himself, though his face looked more perplexed than ever. “But I’ve had enough of this here. You and your father belong to the swells, and I’m a poor working man. You two are ile, and floats on the top—we’re only water, and goes to the bottom. But p’r’aps the water’s got as much pride in it as the ile; and so’s my poor girl, when she’s got her bit of sorrow over. You’re no match for her.”

Max gave a loud, contemptuous laugh, which made Mrs Shingle look up as if she would wither him.

“Not,” continued Dick, “but what she’s the best girl in the whole world, though I as her father says it.”

Dick took up his hammer in a helpless, meaningless way, and turned it over and over, examining the handle and the head, and gazed from one to the other, as if asking their opinion about the quality of the tool.

“I don’t think I was ever so hard up in my life,” continued Dick—“and mother here will bear me out if I don’t speak what’s good as Gorspel; but afore I’d stay under your roof I’d try the workus. You needn’t be afraid, Mr Maximilian Shingle, as your poor shoemaker of a brother, as has been unlucky all his life, a and never see the way to get up the ladder without shouldering and pulling some one else down—which wasn’t his way—will ever trouble you again, nor let your wife’s boys come hanging about after his poor dear gal. I never encouraged it, and never shall. Some day, p’r’aps, you’ll come yourself and ask for it to be.”

“I ask!” cried Max—“a common sempstress, an impudent drab!”

“Mr Shingle!” cried Tom furiously.

“Silence, sir!” shouted Max, who, roused by the opposition he had received, struck at his step-son with his tasselled cane. “I said an impudent, bold-faced drab!”

“Stop!” roared Dick, from whose face the puzzled look seemed to have departed, to give place to one of angry decision; and he stepped, hammer in hand, close up to his brother. “Look here, Max,” he cried, in a low, hoarse voice, “I don’t want to play Cain, and there ain’t much of the Abel about you; but my poor gal here,”—he placed his arm round her as he spoke, and she hid her hot, indignant face upon his shoulder—“my poor gal here, I say, once read to

me when she was a little un about a blacksmith knocking a man down with his hammer because he insulted his daughter. Now, you've insulted my dear, sweet gal, as the very poorest and lowest labourer about here has a respectful word for, and even the very costers at the stalls; and you've made my blood bile—poor, and thin, and beggarly as it is. So, now then, this is my house till I leaves it. I ain't Wat Tyler, and you ain't a tax-gatherer, but if you ain't gone in half a moment I'll give you what for."

"You scoundrel—you shall repent this!" cried Max.

But Dick made at him so menacingly that he hurried out of the house.

"Uncle," began Tom, who had stopped behind.

"Off with you!" cried Dick sternly. "I won't hear a word. No: nor you sha'n't touch her. Jessie, say good-bye to him, and there's an end of it. We'll emigrate."

"Oh, father, what have I done?" cried Jessie.

"Nothing, Jessie, but what is right, my own darling; and here, before your father and mother—"

"Tom!" shouted Max from without.

"I swear," continued Tom, "that I'll never give you up."

"That'll do," said Dick, uncompromisingly. "He's calling you. Out of my house!"

"Uncle," said Tom, "when you are cooler you'll think better of me, I hope. I can't help this. I do love Jessie dearly."

"I won't hear a word," cried Dick.

"But you'll shake hands with me?"

"No: I'm a poor shoemaker, and you're a gentleman. Be off!"

"Oh, father! father!" cried Jessie; and she flung her arms round his neck.

"No, I won't give way," cried Dick; but he was patting and soothing his child as he spoke.

"Shake hands with him, Dick," whispered Mrs Shingle. "It ain't his fault."

"I won't!" cried Dick. "It *is* his fault. He had no business to come."

"No, father, it was my fault," sobbed Jessie. "Shake hands with him—please do!"

All this while Tom was standing with extended hand; and at last Dick's went out to join it for a moment, and was then snatched away.

"Good-bye, dear Jessie," said Tom then; "but mind, I shall keep to my word."

"Is that scoundrel coming?" said Max from without. Dick made a vicious "offer," as if to throw his hammer at the door; but Mrs Shingle took it from his hand.

"I'm coming," said Tom loudly; and then, taking Jessie's hand, he kissed it tenderly, and, as the poor girl began to sob piteously, he hurried out of the house and was gone.

Volume Two—Chapter Five.

Fred is Busy.

The offices of Maximilian Shingle were on the first-floor, in a narrow turning close to the Royal Exchange; and, though they were dark and inconvenient, they were handsomely furnished, as befitted a suite of three rooms for which a heavy rent was paid. The outer room was occupied by four clerks, the second room was allotted to his wife's elder son, and the inner sanctum was Max's own.

A morning or two after the visit to Crowder's Buildings, Fred was seated at his table, with a small open book before him—one which evidently had nothing to do with stock-broking; but he was studying it so hard that the lines were deeply marked upon his effeminate face.

Twice over he started, and closed it hastily, as he heard a step outside; but, after listening for a few moments, he resumed his task, and kept on with his study for some time. Then he closed the little memorandum book with a sigh, placed it carefully in his pocket, and opening a drawer, took out some doubled blotting paper, between which, on opening it, lay a piece of tracing paper and an old bill of exchange.

Placing this convenient to his hand, he also took a large blotter, arranged in it a sheet of paper, and wrote in the date and some half-dozen lines, before moving blotter and letter into a handy position.

This done, he listened for a few moments, and then taking the tracing paper and bill, began to go over the signature very carefully, writing it again and again, beginning at the top of his tracing paper, and forming a column of

signatures.

Then there was a knock at the door; and as Fred cried “Come in!” the blotter was drawn deftly over the tracing paper, and he went on writing.

A clerk brought in a couple of letters to be signed, and this being done he retired; when Fred resumed his task, working away patiently, and always going over the writing again.

This went on for half an hour or so, until the young man started, and hastily drew the blotter over his work; for the door was being opened very slowly and quietly, and in a heavy, noiseless way, old Hopper entered the room.

“How do, Fred?” he said, approaching the table slowly.

“How do?” was the short, sharp reply. “What does he want?” he muttered.

“Hey?”

“I say what hot weather.”

“Don’t shout: I’m not so deaf as all that,” said the old fellow hastily. “Father in his room?”

“Yes,” said Fred; “he’s in there.”

“Hey?”

“I say he’s in there,” roared the young man.

“I wish you wouldn’t shout so, my lad,” said the old man sourly. “I don’t want the drums of my ears split. I could hear what you said. And how is the dear, good man, eh?”

“Same as usual,” replied Fred, with a grin.

“Ah!” said Hopper, “you ought to be a very good young man, having such a step-father.”

“I am,” replied Fred.

“Hey?”

“I say I am,” shouted Fred.

“So I suppose,” said the old fellow, chuckling, and looking at him with a strange expression of countenance. “Well, tell him I want to see him.”

Ting!

There was the sharp sound of a gong heard in the next room, and Fred rose to answer it. He glanced first at the old man, and then down at his letter; but a second stroke on the gong made him hurry to the inner door, which he opened, and stood with his head half inside; but a few sharp peremptory words were heard, and he went in and closed the door, leaving Hopper waiting.

Fred was not gone many minutes; and when he returned it was to find the visitor had taken a chair, and was busy over the contents of a bulky pocket-book, which he secured as the young man appeared, and returned to the pocket in the breast of his ugly, ill-cut dress-coat.

“He says you can go in, but he can only give you ten minutes,” said Fred.

“Won’t see me for ten minutes?” said the old fellow.

“Says you may go in for ten minutes,” shouted the young man; and then, in a whisper, “Confounded old nuisance!”

Old Hopper turned half round, and gave him a peculiar leer, shaking his head and chuckling to himself as he went slowly towards the door of Max Shingle’s office, putting down his stick heavily in the recurring pattern of the floorcloth, closely followed by Fred, who showed him in.

“What the governor has that deaf old beetle hanging about him for, I can’t make out,” said the young man, returning to his seat; and he was about to continue his task when a fresh knock at the door made him hastily thrust his papers into the drawer of the table, lock it, and take out the key.

“Ah, my dear Hopper, how are you?” said Max, smiling amiably, and making his eyes beam upon his visitor.

“Hey? How am I?” snarled the old fellow, giving his stick a thump on the floor. “What’s that to you? I’m not dying yet. Ain’t you sorry?”

“Sorry? Heaven forbid!” said Max unctuously, as he shook his head reproachfully at his visitor, and then, taking hold of his watch-ribbon, threw himself back in his chair and began to spin the seals round and round.

“Don’t! Be quiet!” cried Hopper, thrusting out the point of his stick, so that the seals struck upon it and were arrested in their motion. “Think I’m not bilious enough with looking at you, without having that thing spun round in my face?”

Max laughed, but looked annoyed; while the old fellow took a seat unasked.

“What can I do for you?” said Max at last, smiling blandly.

“Give me a glass of wine. I’m hot and tired.”

“Really, I—” began Max.

“It’s in that stand,” said the old fellow, chuckling, as he pointed with his stick at a handsome mahogany cellarette at one end of the room; when Max, whose smile was tempered a good deal with a look of annoyance, rose, sighed, secured the door with a little bolt, and then unlocked the cellarette and took out a decanter and glass.

“No, thank you—I don’t smoke cigars,” said the old fellow, as he watched the sherry poured into the glass. “Hey! You weren’t going to offer me one? Ho! I was afraid you were.”

Max had not spoken; but he winced as he heard these words—preserving his smile, though, when he turned his face to his visitor and passed the wine.

“Not bad, Max—not bad,” said the old fellow, tasting the sherry and smacking his lips before pouring the rest down his throat. “How you must mug yourself here! Lucky dog, lucky dog! Now, if I had taken to stock-broking instead of ship’s husbanding, I might have been as well off as you.”

“Oh dear, no; I’m not well off,” said Max.

“Hey?”

“I say I’m not well off,” said Max, more loudly.

“That’s a pity,” said the old fellow. “Never mind, I’ll have another glass, all the same. Fill it full this time.”

Max shut his teeth with a snap, but he filled the glass brimming full, and then restopped the decanter.

“So you’re not well off, hey?” said Hopper.

“Very, very short,” said Max, with his mouth close to his visitor’s ear.

“Humph! Sorry to hear it, because I want to borrow five pounds of you,” said Hopper. “You’ve got that, I suppose?”

“Indeed, no. I’m very sorry,” began Max.

“So am I,” said the old fellow shortly. “Hah, Max Shingle, how you’d have liked to stick a dose of poison in that wine, wouldn’t you?”

“Really, Mr Hopper,” began Max indignantly, and he half rose.

But the old man laid his stick upon his shoulder like a sceptre, and forced him down.

“Sit still, stupid!” cried the old man. “I know what you are going to say. Surprised at my making such remarks, and so on. But you would like to, and I believe you’d do it if it was not for the fear of the law. I say, Max,” he chuckled, “it would take a strong new rope to hang you.”

Max laid his hands upon the arms of his handsome, well-stuffed easy chair, and turned of a pale dough colour, as he glared at his visitor.

“I don’t wonder at it,” chuckled Hopper. “It must be very unpleasant to have a man come to see you, and invade the sanctity—sanctity, yes, sanctity, that’s the word—of your home and private office, who knows what a scoundrel you are.”

“For Heaven’s sake, speak lower!” cried Max, in a hoarse whisper.

“All right,” said Hopper, nodding. “Especially to a man like you, who goes in for the religious dodge, and is so looked up to and respected by every one. Ha! ha! ha!” he chuckled—“what a wonderful deal is done in this world, Max, by humbug!”

Max began to wipe his wet face with his handkerchief, glaring the while helplessly at his tormentor.

“You’re such a good man, too, now,” said Hopper, laughing, and evidently enjoying the other’s discomfiture. “I saw you coming from service last Sunday, with the wife, and that dear youth in the next room, Fred, all carrying limp hymn-books. I say, Max, your prayers must be precious limp, too.”

“Say what you have to say, and then go, for Heaven’s sake!” gasped Max.

“Hey! say what I have to say? How I can read your fat lips, Max! I never feel my deafness when you are speaking. Well, I am saying what I have to say. I don’t often speak out like this.”

“Only when you want money,” muttered Max.

“Only when I want money? Right. There, I told you I could read off your lips every word you say, so don’t begin to curse me, and wish I was dead, because it will only make me want more. Think it, if you like. I say, you must look

sharp after that boy Fred, or he'll go to the bad."

Max frowned.

"If he was half such a lad as Tom!"

"Tom's a scoundrel—a vagabond!" exclaimed Max furiously.

"Yes, yes, of course. To be sure he is. Every one is who doesn't do as you wish, Max Shingle. I'm a horrible old scoundrel, and yet you're obliged to put up with me. You can't afford to offend me, and I come to your house as often as I like; and I shall keep on doing so, because it's good for you. I'm like a conscience to you, and a devilish ugly old conscience, eh?—a deaf conscience—and I keep you from being a bigger scoundrel than you are. I say, Max, you'd give a thousand pounds down, now, to hear I was dead, wouldn't you?"

"What is the good of talking like this?" said Max, leaning over to whisper to his visitor.

"Hey? What's the good? A deal—does you good. I say, Max, I've often thought that you might be tempted to get me killed—by accident, of course. It is tempting, I know. You'd feel as if the old slate with the nasty writing on was wiped clean with a sponge. But it would be so ugly for such a good man to be exposed to such a temptation, and uglier still to add the crime of side-blow murder to his other sins. So do you know what I've done to save you from temptation?"

There was a curious malignity of expression in the old man's face as, with a chuckling laugh, he asked his question and saw its effect.

"No! What?" exclaimed Max, in agony.

"Well, I've written it all down neatly on paper—not on a slate; and I've deposited it with my will."

"Where?"

"Ah, yes, that's another thing. Where it would be opened and read directly I was dead. Ha! ha! ha! Max, what an *exposé* that would be! But don't be nervous, man, and look so white. It wouldn't be a hanging matter." Max stretched across the table, and laid his hand upon his visitor's lips; but the old man thrust his chair back, gave the hand a sharp rap with his stick, and Max shrank back in his chair.

"It isn't, I say, a hanging matter. But I say, Max, old fellow, I should look sharp after that boy Fred. Don't let him get into temptation. Like father, like son. Now, Tom—"

"Curse Tom!" cried Max, biting his nails.

"Not I," laughed the old man. "He isn't so bad; and you curse him quite often enough, you know. Ah, Max, what a blessing and relief it must be to you that you have reformed so, and become such a good, pious man!"

Max raised his hands.

"One of those dear, good creatures," chuckled the old fellow, "who go through life saying 'Have mercy upon us miserable sinners,' and then feel so happy. Not a bit of the Pharisee about you, Max—all humble Publican. I say, why don't you build a church or a chapel? That's the proper thing to do. 'Publican' put me in mind of it. It's what the brewers and distillers do. Make fortunes out of the vice and misery of the people, and then buy a seat in the heavenly Parliament by building a church—"

"My dear Hopper," began Max.

"And endowing it."

"Will you listen to me, Hopper?"

"They think they can cheat God with their sham repentance. Ha! ha! ha!—it's a rare joke, 'pon my word. Now, you know, Max, I'm just such a fool in my way, for I get thinking He'd have more respect for an honest old reprobate like me. But we shall see, Max, when we die—when we die; when you die, and the gravedigger puts you to bed with a shovel."

A spasm seemed to shoot across the other's face at these last words.

"I am an out-and-out bad one, you know, Max. I never go to chapel and hold the plate—never dip a little out of it, Max, in the vestry!"

"Man, are you the Devil?" muttered Max.

"Yes, if you like."

"Then you are not deaf!" cried Max triumphantly.

"Honestly; but I can read your lips as well as your heart, my dear friend. Devil? Because I know about that ugly bit of forgery for which you ought to have served your time."

"Will you be silent?" cried Max, with an agonised look at the door.

"No," said the other coolly. "Devil because I saw through the Uncle Rounce business? Perhaps I am," he continued, as

he saw Max wince, “for I never believed in the Excelsior game—to go up higher—because it’s so cold. I’m not a pure-minded man, Max, but would rather stay in the valley, and lay my head on the nice, pleasant, plump young woman’s breast—so comfortable and cosy and warm. Eh, you dog—eh?”

He poked Max with his stick as he spoke, and then chuckled at the other’s horrified air.

“I’m no cackle-spinner, like you, Max; I never went through the world saying it was all vanity and vexation of spirit, and a vale of tears; and howled hymns, declaring that I was sick of it, and wanted to die and get out of it as soon as I could, because it was such a wicked, wretched place. I never told people I had a call, like you did; and played shepherd in a white choker, and went and delivered addresses to the lost lambs outside the fold.”

“They’ll hear you in the outer office,” cried Max vainly, for Hopper went on:—

“Because I was always a wolf, and liked the world, and thought it very beautiful, and loved it; and when I caught a lost lamb I took him and ate him right off, because it was my nature. Not like you, my gentle shepherd, who, of course without any vanity or self-interest, coaxed the lambs into the fold; and when you killed one, you had him nicely dressed with mint sauce. Eh, Max? mint sauce—the tap out of the barrels that they take into the bank.”

“Are you mad?” exclaimed Max, at last.

“Mad as a hatter,” said the old fellow, grinning; “that’s why I chose the wrong way. Not like you. Ah, Max, when we both die, what a beautiful plump cherub you’ll make up aloft there, and what an ugly old sinner I shall be down below! How sorry you’ll be for me, won’t you?”

“Pray, let us bring this interview to an end,” gasped Max.

“No hurry,” said Hopper. “I told you I was bilious when you were spinning that bunch of seals of yours. This is all bile. I’m getting rid of it. I shall be better afterwards. I have not had a go at you for a twelvemonth. I haven’t half done yet. I’m not a pithy man, like you—more pith than heart—but long-winded. Ah, I’m a wicked old wretch, ain’t I, and always turned a deaf ear to what was good?”

“But I am busy,” pleaded Max.

“So am I,” said Hopper, chuckling, and giving a box on the table a poke with his stick—“busy giving you a taste of my bile.—What have you got there, my pious old saint? ‘Donations for the debt fund of St. Ursula’s Church.’ Ah! that’s a pretty respectable way of doing things—that is. Church in debt. Built up, I’ll be bound, with fal-lals and fancy work and stained glass, and a quire inside—twenty-four sheets to wrap up singing men and boys. Now, look here, Max: if I built a place and hadn’t money to pay for it, you’d call me a rogue.”

“Shall we try and transact the bit of business you came about?” said Max humbly.

“Presently,” said Hopper, who was now wound up, and determined to go on. “Ah, Max, you don’t know what a wicked old man I’ve grown,” he continued, with a sly twinkle in his eye. “But you see I can preach morality—my fashion.”

“We shall never agree upon such points,” said Max wearily.

“Of course not, till you convert me, Max. I’m a brand for the burning, Max. Why don’t you try and save me? Teach me to sing some of those nice hymns you know by heart—‘Fain would I leave this weary world.’ Bah! How many would fain? Who made it weary? Who filled the beautiful world full of diseases and death and wickedness? Humbugs, sir—humbugs. I’m an old worldling, and I was put here in the world, and the longer I live the more beautiful I find it; and I don’t want to leave it, even to carry your secret with me, friend Max Shingle. I mean to live as long as I can, taking my share of the bad as bitter to make the good sweet; and when it’s time to set sail for the other land, I mean to go like a man, and say ‘Thank God for it all. Amen!’ There’s a wicked old reprobate for you, Max. Why don’t you try to convert this old scoundrel, eh? Ah! I’m a bad one—a regular bad one—hopelessly lost. And now I’ve got rid of all my bile, and feel better, get out your cheque-book.”

Max rose with a sigh, unlocked the iron safe in the corner, and took out a cheque-book and laid it upon a table.

“I can very ill spare this, John Hopper,” he said. “Five pounds are five pounds now.”

“Always were, stupid!” said the old fellow. “Dear me, how much better I can hear to-day! Got rid of all that bile,” he added, considering. “But don’t you draw that for five pounds. Make it ten.”

“Ten pounds!” gasped Max.

“Yes. Five extra for your conscience. You don’t suppose your poor conscience is going to preach to you, as it has to-day, for nothing?”

“But—” commenced Max.

“Ten pounds, you goodly saint—you man after Heaven’s own heart—you halo-promised piece of piety and man of heavenly manna!” cried Hopper. “Make it ten pounds directly, O smooth-faced piece of benignity, or I shall want twenty in less than a minute.”

Max Shingle hastily drew a cheque for ten pounds, blotted it, and passed it over; for he knew only too well that his visitor would keep his word, and that he should be obliged to obey.

“That’ll do—for the present,” said Hopper, grinning, as he folded the cheque and placed it in his gouty pocket-book.

Then he rose to go.

“Good-bye: God bless you, Max! What a good thing it is for me that I have a wealthy saint who can relieve my necessities! Thank you, my dearest and best friend. I sha’n’t give you any acknowledgment, because I know you mean this for a gift. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” said Max, who could hardly contain his rage.

“Good-bye. And a word more from your conscience. Good advice, mind. Look after Master Fred. Don’t let him go your way.”

“You’ve got your money. Now be silent!” cried Max, savagely.

“All right,” said the old fellow; and he walked out, making his stick thump the floor, and nodding at Fred as he passed through to the outer office; while Max, as soon as he was alone, ground his teeth with rage, as he heaped a series of very unchristianlike curses upon his visitor’s head.

“Yes,” he said in a hoarse whisper, “he must be a devil, or he couldn’t have known about Uncle Rounce.”

Volume Two—Chapter Six.

The Fly on the Wall.

“Well, mother, it might have been worse,” said Richard, sitting down to his humble dinner about a week later. “Here, Jessie, pull my ears.”

Jessie, who looked very pale and red-eyed, as if with weeping, went behind her father’s chair, took hold of his ears playfully, and pulled them, while he drew one hand before his face.

“Will that do, dear?” she said, drawing his head back so that she could kiss his puzzled forehead.

“Beautiful, my darling! Nothing like it. Tightens the skin, and takes out all the wrinkles. Keeps you young-looking, and makes your wife fond of you. Don’t it, mother?”

Mrs Shingle sighed, but looked at him affectionately, as she placed a spoon in the potatoes.

“That’s right,” said Dick. “Smiles is human sunshine, and don’t cost anything. You both look as bright again to-day. Hallo! old fellow,” he continued, thrusting a spoon into some hash. “Now, it won’t do, you know. You can’t deceive me, in spite of your brown gravy. You’re that half-shoulder of mutton we had on Sunday.”

“Yes, it is, Dick,” said Mrs Shingle.

“I knew it. Didn’t he gape wide open as soon as I cut into him, and pretend that three people had been helped? Oh, I knew him again! Come, look bright, both of you: things might be worse. See how I’m trying to shine! Come on: the best side of the looking-glass, both of you. The glue and wood will do for old Max.”

In spite of his endeavours, the dinner was a sorry repast, the only one who enjoyed it being the boy; and as soon as it was cleared away, Dick and the others resumed their work.

“Do you really mean to go, Dick?” said his wife at last, after making three or four efforts to speak.

“Yes, certain!” he said; and he glanced at Jessie, who was just then looking at him, when both lowered their eyes directly.

“But how can we leave without paying?” Mrs Shingle ventured to say at last.

“Sell the furniture,” said Dick bitterly. “There—it’s no use, mother, I won’t humble myself to him no more. I’ve as good as took a couple of rooms off St. John Street, and go we will—for many reasons,” he added.

“But, Dick dear—”

“Hold your tongue, mother!” he cried sternly. “I’m going to turn over a new leaf. Other folks make money; I’m going to make some now—somehow. But I don’t know how,” he added to himself. “Now, you sir, get on—we’ve got to make a fortune yet,” he continued, hammering away; while Jessie’s sewing machine clicked musically, and her little white-stockinged feet seemed to twinkle as they played up and down.

Mrs Shingle looked very much in trouble, for every now and then she wiped a furtive tear from her eye.

“How much money did you bring from the warehouse this morning, my gal?” said Dick suddenly, as he looked up from playing cat’s-cradle over a boot.

Jessie gazed at him in a frightened manner, and then dropped her head lower over her machine, while her hands trembled so that she could hardly direct her work.

“I say, Jessie, my gal, how much did you draw this morning?”

“None, father,” said Jessie, with a sob. And then, covering her face with her hands, she burst into a passion of

weeping.

“Why, Jess, my gal—Jess!” cried Dick, dropping stirrup-leather and boot. “Here, you sir: here’s a penny. Go down to Wilson’s and get a pen’orth o’ wax.”

“But here is plenty, master,” said the boy.

“Go down to Wilson’s and get a pen’orth o’ wax,” said Dick sternly.

“Hadn’t I better go to Singley’s, sir? it ain’t half so far.”

“Go and get a pen’orth o’ wax at Wilson’s,” said Dick angrily. And he saw the boy off the premises before he crossed to Jessie.

“Why, what’s the matter, my pretty one?” he said tenderly.

“Oh, father dear, don’t be cross with me,” she sobbed. “I couldn’t tell you before.”

“Just as if your poor stoopid old goose of a father could be cross with you!” he said, fondling her and drawing her close to his heart. “At least,” he added, “I could be cross, but not with anything you’d go and do. Now, then, what’s the matter?”

“Oh, father, I can never go to the warehouse again.”

“What?” said Dick; “not go—”

“No, father,” she sobbed: “that man—”

She stopped short, and Dick, with his face working, patted her tenderly on the shoulder, and then rolled up his sleeves.

“It’s only father, my precious: tell him all about it,” he whispered.

As he spoke he made a sign to Mrs Shingle to be silent. “That man, father,” she sobbed hysterically—“several times lately—insulted me—dare not say anything—the money—you so poor, dear!”

“Jessie,” cried Dick, in a choking voice, “my poor darling,—if I’d known!”

“Yes, father dear, I know,” she cried, placing her arm round his neck and kissing him tenderly; “but you wanted the money so badly, I would not speak.”

“But it was wrong, my darling,” he said angrily. “But tell me—all.”

“This morning—I went,” she faltered, “and there was no one in the room, and he caught me in his arms—and kissed me,” she sobbed, with her face like crimson. Then, indignantly, “I screamed out, and Tom—”

“Was Tom there?” cried Dick reproachfully.

“Yes, father; I could not help his being there. We had never spoken since that dreadful day, when Uncle Max—”

“Yes,” said Dick hastily: “go on.”

“But he has come and watched me every day, father, at a distance, and seen me go to and from the warehouse.”

“Bless him!” muttered Dick.

“And when I shrieked out,” continued Jessie, with a look of pride lighting up her face, “Tom rushed in; and, oh, father, it was very dreadful!”

“What was?” said Dick hoarsely, for he was evidently suffering from suppressed passion.

“Tom!”

“Mr Thomas Fraser, my gal?”

“Mr Thomas beat him dreadfully,” continued Jessie, “till he cried for mercy; and dear Tom—”

“Mr Thomas, my gal,” said Dick, correcting.

“Made him go down upon his knees and beg my pardon, and then he brought me away.”

“God bless him!” said Dick fervently, “But it’s Mr Thomas Fraser, my dear; and he’s nothing to you but a brave, true young fellow, who acted like a man. But, that it should come to this!” he groaned, striding up and down the room. “This is being a poor man, and having to eat other people’s bread. Oh, it’s dreadful, dreadful! If she’d been rich Max’s daughter, mother, no one would have dared to insult her; and as for this blackguard, I’ll—”

He caught up the hammer, and had reached the door, when Jessie and her mother ran and clung to him, Mrs Shingle locking the door till he promised to be content with the castigation the fellow had received.

“Mr Tom would be sure to beat him well, father,” said Mrs Shingle.

“Well, that is one comfort,” said Dick, cooling a little. “I should have nearly killed any blackguard who had touched you. Well, mother,” he continued, “when things comes to the worst they mends; but it don’t seem to be so with us any more than with shoes, unless some one mends ’em, I mean to mend ours somehow. ‘Why don’t you try?’ every one says. Well, I do try.”

Just then the boy came back, and making a sign to Jessie and his wife not to let him see their trouble, all tried to resume their work, but in a despairing, half-hearted manner, in the midst of which, in a doleful, choking voice, Dick began to sing over his sewing, while the boy seemed to keep time with the hammer with which he was driving in nails.

> “For we always are so jolly, oh—
> So jolly, oh—so jolly, oh—so jolly—”

sang Dick; but he had soon done, and his voice trailed off into a dismal wail, as, unable to contain themselves, Jessie’s face went down over her sewing machine and Mrs Shingle hid hers in her apron.

“My God! what can I do?” the poor fellow moaned, as, with a catching in his breath, he glanced at those most dear to him. “I hav’n’t a shilling in the world, and the more I try—the more I try—”

He caught up a hammer savagely, and began to beat vigorously at the leather, forcing himself to sing again, as if he had not seen the trouble of his wife and child—

> “To get his fill, the poor boy did stoop,
> And, awful to state, he was biled in the soup.”

“Oh, master, please, master, don’t sing that dreadful song,” cried Union Jack, with a dismal howl. “I can’t bear it: please, master, I can’t bear it, indeed.”

“Hold your tongue, you young ruffian,” cried Dick, with a pitiful attempt at being comic. “It’s a good job we’ve got you in stock; for if things do come to the worst, you’ll make a meal for many a day to come.”

“Oh, please, don’t talk like that, master,” cried the boy.

“Dick, dear,” whispered his wife, “don’t tease the poor lad: he half believes you.”

“I’m not teasing of him, mother,” said Dick aloud; “only it’s a pity to have to boil him all at once, instead of by degrees. Here, get out the cold tea, mother, and let’s take to drinking—have a miserable day, and enjoy ourselves. Jessie, my gal, you’ll rust that machine raining on it like that. Come, mother, rouse up; it’ll all come right in the end.”

“I was not crying, Dick,” said Mrs Shingle,—“not much.”

“Yes, you were,” he cried, with a rollicking air of gaiety. “I saw two drips go on your apron and one in that child’s shoe. Come, cheer up.”

There was a pause then, during which all again tried hard to work; but the knowledge that they were about to turn out of the little home, and that their prospects were so bitter, combined with sorrow for their child, made a sob or two burst from Mrs Shingle’s breast, while even the boy kept on sniffing.

“Here, I can’t stand this,” groaned Dick at last, getting up and walking about the room. “I don’t spend no money, mother—only a half-ounce or two of tobacco for myself, and one now and then for poor old Hopper, who seems to be cutting us now we are so down. You don’t spend much, mother: and it’s as true as gorspel about shoemakers’ wives being the worst shod; while as for me, I haven’t had a real new pair this ten years.”

“Don’t take on about it, Dick,” said Mrs Shingle, making a brave effort to smile. And she took and patted her husband’s hand affectionately.

“I wouldn’t care, mother, if things were better for you two; and I can’t see as it’s my extravagance as does it.”

“Oh, no, no, Dick dear.”

“One half-pint of beer this month, and it’s the beer as is the ruin of such as me,” he said, with a comical look—“and one screw of tobacco this week, and the paper as was round it, for thickness, why, it was like leather.”

“Don’t, don’t mind, Dick,” whispered Mrs Shingle. “We’ll sell the things, and clear ourselves, and start free again.”

“It’s all right, mother,” he cried, with a kind of gulp. “It’s got to the worst pitch now—see if it ain’t. Don’t make it rain indoors,” he added, in a remonstrating tone; “’specially when we’ve only one umbrella in the house, and it’s broke. Here, Jessie, my gal, what’s that song you sing about the rain?”

“‘There’s sunshine after rain,’ father,” said Jessie, looking up in so piteous a way that Dick had hard work to keep back a sob; but with another struggle to drive off his cares, he cried—

“To be sure. ‘There’s sunshine after rain, my boys; there’s sunshine after rain,’” he sang, making up words, and a peculiar doleful tune of his own, as he set-to again and hammered vigorously at a piece of leather. “Work away, Union Jack, and sing, you dog—‘There’s sunshine af—aft—after—’”

The hammer fell at his feet, and he rose once more.

“Go away, Jack, my boy,” he said, in a different tone of voice.

“No, no, master: don’t send me back,” cried the boy passionately. “I’m very sorry; and I’ll try so—so very hard not to be hungry.”

“Hush, my boy, hush!” said Dick softly.

“And when I am, master, I’ll never—never say I am. Don’t send me away.”

“Tell him—tell him, mother,” whispered Dick, who had been so near breaking down before that the boy’s passionate appeal completely unmanned him.

“There’s nobody to care for there, master, and it’s all whitewash. Miss Jessie, please ask him not to send me away.”

“Come here, Jack,” said Mrs Shingle.

“No, no, missus; I’ll stop here on bread and water—I will, missus. Please let me stay!”

“I—I only want you to go outside for a bit, Jack,” said Dick, with his lips quivering. “Go out and play, my boy.”

“But,” said the boy suspiciously, “you won’t cut off, master, and leave me. Fain larks, you know.”

“No, no, no, my lad. Go and stop out in the court.” The boy gazed keenly in his face, and then, with a suspicious look in his eyes, went outside.

“It seems to me as the poorer people is the fonder they get of you, mother,” said Dick pitifully. “Oh, my gal, what have we done, that we should be so poor? Here have I worked early and late for the few pence we drag together, and can’t get on. It’s because I’m a wretched bungler, and it would have been better if I’d never been born.”

“Dick, dear Dick,” whispered his wife, as he sat down despairingly, and leaned his head upon his hand, while she bent over him. “Don’t give way. I can bear anything but that.”

“I do try, my gal, harder than you think,” he groaned; “and when I’m making most of a fool of myself, and laughing and singing, it’s because I’ve got such a gnawing here.”

He raised his hand to strike his chest, but it was caught by Jessie, who drew it round her neck as she knelt at his feet.

“And I’ve been so much trouble instead of a comfort, father; and it’s all my fault,” she sobbed.

“Your fault, my precious!” he cried, as he took her piteous face in his hands and kissed it a dozen times over—“your fault! Why, you’ve been like sunshine in the place ever since you used to sit on your little stool there, and play with the bits of leather, and build houses with mother’s cotton-reels. Your fault, my darling! There—there—there! It’s all over, mother, and the sun’s coming out again. It won’t rain any more to-day.”

There was a pause here, and the little place was very silent as the cries of the children at play floated in.

“There, we’ll have Jack in again. And, look here: it’s cowardly and mean of me to give up like that; but it’s the last time. So there, mother,” he said, smiling, as he rose and stood between them, “as a respectable tradesman I object to swearing, as is only allowable when you want to take an oath. I’m going to take an oath now, when I says I’ll be cussed if I give way again, and—”

“Here’s a letter, master!” cried the boy, rushing in.

“A letter?” said Dick, taking it with his apron. “Who’s been a-writing to me? Perhaps it’s about that money, mother, and we shall—Here, my eyes are all of a swim. Did the postman give it to you, Jack?”

“Yes, master, at the door,” said the boy eagerly.

Mrs Shingle took the letter, and opened it, to find a clean, new ten-pound note inside, which she spread out and held to her husband.

Dick took it, turned it upside down, over, round and round, and held it up to the light.

“It’s—it’s a duffer, mother,” he said at last, with his voice trembling; “it’s a flash note, like—like they are at the races. Bank of Elegance.”

”‘For the Governor and Company of the Bank of England,’” read Jessie slowly.

“No! Does it say so?” cried Dick excitedly. “Then it’s a good one, and it’s a mistake. It isn’t for me. Give me the envelope.”

He took it hastily, and read aloud, “Mr Richard Shingle, Shoemaker, Crowder’s Buildings, Lower Street, Islington.”

“That’s me, mother,” he said, looking from wife to daughter, “ain’t it?”

“Yes, Dick, it is for you.”

“Let’s look inside. What does it say in the letter?”

“Nothing! There, we’ve only the blank sheet of paper in which the note was wrapped. Yes, on one corner, the words

—‘For you, Richard Shingle.’”

“Then, it’s from that Tom Fraser,” cried Dick, plucking up; “and I won’t take it.”

“No, father,” cried Jessie eagerly; and she trembled, too, as she took the paper. “It is not his writing; and he would have said ‘*Mr*. Richard Shingle.’”

“So he would, my gal,” said Dick, nodding. “Then it’s from Max; and he’s sorry he’s been so hard on me—dear old Max! And he wants to be friends again. Blood is thicker than water, after all, mother; and I always said it was. There, I’m as pleased as if it was a hundred from any other man.”

The tears stood in his eyes, as he looked from one to the other; but to read no sympathy in the countenance of wife and child.

“That’s five times, you know, the money’s come like that,” said Dick, “and always when we’ve been in great trouble. It is from Max, mother; and his roughness is only the way he’s got.”

A faint flush of hope illumined Jessie’s face as she tried to believe her father’s words; but it died out directly.

“Why, mother,” cried Dick joyously, “we can clear all off, and have some money to go on with; and- But, I say, if Max sent this, he wouldn’t like us to go.”

“Max did not send it,” said Mrs Shingle decidedly. “Eh?”

“I am sure of it,” she said.

“Then you know who did?”

“If I knew who sent it, Dick,” said the poor woman, laying her hand upon his arm, “you’d have known too.”

“So I should, mother—so I should,” he said quietly, as he nodded his head. “Who could it be, then?”

“Some good, true friend, who don’t want to be known,” said Mrs Shingle.

“It would be a bitter pill to swallow,” said Dick thoughtfully, “if it was done in charity—a gilded pill, mother, wrapped up in that bit of paper. Oh, mother, mother!” he cried, stamping up and down the room, “I’m only a poor, miserable fellow, but I’ve got my pride, like better men. I don’t like this beggarly dependence on other people—this taking money in charity. If I could only hit a bright—invent some new thing that all the world would buy!”

“Watts was an inventor, and made the steam engine,” said the boy softly.

“Hang Watts!” cried Dick impatiently. “Here, you be quiet. I don’t want your union-school copy-books here.”

“All right, master,” said the boy, with a sniff.

Dick walked up and down the room in an excited way, with the bank-note in his left hand, while a bluebottle fly came in at the window and buzzed round the room, now up, now down, its loud hum rising and falling, as, apparently taken off from his previous thoughts, the man followed it, and as it settled he twice made ineffectual efforts to catch it.

“*Buzz—uzz—buzz*! *Um—um—um*!” went the fly; while Jack stood with open mouth and an old slipper, ready to hit at the insect if it came his way; Mrs Shingle and Jessie glancing at one another, and then following Dick in a troubled fashion with their eyes, as he still pursued the great bluebottle.

“You’ve a fine time of it, you have,” he said, “you great, lazy wind-flitter!”

“*Buzz—buzz*!—*um—um—um*!” went the fly, round and round.

“Ah,” said Dick, “some men hit bright ideas, and make fortunes, but I don’t; and it seems (ah! I nearly had you that time)—seems, mother, as if we go on as we are that we may toil on (well, he is a sharp one, but I’ll have him yet)—toil on till we get to the workhouse!”

“Oh, don’t, please, master—don’t go there,” cried the boy. “Now, master—quick, quick. He’s settled on the edge of the last shelf.”

“I see him,” said Dick, going cautiously up, with hand ready to catch the fly.

But, before he reached it, away it went round and round the room again.

“*Buzz—uzz*!—*um—um—um*!”

“There’s nothing done without trying, mother,” continued Dick, who was excited now over his chase. “Try again, try again till you succeed’s the way. Now, you know, if I was to—was to—(Ah, gone again; but I’ll have you yet)—you see, I might—”

“Now, master, there he is,” whispered Jack; “you’ll have it now.”

“Yes,” said Dick, “I shall get it now. You see, mother, shoemaking and cobbling’s all very well, but it means starvation to us, though it’s a thing in common demand. If I could invent—(Ah! I shall have you directly).”

He went cautiously across the room.

“Invent a pair o’ boots as won’t never wear out, master,” whispered the boy. “Now look, master—there, on the wall!”

The buzzing had ceased, and all was very still in the low, shabby room, as the bluebottle settled on the centre of a figure in the common wall-paper; and Dick went forward, on tiptoe, while, somehow drawn into a keen interest in the pursuit, they knew not why, Mrs Shingle and Jessie still looked on.

Slowly and cautiously, as if determined to make up this time for his many failures, Richard Shingle advanced closer and closer, just as a ray of sunshine fell on the wall, making the fly, which was cleaning and brushing itself, stand out plainly before them all.

It was as if the capture of that fly had something to do with their future in life, and the activity that Dick threw into the pursuit was shared by all present.

Would he catch it? Would he fail?

That was the mental question asked, as he made a scoop of his hand, drew just within the required distance, paused for a moment, and then—

There was a rapid dash of a hand across the sunlit patch, and Dick stood up, with outstretched arm and closed fist.

“*Bizz—izz—izz*” went the captured fly, within the tightened hand, as Jack gave his knee a delighted slap.

“At last—at last!” shouted Dick. “I’ve got it, mother, now. Do you hear, Jessie? I’ve got it.”

“Got what?” they cried.

He paused for a moment or two, turned to them with a curious look upon his face, and then said quietly—

“The fly on the wall.”

“Jessie, my darling—he’s mad,” whispered Mrs Shingle, running to him. “Oh, Dick, Dick!”

“No, mother,” he cried, “I’m not mad; and I’ve made my fortune.”

As he spoke he held his hand to the window, unclosed it, and the fly darted into the sunshine—free.

“At last!” said Dick softly. ”‘Hit a bright,’” Max said, “and—I’ve let it go.”

Volume Two—Chapter Seven.

Who was that?

“Got your Australian money yet, Dick?” said Hopper the next day, when he dropped in as usual.

“No,” said Dick; “but I’ve got this,” and he flourished the ten-pound note before his old friend.

“Hey? Got that,” said Hopper, putting on a pair of tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles, and taking the note in his fingers. “Why, it’s—it’s a ten-pound note. It’s a bad one.”

“No,” said Dick triumphantly; “it’s a good one. I asked our grocer.”

“Hey? A good one! Come by it honestly, Dick?”

“Of course he did,” cried Mrs Shingle indignantly.

“Ah! I don’t know—I don’t know,” said the old fellow. “There’s a deal of trickery in the world. If it’s a good one, then, Dick, and you did come by it honestly, you’ll lend me a few shillings, Dick, eh? Say ten.”

“Hopper, old man,” said Dick, “you shall have a pound if you like. And, look here, I’ve hit a bright idea at last.”

“No—have you?” said Hopper, whose hearing seemed wonderfully good.

“Yes, old chap; and a fortune will come of it. And, look here: we’ve been best friends when it was hard times,—there’s an easy chair in the corner for you when it’s soft times. None of your turning proud, you know.”

“Hey? Turn proud? No; I sha’n’t turn proud. You will. Won’t he, Jessie?”

“No,” said Jessie, speaking up. “Father will never alter—never.”

“Well, I don’t know about that,” said Dick, with a peculiar smile, which he seemed to wipe off directly by passing his hand across his mouth. “Perhaps I may alter, you know, and a good deal too. But, look here, old Hopper, you stop to-day, and we’ll have a holiday—the first I’ve had for years.”

“Hey? Holiday? What, go out?”

“No,” said Dick, “stay at home. We’ll have a bit of supper together, and drink the health of him as sent me that

money—bless him. I can't work to-day. I'm ripening up something, and I can do it best over the old fiddle. We haven't had a scrape for weeks."

"Scrape? No," said the old fellow, "we haven't;" and, getting up, he toddled to the corner cupboard, from which he drew out a violoncello in its faded green baize bag, and, patting it affectionately, brought it out into the middle of the room. "I was going to take it away to-day," he said. "It's too valuable to be lost."

"Thought we were going to be sold up, eh, Hopper, old man?" said Dick, taking down a violin that hung by the eight-day clock.

"Hey?"

"Thought we were going to be sold up, eh? I should have taken care of your old bass," said Dick, with a nod and a smile. "It should not have come to harm, Hopper, anyhow. Now, missus, and you, Jessie, give us a cup of tea, with srimps and creases, and a nice bit of supper about eight. We'll have a happy day in the old house for the last one."

"Last one, Dick!"

"Yes, mother, the last one. I shall move into better premises to-morrow."

"Dick dear," cried Mrs Shingle imploringly—while Hopper seemed to be busying himself over the strings of the 'cello—"what does all this mean? What are you going to do?"

"Do!" said Dick, making his violin chirrup: "throw away wax-end and leather. They say, let the shoemaker stick to his last; but I've stuck to it too long. Mother, I'm going to make a fortune."

"But how, Dick—how?"

"Wait and see."

"You'll tell me what you are going to do?" said Mrs Shingle, half angrily.

"I sha'n't tell a soul," replied Dick firmly; and then, seeing the effect his words had upon his wife, he kissed her, tuned up his violin, and began to turn over the leaves of some very old music with the bow. "Here's the note, mother; and don't spare expense—as far as five shillings go. Get a drop of whiskey, too."

"Hey! whiskey? Who said whiskey?" exclaimed Hopper. "Going to have a drop of whiskey to-night, Dick?"

Dick nodded.

"That's good," said the old fellow, laughing and nodding his head. "We'll drink success to the new venture, Dick."

"We will. Now, then, what's it to be, eh? Here we go: 'Life's a bumper!' That'll do, for it is; and many a bump and bruise it has given me."

Hopper's head went down over his 'cello, Dick's cheek on his violin; and the oddly assorted couple began to solemnly scrape away, sometimes melodiously, sometimes getting into terrible tangles over the score, consequent upon its being set for three voices or instruments, and Dick having to dodge up and down, from the treble to the tenor and back; while Hopper, with half-closed eyes, and his head moving to and fro like a snag on an American river, kept on sawing away, regardless of everything but the deep tones he evolved from the strings.

From "Life's a Bumper" they went on to "Vital Spark," and from "Vital Spark" to the "Hallelujah Chorus," and from the "Hallelujah Chorus" to "Forgive, blest Shade;" and then Dick tried a solo known as "The Cuckoo." But it was a failure; for though he managed the first note of the bird, the second would not come—all owing to want of practice,—so he gave way to Hopper, who, with knitted brows, played his solo, "Adeste fideles," with variations; the effect upon the boy being absolutely painful, causing him to thrust his legs up under the stool, and head down, with his arms crossed over his person. His face, too, was drawn; and had it not been for the variations, it seemed probable that he would have had a fit of sobbing. These latter, being more lively, saved him; though he had a painful relapse during the third variation, which was *largo*, and in A minor, his face during the performance being a study. However, he became convalescent during the *allegro finale*, and all ended well.

Tea being declared ready, the musicians ceased their toils for the time being, and feasted on watercress and shrimps; and though the "creases," as Dick called them, were a little yellow, and the shrimps dull in hue, and too crumby and soft for crustaceans, the meal was a great success, and Hopper actually made a joke.

Like giants refreshed, Dick and he returned to their instruments, and sawed away until supper, which was luxurious, consisting, as it did, of a highly savoured rump-steak pudding, with so much pepper in it, in fact, that both took off their coats, and perspired in peace.

"Ha!" said Hopper suddenly—"I like this; it's better than eating curry in company at your brother's, where you can't scratch your head."

"Yes, nice pudding," said Dick, with his mouth full. "You've put a good lot of salt in it, Jessie."

"Lot!" chuckled Hopper. "I had one bit that tasted as if Jessie had put in Lot's wife as well—the whole pillar. But, never mind, my dear; that's the best pudding I ever ate in my life. I could taste your fingers in the crust."

The table being cleared, half a bottle of whiskey and the pipes were placed, with hot water, on the table by Jessie,

whose eyes were always wandering nervously towards the door, as if expecting to see some one come in.

Hopper was the first to help himself to whiskey, which he did liberally, apparently not being able to judge the quantity on account of the foreshortening effect of the tumbler.

“That boy Fred been about here lately?” he said, taking his pipe from his mouth, and poking at the lump of sugar in his glass with a spoon, as if he were offended with it, or looked upon it as Fred’s head.

“Not for some days,” said Dick, puffing out a cloud of smoke, while he glanced at Jessie, whose forehead contracted, and she turned slightly away.

“Don’t have him here: he’s a bad one,” said Hopper. “I don’t like him. Look at his moustaches.”

“Ain’t here.”

“Hey? Ain’t here? Who said he was? Just look at his moustaches, stretching straight out on both sides, and worked into a point with wax.”

“Well, they ain’t pretty, certainly.”

“Pretty? Did you say pretty?”

Dick nodded.

“Look as if they were fixed there as handles to open his mouth with, or to steer him. I don’t like that boy. You, Jessie, if you let that chap make love to you—Heyday, what’s the matter now?”

The matter was that Jessie had darted an indignant look at him and gone upstairs to her bedroom.

“Look at that now!” said Hopper.

“Well, you shouldn’t speak to her like that,” said Mrs Shingle indignantly.

“Oh, if it’s coming to pride, I’m off,” said Hopper.

“This is getting on in the world.” And, laying down his pipe, he prepared to go.

“No, no, no—what nonsense!” cried Dick and his wife. And together they forced the old fellow back into his chair, where, becoming somewhat mollified after another glass of whiskey and water, he began to talk.

“She oughtn’t to have huffed off like that,” he said. “But I like Jessie: she’s a sensible girl, wears her own hair, and doesn’t turn her boot-heels into stilts and walk like a hen going to peck the ground with her beak; though how she expects to get on without being more fashionable I don’t know. Ah! it’s a strange world, but it’s a great nuisance that we shall all have to die some day. Max won’t mind it a bit,” he chuckled, “he’s such a good man.”

“You leave Max alone,” said Dick gruffly.

“Hey? what say?”

“I say you leave Max alone. He’s my brother; and blood is thicker than water after all—ain’t it, mother?”

“Hush!” said Hopper, suddenly removing his pipe and making signs with the stem.

“What’s the matter?”

“There’s some one outside, under the window,” he said, in a whisper.

“Why, you can’t hear,” said Dick, in the same low voice.

“Can’t hear? No; but I can feel some one there.”

“It’s the boy,” said Dick.

“No; he’s gone to bed this hour,” said Mrs Shingle nervously.

“Let’s go and see,” whispered Hopper.

“Stop a moment,” said Dick, frowning; and, getting up, he opened the door that led upstairs, when a low whispering was plainly heard from above.

Dick shut the door quickly, and turned to his wife.

“Mother,” he said huskily, “I wouldn’t have believed this if I’d been told. Did you know of it?”

“No, dear—no,” she cried agitatedly. “But pray—stop. What are you going to do?”

“Put an end to it!” he cried fiercely. “My gal’s going to be a lady; and do you think I’m going to let her be the talk of the town?”

“Don’t do anything rash, Dick, old chap,” said Hopper, laying his hand upon the other’s arm.

“Rash!” cried Dick, bitterly. “I’ve been waiting for prosperity to come all my life; but, curse it, give me poverty again, if riches are to be like this.”

A complete change seemed to have come over the man, as he darted to the door and swung it open, just as there was the rush of rapid footsteps along the paved court, and he ran off in pursuit; while Mrs Shingle and Hopper followed.

They met Dick at the entrance, coming back panting; and he motioned them into the house, and closed the door.

“Mother,” he panted, in a voice that trembled with grief and passion, “I’ve left it to you to train our girl while I earned —no, tried to earn—the bread; and it’s been my pride through it all to hold up my head and point to our Jessie, and say to folks, ‘Look at her—she’s not like the rest as go to the warehouse for work.’”

“But, Dick—dear Dick, don’t, pray don’t judge hastily,” cried Mrs Shingle.

“I won’t,” said Dick hoarsely. “All I say is there was a man out there, and she was talking to him on the sly. Is that right, Hopper? I say, is that right?”

The old man looked at him vacantly, and seemed not to hear.

“Curse him! whoever he was,” cried Dick hoarsely; “he was ashamed to meet me. It was Tom Fraser, I’ll swear; and he’s not the man I thought him. Here,” he cried, swinging open the door that led upstairs, “Jessie—Jessie, come down! Hopper, old man, you’re like one of us—you needn’t go.”

The visitor, with a sorrowful look upon his face, had already reached the door, where he stood, leaning upon his stick, as Jessie slowly descended, looking very pale, and glancing anxiously from one to the other.

Mrs Shingle was crossing—mother-like—to her child’s side; but Dick motioned her back.

“Stop there!” he said fiercely; and then, taking a step forward—“Jessie, you were talking to some one outer window just now?”

She did not answer for a moment, but gazed at him in a frightened way.

“I say you were talking to some one outer window?”

“Yes, father,” she faltered.

“It was to Tom Fraser,” he said, in a low, angry voice. “And he’s a sneak.”

There was no answer.

“I say it was—to Tom Fraser.”

“No, father, it was not,” said Jessie, in a low clear voice.

“Who was it, then?” cried Dick.

There was no answer.

“I say, who was it, then?”

“It was to his brother Fred, father,” said Jessie, almost in a whisper.

But all the same Tom Fraser had stood at the entrance to the court, and been a witness of the scene.

Volume Two—Chapter Eight.

After a Lapse.

Max Shingle lived in the unfashionable district of Pentonville; but he had a goodly house there, and well furnished, at the head of a square of little residences that some ingenious builder had erected to look like a plantation of young Wesleyan chapels, growing up ready for transplanting at such times as they were needed to supply a want.

Mrs Max, relict of the late Mr Fraser, was a tall, bony, washed-out woman, with a false look about her hair, teeth, and figure; large ears, in each of which, fitting close to the lobe, was a large pearl, looking like a button, to hold it back against her head. She was seated in her drawing-room, but not alone; for opposite to her, in a studied, graceful attitude, sat Max’s ward, Violante, daughter of a late deacon of his chapel—a rather good-looking girl in profile, but terribly disfigured, on looking her full in the face, by a weakness in one eye, the effect of which was that it never worked with its twin sister, but was always left behind. Thus, whereas her right eye turned sharply upon you, and looked you through and through, the left did not come up to its work until the right had about finished and gone off to do duty on something else. The consequence was that when talking to her you found you had her attention for a few moments; and then, just as you seemed to have lost it, eye Number 2 came up to the charge, and generally puzzled and confused a stranger to a remarkable extent.

“Dear me! Hark at the wind!” said Mrs Max; “and look at it. Give me my smelling bottle, Violante. I’m always giddy when the wind gets under the carpet like that.”

The smelling bottle was duly sniffed; and then, changing her position so that her fair hair and white eyebrows and lashes were full in the light, Mrs Max looked more than ever as if there had been too much soda used in the water ever since she was born; and she sighed, and took up her work, which was a large illuminated text on perforated cardboard.

In fact, Max Shingle's house shone in brightly coloured cards and many-tinted silken pieces of tapestry, formed to improve the sinful mind. Moral aphorisms about honesty and contentment looked at you from over the hat-pegs in the hall; pious precepts peeped at you between the balusters as you went upstairs, and furnished the drawing-room to the displacement of pictures. Many of them lost their point, from being illuminated to such an extent that the brilliancy and wondrous windings of the letters dazzled the eye, and carried the mind into a mental maze, as you tried to decipher what they meant; but there they were, and Mrs Max and the ward spent their days in constantly adding to the number.

The hall mat, instead of "Cave canem," bore the legend "Friend, do not swear; it is a sinful habit," and always exasperated visitors; while, if you put your feet upon a stool, you withdrew them directly, feeling that you had been guilty of an irreverent act; for there would be a line worked in white beads, with a reference to "Romans xii." or "2 Corinthians ii." If you opened a book there was a marker within bidding you "flee," or "cease," or "turn," or "stand fast." If you dined there, and sat near the fire, a screen was hung on your chair, which was so covered with quotations that it made you feel as if you were turning your back on the Christian religion. But still, look which way you would, you felt as if you were in the house of a good man.

Pictures there were, of course. There was a large engraving of Ruth and Boaz, to which Mrs Max always drew your attention with—

"Would not you suppose that Mr Shingle had sat for Boaz?"

And when you agreed that he might, Violante always joined in, directing one eye at you, and saying—

"People always think, too, that the Ruth is so like Mrs Maximilian." Then the other eye came slowly up to finish the first one's task, and seemed to say, "Now, then, what do you think of that?"

The place was well furnished, but, from the pictures to the carpets, everything was of an ecclesiastical pattern; and when Max came in, with a white cravat, you felt that you were in the presence of a substantial rector, if he were not a canon, or a dean.

In a wicked fit, Dick had once dubbed his brother and sister-in-law "Sage and Onions"—the one from his solid, learned look; the other from her being always strangely scented, and her weakness for bursting into tears.

Upon the present occasion, she sat for a few minutes, and then, taking out her handkerchief, began to weep silently.

"Your guardian is always late for dinner, my dear; and everything will be spoilt. Where is Tom?"

"Gone hanging about after Miss Jessie, I suppose," said Violante, with a roll of one eye. "And Fred as well," she added, with the other.

"It is a strange infatuation on the part of my two sons. Your dear guardian's Esau and Jacob," said Mrs Max, wiping her eyes. "I wonder how it is that poor creature, Richard Shingle, makes his money."

"I don't know," said Violante. "They've set up a very handsome carriage."

"Dear me! It is a mystery," said Mrs Max, still weeping. "Two years ago Richard was our poor tenant; now he must be worth thousands. I hope he is honest."

"Perhaps we had better work him some texts," said Violante, maliciously. Then, raising her other eye, "They might do him good."

"I don't know," sighed Mrs Max; "we never see them now they have grown so rich. It is very shocking."

Violante did not seem to see that it was shocking, for she only tossed her head.

"Has Tom been any more attentive to you lately, my dear?"

"No, not a bit," said the girl spitefully, and one eye flashed at Mrs Max; "nor Fred neither," she continued, bestowing a milder ray with the other.

"The infatuation will wear off," said Mrs Max, wringing her hands, but seeming as if wringing her pocket-handkerchief, "and then one of them will come to his senses."

"I shall never marry Tom," cried the girl decidedly. "Don't speak so, my child," said Mrs Max. "You know your guardian has so arranged it; and he can withhold your money if you are disobedient."

"Yes," cried Violante, "money, money, money—always money. That's why I am kept for the pleasure of those two scapegraces, and mocked at by that saucy hussy of a Jessie. I wish I hadn't a penny."

"Hush, hush!" cried Mrs Max, "here is your guardian." As she spoke she hastily wiped her eyes—pretty dry this time—and put away her handkerchief, for voices were heard below.

In fact, half an hour before, Max Shingle had been rolling grandly along from the City, looking the full-blown

perfection of a thick-lipped, self-inflated, sensual man, when he encountered Hopper, who hooked him at once with his stick.

“Hullo, Max Shingle!” he cried: “been doing good, as usual? Here: I’ll come home to dinner with you,” he continued, taking his arm.

Max swore a very ugly oath to himself; but he was obliged to put up with the annoyance—a feeling modified, however, by his curiosity being excited.

“I’ve just come from your brother Dick’s,” said Hopper, winking to himself.

Max was mollified directly, for reasons of his own; for, though over two years had passed, Dick had kept his own counsel so well that not a soul, even in his own family, knew the full secret of his success. Hopper was as ignorant as the rest; but he assumed a knowledge in Max’s presence that he did not possess.

“Is—is he doing well?” said Max, in an indifferent tone. “Hey?”

“I say, is he doing well?” shouted Max.

“Wonderfully! Keeps his brougham, and a carriage besides, for his wife and daughter.”

“Ah!” said Max. “Is he civil to you? No music now, I suppose?”

“Only three nights a week,” said Hopper, winking to himself. “Fine princely fellow, Dick. Ah! here we are. Very glad—I’m hungry. He wanted me to stay, but I would not.”

Max opened the front door with his latchkey, and drew back for Hopper to enter which that worthy did, and began to wipe his feat upon the mat, which said in scarlet letters, “Friend, do not swear,” etc.

“Damn that mat!” exclaimed Hopper loudly, as he caught one toe in the long pile, and nearly fell headlong, while Max gazed at him in horror.

“Couldn’t help it,” said Hopper apologetically. “Didn’t swear, did I?”

“Indeed, sir, you did.”

“Hey? What say?”

“You did, sir,” shouted Max.

“Did what?”

“Swore—at the mat.”

“Hey?” said Hopper, who had grown wonderfully deaf since he had been in the hall.

“I say you—swore—at—the—mat.”

“I swore at the mat? Did I? Tut, tut, tut! How hard it is to break oneself of bad habits! Now, I’ll be bound to say you never did such a thing as that, Max?”

Max shook his head.

“No, of course you would not. Ah, Max, I wish I was as good a man as you. It’s wonderful how some men’s minds are constituted.”

Hopper took off an unpleasant-looking respirator that he had been wearing more or less—more when he was speaking, less when he was not; and when it was in its place it seemed to have the effect of sticking his grey moustache up into his nostrils, like a fierce *chevaux de frise*. Then he put his hat on his hooked stick, and his great-coat on a chair, so as not to confront the moral aphorisms that were waiting to catch his eye, and followed Max up into the drawing-room, where the ladies looked horror-stricken at the sight of the guest.

But there was no help for it; and Mrs Max, at a sign from her lord, put on her most agreeable air, though Violante gave him, uncompromisingly, an ugly look with one eye, which seemed to pierce him, while she clinched the shaft with the other, Hopper replying with his lowest bow.

The brothers Tom and Fred came in directly after,—Tom to offer his hand, while Fred gave a supercilious nod and went up to his mother.

Hopper nodded, and as soon as the dinner was announced, offered his arm to Mrs Max, and they went down to the dining-room.

A well-ordered house had Max Shingle, and his dinners were nicely served; and since he was obliged to receive the visits of Hopper, he made a virtue of necessity, trying all the dinner-time to lay little traps for him to fall into about his brother Richard. But as Hopper saw Tom lean eagerly forward, and Fred turn sharply to listen to his answers, while a frown passed between the two brothers, he misunderstood every word said to him as the dinner went on.

“So Richard is doing uncommonly well, is he?” said Max.

“Hey? You’re not doing uncommonly well? So I heard in the City. Some one told me your house was quite shaky.”

“Who told you that?” cried Fred fiercely.

“Hey?”

“I say who told you that?” cried Fred, more loudly.

“I can’t hear a word you say, young man,” replied Hopper; “you must come round. This, is a bad room of yours for sound, Maximilian—I’d have it altered.”

There were several little encounters of this kind during the repast; for Hopper, as soon as he saw the object of his host, strove religiously to frustrate his efforts, and with such success that Max gave up in disgust, and tried another tack, after making up his mind to call on his brother and become reconciled. This he was the more eager for, since it was a fact that he had lost very heavily of late, and his house was tottering to its fall.

“Ah!” said Max at last, as the dinner progressed slowly, “it’s a pity, Hopper, that you have no money to invest.”

“Hey? Money to invest? No, thank you. But don’t talk shop, man. I wonder so good a creature thinks so much of money. But you keep a carriage?”

“Oh yes,” said Max, smiling good-humouredly at his wife, as if to say, “You see, he will have his joke!”

“And horses?”

“Of course,” said Max, smiling.

“There, don’t put on that imbecile smile,” cried Hopper. “There’s only been one decent dish on the table yet, and I’ve got some of it now. You don’t send your horses out to work in their nosebags? so don’t make me work when I’ve got on mine. I’m hard of hearing, but I’m fond of my digestion. Don’t treat your guest worse than your horses.”

“You always did like a joke, Hopper,” said Max.

“Joke!—it’s no joke,” cried Hopper, pointing at a pie before him. “Look at that—there’s a thing to eat! Look at the crust: just like the top of a brown skull, with all the sutures marked, ready to thrust a knife in and open it,—only it’s apple inside instead of brains.”

Mrs Max gave a horrified glance at Violante.

At last the dessert was placed on the table, and in due time the ladies rose, Tom following them shortly, and Fred, with a sneering look at his brother, rising, and saying he should go and have a cigar.

“You don’t smoke, I suppose, old Hopper?”

“Hey? Not smoke? Yes, I do; but I shall have a pipe.” Left alone, the visitor condescended to talk about Richard, and gave Max a full account of his handsomely furnished house; growing so confidential that, when he took his cup of coffee, he drew nearer and nearer, gesticulating as he described the rich Turkey carpets.

“He must be very rich,” said Max at last, as he tapped the mahogany table with his fingers.

“Not saved much, I should say,” replied Hopper; “but he’s making money fast. So are you.”

“Um—no. I’m very heavily insured, though.”

“Not in the Oldwives’ Friendly?” said Hopper, with a curious look, though he knew the fact well.

“Well—er—er—yes, I am,” said Max.

“They’ll go to smash,” said Hopper eagerly. “Haven’t you heard the rumours?”

“Ye-es,” faltered Max.

“The scoundrels! And you such a good man, too, who has saved up and toiled for his family. I tell you what I’d do,” he said earnestly.

“What?” cried Max, turning to him with the eagerness of one in peril.

“They must last another twelvemonth, and pay up liabilities till then.”

“Yes, they must do that, I should say,” said Max.

“Then die at once, and let your people draw the money!” cried Hopper, slapping him in the breast, and gazing at him with the most serious of aspects. “So good and self-denying! You all over.”

Max started back, with horror in his countenance, and glared at Hopper, whose countenance, however, never for a moment changed; and he hastily poured himself out a glass of port and tossed it off.

“Very hard upon you, Max. I wish I was rich, and could help you. For you have been hit hard, of course. Never mind: you’ve that violent girl’s money in hand—six thousand. Make one of your boys marry her, and that’ll be all right.”

Max winced visibly.

“Haven’t spent it, have you?” continued Hopper, watching him from the corners of his eyes. “No, you’re too good a man for that? and it would be ugly.”

“Shall we go up to the drawing-room?” said Max, rising.

“Hey? Go upstairs? No, not to-night, thankye. Say good-bye to the ladies. I’ll be off now. Thankye for a bad dinner. More wine? No, I’m going to my lodging, for a quiet pipe and a glass of toddy before bed. Wretched weather, ain’t it? All right: I can get my coat on. Thankye, Max, thankye. I sha’n’t die yet, you know; your secret’s all right. Stop till I put on my respirator, so as to keep my lungs all right for your sake. Now my hat and stick. Thankye.”

He buttoned his coat tightly, looped the elastic of his respirator over his ears, and then stumbled to the door, gave the mat an ugly stab with his stick, nodded, did not shake hands, and went stumping down the street, talking to himself the while.

“I wonder whether that Tom is a trump at bottom?” he said. “I don’t know yet, but there’s a bit of a mystery over it all; and about Fred and that girl Jessie. She’s a puzzle, too. I wouldn’t have thought it of her; but I never did understand women. And so old Max is hit hard. Well, it’s the old saying, ‘Money got over old What’s-his-name’s back’s spent under his chest;’ and I’m sure of it. I’d swear it. He’s spent every penny of that violent girl’s fortune, as sure as my name’s Hopper, which it really is.”

Volume Two—Chapter Nine.

A Great Change.

Richard Shingle was seated in his study—his own special room, tabooed, as he said, to every one but the specials—the specials being those whom he admitted. The place had a gay bachelor look about it, with a smoking-cap putting out a fiery bronze Amazon, and the green shade of a gas globe perched on one side, giving it a rakish air, as if it had been out all night. Cigars were in a box on a table, a handsome soda-water and spirit stand was on a sideboard, ready for use.

The furniture of the room was handsome, and in excellent taste; but it seemed as if finishing touches had been put by the owner himself, the said touches not being in keeping with the rest of the arrangements. There was an absence of books, too, in the place, which certainly had not a studious air. There were, however, plenty of newspapers and reviews; and it was observable that while the *Saturday* and *Spectator* were in an uncut state, *Reynold’s* and *Lloyd’s* were crumpled with much reading.

Richard Shingle, Esquire, was lolling idly back in a comfortable easy chair, in a rather loud-patterned shawl dressing-gown; one leg was thrown negligently over the chair-arm, a good cigar was in his lips, and as he smoked he diligently read the *Times*.

There was an appearance about Richard Shingle of having been dressed and had his hair brushed by somebody else, with the result that he was not quite comfortable; and every now and then he looked at the stubby fingers of his right hand, and had a bite at the hard skin at the sides, as if to help them to grow soft and genteel; for though as clean as if he had boiled them every day, to get them rid of old stains, they looked as thorough a pair of workman’s hands as it was possible to encounter in friendly grasp or clenched in warfare unpleasantly near your nose.

“Phew! this is hard work,” said Dick, pulling out a crimson silk handkerchief and wiping his forehead.

Then, laying down the paper, he rose, crossed the room, and poured himself out a little brandy from a decanter, before taking up a bottle of soda-water.

There was a sharp explosion: the cork struck a gas globe with a loud ring, and before Dick could pour out the contents of the bottle, half of it was on the Turkey carpet, drenching his hands and the front of his dressing-gown.

“If it was only genteel to swear,” he thought, “I’d have such a good one. Yah, it’s as gassy as brother Max. Wonder he has never found me out. Here’s a pretty mess! Ah! that’s better, though,” he continued, as he poured out and drank the refreshing draught before returning to his seat, wiping his hands upon his crimson silk handkerchief. “It’s very good sort of stuff, brandy and soda, specially the brandy; but I don’t know that I like it so well as half a pint of beer just drawn up cool out of a cellar, with plenty of head. Ah, those were days after all!” he said, sorrowfully. “One can’t go and have half-pints now. Hold hard, my lad! Taboo! taboo! That’s all taboo, you know.

“Well, I was always grumbling then, and wanting to be well off; but, somehow, we was very happy,” he continued, reseating himself in his easy chair. “Now I’m well off, I’m always feeling as if I wanted something else. But I don’t know: if Jessie would only look all right again, and matters be square, I don’t think I should grumble much. Well, here goes once more.”

He gave the paper a fierce shake, got his leg well over the arm of the chair, and went on reading aloud.

“‘The Chancellor of the Ex-exchequer ap-peal-ed to the ’Ouse to give doo con-sid-e-ra-tion to the wote—vote—and said—plead—’ Blow the paper! it’s awfully dry work going through all this ’Ouse of Commons business every morning. Not half so interesting as the little bits about the accidents and murders and ’saults down at the bottom of the weekly papers.—One never knows where one is; and the way I get the two sides of the ’Ouse mixed up together makes me thankful I ain’t in Parlymint, or I should be doing some mischief. I wish Jessie would come. The members don’t seem to talk quite so much stuff when she reads. Poor lass! I’d give a thousand pounds down—and I could give it, too,” he

added, with a fierce slap on his knee—“to see her looking as well and happy as she used to.”

He stopped, thinking for a few minutes.

“No,” he said aloud, “I haven’t done wrong. I’ve said it a dozen times, and I says it again. ‘No, my lass, I ask no questions about it,’ I says; ‘but that was an unpleasant piece of business about Fred Fraser, as is a reg’lar scamp; and if you loved Tom you didn’t do right. You says he came and threw up something at the window, and you opened it, thinking it was Tom. Well, my gal, you didn’t do right then, after what had happened.’ But there, it’s all over now—they belong to another set, unless they find out as we’re well off now, and Max wants to be friends. Ha! ha! ha! I shouldn’t wonder if he did some day. Ah, well! let’s have some more paper.”

He went on reading for five minutes, and then threw the sheet impatiently away.

“If it wasn’t for seeming so ignorant, I wouldn’t read a blessed line of it,” he cried. “Talk, talk, talk! Why, they might say it all in half an hour; only one seems so out of everything if one can’t talk about politics. No one ever says a word about the interesting paragraphs. I’m getting very tired of it all, and if ever I go into Parlymint I shall try for a comfortable seat below the gangway, or a hammock in the cabin.”

He pulled out a handsome self-winding gold watch, looked at the time with a sigh, and turned it over in his hand.

“Yes, you’re very pretty, and very valuable; but now I’ve had you six months I don’t care tuppence about you, ’specially as I don’t want to serve you as we used the old thirty-shilling silver vertical. ‘Make it ten shillings this time, Mr Dobree—do, please,’ I says, one night, ‘and I’ve got tuppence in my pocket for the ticket.’ ‘No,’ he says; ‘seven shillings—the old price; take it or leave it,’ he says. ‘Take it,’ I says. And so it went on till we lost it. Taboo—taboo!” exclaimed Richard, giving himself a tap on the mouth and putting away his timekeeper. “But I often wonder what’s become of the old watch. It was a rum one. You never knowed what it meant to do. One week it was all gain, and another all lose; and the way in which it would shake hands with itself, as if it enjoyed having such a lark, was fine, only it forgot to leave go, and the two hands went round together. Ah, well!—the cases was worth the seven shillings; so Uncle D. didn’t lose very much by the last transaction.”

The door opened, and Mrs Shingle entered, looking plump and well; and, having been very tastefully dressed by a good *modiste*, she was a fair example of what money will do.

It must be certainly owned that if she were to be calculated by the standard of refinement, it would have been necessary for her to hold her peace, as at the first words a considerable amount would have had to be taken from her value; but, all the same, there was very little trace left of the homely mechanic’s wife.

“Well, mother,” said Dick, smiling, as she entered, “what’s the best news?”

“Bad.”

“Isn’t Jessie any better?” he exclaimed anxiously.

Mrs Shingle shook her head.

“What does she say?”

“Nothing,” said Mrs Shingle sharply: “she’s like her father—has her secrets, and keeps them.”

“Don’t—don’t, mother! don’t go on like that!” cried Dick imploringly. “I’ve only got one secret from you.”

“One, indeed!” said Mrs Shingle, growing red in the face; “but it’s such a big one that it’s greater than all the things you’ve told me all your life.”

“Well, it is a big one, certainly,” said Dick, caressing his chin and smiling blandly. “But it’s been the making of us.”

“And you keep it from your own wife, who’s been married to you over twenty years.”

“Over twenty years!” said Dick, smiling at her—“is it, now? Well, I suppose it is. But lor’, who’d have thought it? Why, mother, you grow younger and handsomer every day!”

“Do I?” said Mrs Shingle, evidently feeling flattered, but angry all the same. “If I do, father, it’s not from ease of mind.”

“Come, come, mother,” he said, getting up and putting his arm round her, “don’t turn cross about it. I made a sort of promise like, when I thought of the idea that I’ve worked out into this house and this style of grounds for you, and your watch and chain and joolery, that I’d keep it all a secret.”

“Then it isn’t honest, father.”

“That’s what you’ve often said, mother, when you’ve been a bit waxy with me, and that’s what I felt you might say when I first thought it out and promised to keep it a secret.”

“Who did you promise?”

“Him,” said Dick, taking up an envelope and pointing to it with pride. “See—

“‘*Richard Shingle*, *Esq.*, *The Ivy House*, *Haverstock Hill*,’” he went on, reading the address. “That’s the man I promised.”

“Yes,” said Mrs Shingle, trying to escape from his arm, but very feebly; “and kept it from your own wife.”

“Well, yes,” said Dick, with the puzzled look very strong in his face. “I have kept it from you; but it’s a sort of religious oath—like freemasonry.”

“Like free stuffery!” cried Mrs Shingle. “When we were poor you never had any secrets from me.”

“No, my dear,” said Dick, kissing her—“never had one worth keeping; and see how badly it worked—how poor we were! Now I have got a secret from you—see how nicely it works, and how well off we are!”

“I’d rather be poor again, then.”

“Well, they was happy times,” said Dick; “but there was a very rough wrong side. It was like wearing a good pair of boots with the nails sticking up inside.”

“If I’ve asked you to tell me that secret night and day—I say, if I’ve asked you once,” cried Mrs Shingle, excitedly, “I’ve asked you—”

“Two thousand times at least,” said Dick, interrupting her: “you have, mother, you have—’specially at night.”

“Then I’ll make a vow too,” cried Mrs Shingle, throwing herself into a chair. “Never more—no, not even when I’m lying on my dying bed, will I ask you again.”

She leaned back, and looked at him angrily, as if she expected that this fearful vow would bring him on his knees at her feet. And certainly Dick did come over to her; but it was with a look of relief on his countenance as he bent down and kissed her.

“Thankye, mother,” he said—“thankye. You see, it’s a very strange secret, and mightn’t agree with you.”

“It’s agreed with you.”

“Well, yes, pretty well,” he said, smiling complacently; “but there, I’ve never told a soul—not even old Hopper; and fine and wild he’s been sometimes about it.”

“I should think not, indeed!”

“There, there, don’t look like that, mother,” cried Dick; “you have got such a sweet, comfortable sort of face when it’s not cross; and—there—it’s all right, isn’t it?”

It seemed to be, for Mrs Shingle smiled once more, and Dick drew a chair close to her.

“Now, look here,” he said: “I want to talk to you about Jessie.”

Mrs Shingle sighed, and laid her head upon his shoulder.

“Poor Jessie!” she said.

“Now, what’s to be done about—”

“I’m sure I don’t know.”

“Do you think she cares about Tom now? Because, if she does, I’ll swallow all the old pride and hold out the ’and of good fellowship to him—that is, if he’s a honest, true sorter fellow; if he ain’t, things had better stop as they are.”

“But that’s what I don’t know,” said Mrs Shingle; “she won’t talk about it. You know as well as I do that it’s all come on since that night at the old home.”

“Taboo! taboo!” muttered Dick.

“That letter was the worst part of it.”

“What, the one that come from Tom next day?”

“Yes,” said Mrs Shingle; “it must have been very bitter and angry, for she turned red, and then white, and ended by crumpling it up and throwing it into the fire.”

“And Tom’s never tried to come nigh her since?” said Dick, musing.

“No.”

“Well, p’r’aps that’s pride,” said Dick. “He’s waiting to be asked. I don’t think the less of him for that.”

“No,” said Mrs Shingle, “Jessie won’t talk about it; but it’s my belief that Tom must have seen Fred come to see her that night, and he told her so, and threw her off, and she’s been fretting and wearing away ever since.”

“Fred’s often hanging about, though. Does she see him, do you think?”

“Oh no,” said Mrs Shingle, “I don’t think she does. Heigho! I don’t know how it’s to end. She’s getting as thin as thin, and hardly eats a bit; and she’s always watching and listening in a weary, wretched way, that makes me wish she was married.”

“Well, that’s it,” cried Dick; “let’s get her married.”

“Are you in such a hurry to part with her, then?” said Mrs Shingle bitterly.

“Part with her? Not I! I’m not going to part with her. Whoever it is as has her will have to come and live here.”

“Don’t talk nonsense. Nice thing, for a young couple to be always having their father and mother in the house! Suppose whoever it is should want to bring his too?”

“Well, that would be awkward,” said Dick, rubbing his nose. “Hush! here she is.”

For Jessie came in just then, very gently, and her aspect justified Mrs Shingle’s words. She looked thin and wasted, while a sad, weary smile played about her lips, as if she were in constant pain and trying to hide it from those around. “Why, Jessie, my gal,” said Dick, “where have you been all this long time? Come along. I’ve got to leave soon—11:20 sharp,” he continued, glancing at his watch, and shutting it with a loud snap as Mrs Shingle rose and left the room.

Jessie went to his side, and kissed him, staying leaning upon his shoulder; but soon after walked away to the window and looked out.

“That’s what she’s always doing,” muttered Dick—“always looking for some one as never comes. It must be about one of those two fellows. Jessie!” he cried.

“Yes, father.”

“I met Fred Fraser yesterday.”

She started round, and looked at him with dilated eyes.

“And Tom Fraser, his brother, the day before.”

Her face flushed, and an angry look darted from her eyes as he spoke, but she turned away.

“It must be Fred,” he muttered. “I don’t like it,” he continued; “I never did see such things as gals—girls. If she wants such and such a fellow, why don’t she say so? and if money’ll get him, why, he’s hers; but I’m not going to see her die before my eyes. I’d sooner she married a scamp—if she loves him. But he don’t have the playing with any money I may give her. Now, if Max would only make the first advances, we might be friendly again. I can afford to be, and I will; but I don’t like to make the first step. Jessie, my girl, if—I say if—if I was to become friends with your uncle again —”

“Friends with Uncle Max?” cried Jessie, starting.

“I’ve been thinking of it, you know; and I was going to say he did give you—us, I mean—the rough side of his tongue once.”

“That’s—that’s all forgotten now, father,” faltered Jessie softly.

“You forgive him, my gal, for what he said to you?”

“Yes, father, yes,” she cried, with a sob.

“And you wouldn’t mind meeting him again?”

“N-no, father, I think not,” she faltered.

“And you wouldn’t mind meeting your cousin Fred, eh?”

“I—I don’t think so, father; I would try not to mind.”

“I wouldn’t press you, my dear,” he said; “but you know Uncle Max is my brother, and blood is thicker than water, eh? I say blood is thicker than water; and some day I must die, and I should like to be friends first.”

“Die, father!” said Jessie, with a weary look. “Would it be very hard to die?”

“Here, I say, Jessie, my pet, don’t talk in that way. How should I know? I never tried. What makes you say that?”

“Because—because, father—”

She stopped short.

“Oh, there, my gal, no one’s going to die yet; but I say, Jessie, your cousin Tom—you wouldn’t mind meeting him, too?”

She turned upon him a mingled look of joy and dread; and then, shaking her head—

“No, no, father,” she exclaimed, closing her eyes, and with the veins in her forehead standing out—“I could not bear to meet him.”

“It’s Fred! I said it was,” exclaimed Dick to himself. “Well, I’m sorry; but it can’t be helped. I’ll talk to him like a father, and bring him round. Now, if—What do you want, John?”

He turned sharply round, for the door opened, and a page in a neat livery, hardly recognisable as the ’prentice of the shoemaker’s workshop, entered the room.

“Please, sir, here’s a gentleman to see you.”

“Who is it?” cried Dick; “and what are you grinning at?”

“Please, sir, it’s Mr Maximilian Shingle; and ’ere’s his card.”

Max Shingle had made up his mind, without any allusion to blood being thicker than water, to make the first advance to his brother. For it was very evident that Dick had hit upon some means of making money rapidly, whilst of late matters had been turning out very badly in his own business arrangements. No matter what he tried, or how he speculated, everything went wrong; until, in a kind of reckless gambling fit, to try and recoup himself for past losses, he had plunged himself more deeply in the mire.

He had broached his intentions to his wife and ward at breakfast time, and Mrs Max had shed tears.

“I’m sure I don’t know what to say, Max,” she whimpered, “unless it be—*oh*!”

She uttered a loud shriek.

“My poor darling! what is it?” cried Max. “Another of your little fits? There, go to her, Violante. She will be better soon.”

“Yes, yes—it is nothing,” faltered the unhappy woman. “I shall be better directly.”

She looked in a frightened way at her smooth, smiling lord, as she ground her teeth and pressed her lips together, to keep from moaning aloud.

Violante, who did not know what was the matter, jumped up and went to Mrs Max’s assistance; while the cat, who did know, having felt Max Shingle’s boot whisk by her ears as it struck Mrs Max, crept out of harm’s way, and curled up on the mat.

Tom Fraser and his brother Fred had risen and left the table, the one for Somerset House, the other for the office, before this incident occurred, or probably it would not have taken place; but Max had his reasons for not speaking sooner—one being that he fully intended Tom to marry his ward, and the other that he wished to pay his visit before the young men were aware of the fact.

On reaching his brother’s house, it was with a feeling of annoyance that he was ushered by the boy into the handsome dining-room, opening upon a conservatory, where, amongst other pictures, that of Dick and his wife occupied conspicuous places.

“So you say your master is at home, my man?” said Max, with his most urbane smile, as the boy came back from the study.

“Yes, sir; he don’t go out till nearly midday on Toosdays. He says will you wait five minutes, sir?”

“You didn’t know me again,” said Max, smiling in an ingratiating manner.

“Oh, don’t I just know you again, sir!” cried the boy. “You’re master’s brother, as used to come to the old place.”

“Quite right, my man, quite right; I am your master’s brother.”

“You didn’t know me again, sir?”

“No, my man, no,” said Max, putting up his glass and gazing at the boy with great interest; “you have improved so wonderfully. Ah! you look better than you did in those old days.”

“I should think I did, sir. Things is altered now. Master never talks about the shoemaking; he always calls it taboo.”

“Does he really?”

“Yes, sir, and everything’s different. Never feel hollow now—nothing never gnaws inside; and master says it’s all because my ’gestion’s better. He knows.”

“Stop a moment, my man,” said Max insinuatingly; “here’s a shilling.”

“Thankye, sir: shall I go now?”

“In a moment. So he’s in his study, is he? Making patent boots and shoes?”

“Bless your ’art, no, sir; it’s patent, but he don’t make no boots and shoes now. He buys all the very best. Look at that,” said the boy, holding out a foot.

As he spoke, Dick made his appearance behind them at the conservatory door, when, on seeing Max talking to the boy, he drew back.

“Ah, yes,” said Max, “that’s a handsome boot; and you’ve got a good foot, my lad.”

“Them’s the best boots in the trade, sir,” said the boy proudly.

“He’s going to pump him,” muttered Dick. “Well, if he plays those games, I shall do the artful too.”

“So you never feel hungry and hollow now, my man?” said Max.

“I should think not, sir. Master gave orders that I was always to have as much as I liked to eat. And I do,” he added unctuously.

“He don’t know much,” muttered Dick; “but if he gets putting old Max on the scent, I’ll smother him.”

“So you eat and drink as much as you like, do you, my man?” continued Max.

“Don’t I?” said the boy, laughing. “I should just think I do. Why, I’ve growed out of two suits of livery since we’ve been here.”

“And how long’s that?”

“Twelve months, sir; and these is getting too tight.”

“You were not in quite such a fine house as this before were you?”

“Oh no, sir, nothing like; but we’ve been doing very well lately.”

“You young villain!” muttered Dick; “if you get telling tales I’ll never forgive you.”

“So I suppose,” said Max. “And so you are very happy and comfortable?”

“It’s lovely, sir.”

“Master and mistress very kind, I suppose?”

“They jest are, sir. Missus and miss seems like two angels, sir.”

“And your master—does he ever give you the stirrup-leather now?” said Max, laughing.

“Give me the sterrup-leather!” said the boy, looking pugnacious; “no, he jest don’t. I should like to ketch him at it. Sterrup-leather! why, he treats me just like a son.”

“But of course you are not his son?” said Max, with a peculiar smile.

“There’s impudence!” muttered Dick, from behind a great camellia. “Nice brotherly attack on me. Why, the young ruffian’s going to say he is, just out of pride and vanity!”

“No, sir; I was a workusser.”

“A what?”

“A workusser, and was sent out to one o’ the whitewashy schools. That’s where master got me. I’ll go and see if he’s ready.”

“Wait a moment, my lad,” said Max; “there’s another shilling, for being such a good boy and stopping in your place.”

“Stop, sir!” said John, grinning, as he bit the edge of the coin and then slipped it in his pocket—“I should think I do stop: master couldn’t afford to part with me.”

“If that boy tells all he knows, I’ll about half kill him,” muttered Dick, who, playing the eavesdropper, stood a fair chance of suffering the listener’s fate.

“I suppose not; you’re so useful to him in his business, I suppose?”

“Pooty well, sir.”

Max tried another tack.

“Master look well, John?”

“Lovely, sir!” cried the boy. “He’s a regular swell now.”

“Is he, though?”

“Tip-top, sir; never puts on a shirt twice, and wears three pairs o’ boots every day—shiny leather ones.”

“Does he, though?” said Max, drawing nearer to the boy. “And so he wouldn’t like to part with you?”

“Oh no, sir. I goes to the City with him every day—on the broom sometimes.”

“He keeps a brougham, then?”

“My master could keep anything he liked,” said the boy proudly; and Dick took a two-shilling piece out of his trousers

pocket and placed it handy in his vest. “He’s going to have a yatched.”

“A what?”

“A little ship of his own, to go sailing about in.”

“Then he must be very rich?”

“Rich?” said the boy. “I should think he is.”

“And what did you say his business was, my lad?”

“Master’s business is master’s business, and nobody else’s,” said the boy sharply. “Here he is, sir.”

For just then Dick’s cough was heard, and his step in the conservatory. And then, in the whitest of vests and the glossiest of frock-coats, he came into the room as the boy backed out.

“My dear Richard!” cried Max, with effusion—and the tears stood in his eyes as he stretched out his hands—“I am delighted to see you again.”

“Are you?” said Dick coolly, and without taking any notice of the suggested embrace.

“So glad, I cannot tell you,” cried Max, taking out and unfolding a cambric handkerchief, which he held to one eye, looked at it afterwards to see if there was a moist spot for result, and, as there was not, tried the other eye with rather better success. “You’ll shake hands?”

“Oh yes,” said Dick. “How are you, Max?”

“Quite well, my dear brother: but why haven’t you been to see me all these long months?”

“Long months, eh? I never found ’em long. I began to think I was being took advantage of now that I was well off, and getting short measure.”

“Then you are very well off?”

“Tol-lol, tol-lol; nothing much to grumble about. But sit down.”

He placed an easy chair for his brother, seating himself afterwards on the edge of the table and watching his visitor sharply.

“I’m very glad of it, Richard,” cried Max, after a glance round. “You know, I always thought that a man with your brains was throwing himself away on trade, and wasting his energies.”

“Oh! you did, did you?”

“Always, my dear brother; and that’s why I used to speak so sharply to you—to rouse you—to awaken you.”

“Well, you did that, and no mistake!” said Dick, laughing.

“And look at the result. You set-to and hit up some bright idea; and now, before two years have elapsed, I come and find you a millionaire.”

“Well, not quite that, Max: a million’s a stiff sum, Max—a very stiff sum.”

“Hah! it’s refreshing to come and hear you call me again by that familiar name, Richard: it reminds me of when we were boys.” And Max again raised his handkerchief to his eyes.

“Well, old fellow, I wouldn’t cry about it if I was you. It’s all right now. You always was pretty well down upon me when I was a poor man; but as you’ve come and showed, as I said to Polly, that blood’s thicker than water, why, we’ll forget all about the past.”

“We will,” cried Max, taking his brother’s hand and beginning to pump it up and down, clinging to it the while as if he were afraid of being parted, and ending by trying to embrace him.

“I say, don’t do that!” cried Dick sharply. “I’m pretty well off, but I can only afford one clean shirt a day.”

“Jocular as ever,” said Max, holding his head on one side, and looking at him admiringly. “Humour flourishes in a golden soil. And so, my dear Richard, you make your twenty per cent, out of your profession?”

“Twenty per cent!” said Dick contemptuously. “Why, you don’t think this sort of thing’s done on twenty per cent, do you?”

“How much, then?”

“Well, I don’t know. I’m not particular. I take a hundred per cent, when I can’t get a hundred and fifty.”

“A hundred and fifty per cent! My dear Richard, you must put me on to this. We must be partners, Dick—Shingle Brothers, eh? But, my dear boy, what business are you in?”

“Oh, yes—that’s it!” said Dick, closing one eye slowly, and keeping it shut while he fixed the other on the ceiling. “But

here are the ladies."

As he spoke, Mrs Shingle and Jessie entered the room.

"Never!" exclaimed Max, with an air of wonderment. "My dear sister, my dear niece—years younger on the one side, years more beautiful on the other. What a change since I saw you last!"

"There's better light in this room than in the old one, Max; and it flatters, perhaps," said Dick.

"Yes, so there is, Richard. That was a cruel cold place. But why speak of the past? My dear niece, you have really grown beautiful. Fred would be charmed to see you."

Jessie's eyes contracted as she gazed full at him, and then, bending her head slightly, turned away.

"Haven't you married him to a lady of fortune yet?" said Dick.

"Oh no!" cried Max hastily. "He is not engaged. Tom is—to my ward, Violante—a charming girl."

Jessie stood as if turned to stone, but no sound escaped her. Dick, however, saw that she was suffering, and he said, sharply—

"Ah! fine young fellow, Tom; but deuced low in his tastes. Wanted to marry a poor shoemaker's gal—girl, I mean. But there, come into my study, and I'll give you a glass of genuine port. Mother, tell them to bring in the comic port."

"Comet port," she whispered. "I told you before."

"All right—only meant to get him away. Look at Jessie."

"I shall be delighted," said Max. "Ladies, good-bye for the present."

His bow was perfection; and then Dick led the way through the well-filled conservatory, while Mrs Shingle caught her child's clammy hand in her own, for Jessie seemed about to faint.

Volume Two—Chapter Ten.

A Lunatic.

"Jessie, are you ill?" cried Mrs Shingle.

"No, mother, no," said Jessie, making a brave effort to recover herself. "It is all past now."

"It was them talking in that heartless manner about those two fellows," cried Mrs Shingle indignantly. "What is it, John?"

"Here's another gentleman to see you, mum," said the boy.

As he spoke, Mr Fred Fraser, elaborately dressed, walked into the room, a pull at the bell sounding through the house as he made his salutations, and, in a light and airy way, began to converse as if they had been the greatest intimates all along.

"Mr Thomas Fraser," said John, in a loud voice. And, in a hasty, excited manner, Mrs Max Shingle's elder son entered the room, to look angrily at his brother, as he saw him seated there.

"You here?" he cried sharply.

"Ya-as, I'm here, Tom," was the cool reply.

"Aunt—Jessie!" exclaimed Tom, advancing. "I by chance heard that my step-father had come here; and, taking this as an augury that we were to be friends once more, I followed him; but I did not expect to find my brother here, and that I should be—"

"*De trop*," said Fred, with an irritating smile; "but you are."

Tom turned upon him sharply, but, mastering his passion, he crossed to where Jessie was seated, and held out his hand.

"Jessie," he said, in a low, earnest voice, "you will shake hands with me? I forgive all the past now, and wish you every happiness."

At his first words a glad light had leaped into the poor girl's eyes, and she half raised her hand to take his; but, as he finished his sentence, a stony rigidity stole over her, and she shrank back, letting her hand fall upon her lap.

It was too hard to bear, and she would have given worlds to have been able to rush from the room—anywhere, so as to be alone—and sob and wail aloud, to relieve her bursting heart. But it was impossible. She could not stir—only look up at Tom, as with knitted brows he stood there, resenting her coldness.

Never once had her thoughts strayed from him; and yet he had misjudged her so cruelly, believing that she trifled

with him, that she played with his heart, while she coquetted—behaved lightly—with his brother. And now, after these long, weary months—after what would soon be two years of misery—now that he had come, her heart had whispered, to tell her that he had been wrong, and misjudged her, while he asked her pardon for the past—a pardon that she would joy in according—she had to hear, first that he was engaged to another, and then read in his face that his doubts and misgivings were stronger than ever.

Jessie's heart, that had been expanding fast, like the petals of a flower, to drink in the sunshine of hope and love and joy, seemed to contract and shrivel up, blighted and seared, as, cold and trembling, she sat there, while, with a look of contempt, Tom turned away.

"As you will, my fair cousin," he said, in a low, bitter voice. "I suppose I am to call you sister some day. How the world changes? Better poverty and truth than this." When a word would have set all right.

He turned abruptly, and began speaking to Mrs Shingle; while Fred, seizing the opportunity, took a seat beside Jessie on the couch, and began to talk to her rapidly about the various trifles of the day—chattering on, while she seemed to be listening to him, for she replied in monosyllables, though she was striving, with every nerve strained, to hear what was said by his brother.

Before many words had passed, though, voices were heard from without, increasing in loudness; and Mrs Shingle started up, for it was plain that her husband was in a towering rage.

In fact, as he came through the conservatory, he struck a handsome jardinière a heavy blow with his open hand, shivering it upon the tesselated tiles of the floor.

"Hallo!" cried Dick angrily, as he entered, followed by Max, "you are all here, are you! Why didn't you bring the wife and the servants, and take possession? It's all right—there's plenty of room. Here, you sir, get off that sofa!" The young men rose as he entered—Fred very slowly, and evidently amused; while Tom's face flushed with rage.

"Oh, father!" cried Jessie, whose face had become suffused from shame and annoyance.

"There, I know what I'm doing," he said. "Hold your tongue. You and your mother had better be off. You'll stop? Well, then, stay."

"Is your husband subject to a little—er—er—? You know, Mrs Richard," said Max, tapping his forehead.

"No," said Dick sharply, "he isn't. And now, may I ask, young fellows, how it is you condescend to be here? If it's to order boots and chuck 'em on my hands for misfits, you've not come to the right shop."

"They came unknown to me," said Max hotly.

"I dessay they did," cried Dick; "but whether they did or not, they've come to the wrong place, and, once for all, I forbid them my house."

"Come, father," said Tom sternly; while Fred took a step to Jessie's side, and whispered—

"Dear Jessie, for heaven's sake let this make no difference to us."

She turned her eyes upon him for a moment, and Tom saw the glance; and then, as she gazed at him, directed a look upon her of withering contempt, beneath which she shivered.

"Don't be in too great a hurry," said Dick. "As you are here, we may as well have it out. We don't often meet. Now, Max, my most affectionate brother, have the goodness to say that again, and let your wife's sons hear what sort of a man you are."

"No," said Max, "I leave now. I shall take my own steps about it."

"You will?" said Dick, looking startled.

"I shall, sir—I shall. I don't consider you are fit to be trusted. There are such cases as inquiries in lunacy."

"Bah!" said Dick, who looked startled all the same. "Well, if you don't say what you said to me, here out loud before them all, I shall say it myself."

"Then I will say it!" cried Max desperately. "What I said was this: As your uncle has hit upon some scheme for making a fortune, I have a right, as his own brother—"

"Very own, indeed," said Dick quietly.

"To share with him in the secret."

"And what I say to it is," cried Dick—"and you can all hear me—that what I invented with my own brains is my own property, and I won't be bullied out of it by all the brothers in Christendom."

"Then I shall follow out my own course."

"Follow it, then," said Dick scornfully, "and let your boys come after you."

Tom turned upon him resentfully, but merely ground his teeth; while Fred winked, and tapped his teeth with his cane.

“I have not been idle during my interview with my poor afflicted brother,” continued Max; “and I have seen enough from his wild behaviour and language to know that the mental disease that has been threatening for years has now obtained such a hold that he is no longer fit to manage his own affairs.”

“I say, hold hard there!” cried Dick, looking at him in a puzzled way.

“I shall, of course, make due arrangements for the proper carrying out of his business, and for protecting the interests of his wife and child.”

“Mr Shingle!” cried Tom, stepping forward, “this is atrocious: there are no grounds for what you say.”

“Silence, sir!” roared Max; while Dick’s countenance underwent a complete change.

“There!” cried Dick angrily, as he appealed in turn to all present; “what did I always say? Max, you always were, and always will be, a ’umbug!”

“What?” cried Max.

“A ’umbug, sir. U-m, um—b-u-double-g, bug, ’umbug! That for you!” cried Dick, snapping his fingers in his brother’s face.

“Ah!” said Max, with a heavy sigh—“all proof of what I say—the violence, the excitement, these strange outbursts. My poor brother!”

He took out his handkerchief, and applied it to his eyes.

Dick looked at him for a moment, then at his wife and child, and then his face grew longer and his hand played nervously about his face.

“But, I say, Max,” he cried, “you don’t mean this. I’m as right in the upper story as you are.”

Max shook his head.

“My dear Richard,” he said, “I’d give my right hand to know you were. This is dreadful.”

“Dreadful? It’s worse than dreadful,” cried Mrs Shingle, catching her husband’s arm. “Dick, make him leave the house.”

“My dear Mrs Shingle,” said Max deprecatingly, “this is folly. You only excite him terribly.”

“Excite him?”

“Yes, my dear,” said Dick, wiping the perspiration from his face, “it do excite me a deal. I don’t know that Max ain’t right; but he won’t be hard on me—Max won’t. I have felt a little—little confused and upset, you know, about my business sometimes.”

“Father, it is not true,” cried Jessie, running to his side, “your mind is perfectly clear.”

“I’m afraid it ain’t, my dear,” he said. “But your Uncle Max won’t be hard on me. No sending to asylums or that sort of thing. Just a friendly visit from a doctor or two, and I should be soon put right.”

“Whatever the cleverest medical man I could procure—a specialist on your particular ailment—said, I should go by,” replied Max sadly.

“There, mother—there, Jessie, what did I tell you?” cried Dick, brightening up. “Blood is thicker than water. I always said it was. He’ll do what’s right.”

“With Heaven’s help I will,” said Max solemnly; while, unable to contain his disgust, Tom walked to the window.

“Of course he will,” cried Dick; “it’ll be all made up now, and we shall be the best of friends—eh?”

“Yes, dear Richard—the best of friends,” said Max, glancing at Mrs Shingle, and then shrugging his shoulders and raising his eyes.

“But about my business,” said Dick uneasily. And he began to bite the bits of tough skin at the sides of his fingers.

“Richard, are you mad?” cried Mrs Shingle excitedly. “You shall not talk about it. You have kept it secret so long, even from your own wife and child, and you shall not talk about it to him.”

Dick smiled at her rather vacantly.

“Well, it do seem hard, mother, certainly; but it was sure to come out some day, and it’s best for one’s own brother to know of it—better than anybody else, because he’ll do what’s right and best for every one—you and Jessie too, of course; for if I get worse (as I may, you know) it would be sad, of course, for it all to go to ruin for want of a master-mind, and no one left to take care of you—and—you come to ruin, and not even your poor husband to make boots and shoes for you again.”

He laughed hysterically, and Mrs Shingle threw her arms round his neck.

“Oh, Dick! dear Dick! what has come to you?” she cried. Then, rousing herself, she turned angrily upon Max. “This is your doing,” she cried. “He was quite well till you came.”

Max shook his head sadly, and wiped his eyes, while Fred tried to take Jessie’s hand; but she motioned him away, and stood by her father, keenly watching all present.

“Don’t talk like that, my dear,” said Dick, patting his wife’s shoulder; “it hurts me, and makes me worse. Max means well, and he’ll see to things being carried out right for all of us, won’t you, Max?”

“Indeed I will,” said Max piously; and Tom still gazed from the window.

“But—but—but do you think, Max,” said Dick, drawing his hands from his wife and child, and speaking in a desultory, wandering way, as if trying to collect his thoughts, “do you think that if you came in with me as you proposed, and saw to the management of the business, so as to relieve me and let me rest, it would be necessary for me to go anywhere away from home?”

“We would take advice over that,” said Max; “the best to be had—medical.”

“N-no,” said Dick shrewdly, “I shouldn’t quite like that, Max; those very clever doctors are too clever sometimes, and they might want to lock me up. I should be better at home with mother here and Jessie. It would make me worse to go away.”

“Oh, that could be managed, perhaps,” said Max; “but you must have your business arrangements seen to—they are so important.”

“Yes, yes, of course,” said Dick, who shuddered and looked horrified at the thought of having to go away; “but you’d make time for that. You could go halves, Max, and manage for me; and the business is growing fast—and you’d see, even if I got worse, that Jessie and mother here always had enough.”

“I cannot bear this any longer!” cried Mrs Shingle; while Jessie stood aghast.

“It’s all right, mother—it’s all right, mother. Max is a good fellow. When he used to row me it was to do me good. And you’ll take all in hand, won’t you, Max?”

“Dick, you shall not make any such arrangements,” cried Mrs Shingle. “Will no one take our side?”

“I will, aunt,” cried Tom fiercely; “for I will never stand by and see such a blackguardly wrong committed. Jessie,” he cried, “you have treated me badly, and behaved with cruel treachery to the man who loved you very dearly; but that’s all past now—and while I’ve hand to lift or voice to raise, I’ll never see you or yours wronged by father—or brother,” he added, fiercely turning on Fred, while Jessie uttered a sigh of relief, and buried her face on her mother’s shoulder.

“Tom,” whispered Max, catching him by the shoulder, “if you are not silent, I’ll strike you down.”

“Look here, if you dare to touch me,” roared Tom, “I shall forget that you are my poor weak mother’s husband. I will not stand by and see my uncle wronged. If he is unfit to attend to his affairs, aunt, see some trustworthy lawyer; but you shall not be, imposed upon like this.”

“Fred, stop him,” cried Max furiously. “Turn him out of the room. He’s as mad as his uncle.”

Fred hesitated for a moment, and then, stepping forward, he caught Tom by the arm.

“Here, come out!” he cried.

“Stand back!” cried Tom huskily.

“No—out you go,” cried Fred, who gathered courage on finding his brother did not resent his attack.

“Stand back, I say!”

“Out you go,” repeated Fred—“you fool!”

Tom drew back for a moment; and, as Jessie looked up, roused by a movement on her father’s, part and a cry from her mother, she saw Tom’s fist dart out from his shoulder, and then there was a dull sound, and Fred staggered back, tripped over a mat by the open window, and fell with a crash amongst the plants in the conservatory, bringing down an avalanche in his fall.

As Tom turned, it was to see that a complete change had come over Dick, who had leaped at his brother’s throat, catching him by shirt front and white cravat, bringing him upon his knees, and shaking him with all his might.

“You cursed scoundrel—you sanctified, hypocritical cheat!” shouted Dick, as he shook Max till he began to turn purple, and something white fell on the floor between his knees. “Mad, am I? Send me to an asylum, would you? Let me off if I give you half my income?”

“Help, help!” moaned Max, whose dark, smooth hair glided from his head on to the floor as Dick shook away.

“Didn’t I—say—you were—a ’umbug?” cried Dick, panting, and throwing all his energies into a kick. “Yes, and a fool. This is my clever brother, who let himself be taken in by the weakest, transparentest do that ever a man tried to invent. Softening of the brain, have I! That was a pretty hard kick for a man with that complaint!” he roared, as he

stood over his brother, threatening with his foot as if about to punish him again. “There! Get up, and out of my house, and never darken the doors again. You ain’t a brother to me, and never were. Being born of the same mother only half makes brothers. I’ll never own you as mine. Eh? Oh, I’ve done, Tom, now.”

Dick made no resistance as Tom dragged him away from his brother; and Max got up, looking very strange about the head, as he hastily picked up and dragged on his wig.

“You—you—shall smart for this,” he mumbled. “As for you, sir, never enter my house—”

“Be off!” roared Dick; and he made at his brother again. “Be off, you artificial sham!”

But Tom, with a look of bitter mortification in his face, restrained him; and Max, clinging to Fred, hurried out of the door, leaving Mrs Shingle trembling in a chair, where she had sunk; while Jessie knelt beside her, white as ashes, and holding her hand.

It was an ignoble plight, made more absurd by Dick, who suddenly ran to the fireplace and took the tongs, with which he picked up a handkerchief, and ran to the door.

“Here, Saint Maximilian!” he shouted, “you’ve left your weeper;” and he threw the tongs out with a crash into the hall.

“Take care!” cried a familiar voice; “*I* haven’t done anything.”

“What, Hopper, old man!” cried Dick, “you there?”

“Yes, I am, and heard it all—all I could,” he added, stumping into the room.

Dick threw himself laughing into an easy chair, as he heard the door bang; but started up directly, as he saw Tom standing silent and mortified in the middle of the room.

“Thankye, Tom,” he cried, as he held out his hand, which the young man took for a moment and then dropped. “Ah! you’re put out, of course; and I don’t wonder. It’s enough to rile any young fellow with stuff in him; and you’ve got that, and acted like a man.”

Tom gazed at him in silence, but did not try to speak.

“He’s ordered you out of his house, my lad,” continued Dick. “Not pleasant between father and son. There, I ain’t going to abuse him,” he hastened to add, as Tom made a deprecating gesture; “but don’t you mind that,—you acted like a man, and your conscience will set you right. Now, good-bye, my lad; and mind this: if you ever want a hundred pounds, or two hundred, or five hundred pounds, you’ve only got to say so to your uncle, Richard Shingle, and there it is.”

“I thank you, sir,” said Tom sadly; “but I shall not ask. Good-bye!”

“Good-bye?”

“Yes. I shall go abroad, and we may never meet again. I cannot stay here now. Good-bye, aunt. Good-bye, Jessie,” he cried passionately.

But she did not hear him; for, as Tom hurried to the door, she sank, fainting, at her mother’s knee, while he passed out, closely followed by the last-comer on the scene.

Volume Two—Chapter Eleven.

Hopper on Suicide.

“Here! hold hard, you sir—hold hard!” cried Hopper, hooking Tom at last by the arm with his great stick.

Tom turned upon him savagely; but the old man did not move a muscle.

“Where are you going?”

“To the devil!” said Tom bitterly. “To drown myself, I think.”

“Hey? Drown yourself? Well, don’t go to do it on an empty stomach. I knew a man once who tried it, and he did nothing but float. Come home with me, and have a bit of dinner first.”

Tom Fraser was just in the humour to be led, and he could not help smiling at the old man’s words. The next moment Hopper seized his arm, and began signalling wildly with his stick to a passing hansom cab, into which he thrust him.

“Get over farther,” he cried, poking at him with his stick; and then, following, he shouted to the man, “Clement’s Inn.”

Nothing was said during the journey; and, on reaching the gateway, Hopper got out first, and, literally taking Tom into custody, led him to a black-looking house, and up a dingy old staircase, to a door at the top covered with iron bands and clamps. This he unlocked, and pushed his companion into a very old-fashioned-looking room, cumbered with pictures, curiosities, and odds and ends piled up amongst the antique furniture.

“There!” said Hopper, stopping to caress a cat that came rubbing itself up against his left leg, and another that purred against his right, while a third and fourth leaped upon his back when he stooped, “this is my kennel—cat’s kennel, if you like: I’ve got eight. That’s their garden,” he continued, throwing open a sliding window that looked upon a parapet; “they can run far enough along the roofs of the houses here. Good view this, Tom Fraser. Ah! the very thing,” he added, catching the young man’s sleeve; “look down there—eighty feet, and good firm stones at the bottom. You say you want to go to the devil: jump down—I won’t stop you.”

Tom glanced below, and turned away with a shudder. “Well, it would make a nasty mess on the pavement, certainly,” said Hopper, looking at him curiously, while the cats rubbed and purred about them; “but they’d soon sweep that away; and the dead-house is close by, in the Strand. I’ll go as witness.”

“For God’s sake, hold your tongue!”

“Hey? Hold my tongue? Why? Better and quicker than jumping into the river, and struggling up and down, and wanting to get out; besides running the risk of floating to and fro with the tide, and looking like swollen bagpipes.”

“Be silent!” shouted Tom, gazing at him in horror.

“What for?” chuckled the old man. “You’d look so ugly, too, with your nose rubbed off. Tide always rubs their noses off against the barges, and ships, and piers of bridges. Lots of people wouldn’t drown themselves if they knew how nasty they’d look when they were dead. I’ve seen ’em—dozens of times.”

“Do you find any pleasure in tormenting me?” cried Tom furiously.

“Torment you, hey? Not I,” chuckled Hopper. “You said you were going to drown yourself—that takes nearly five minutes; and they may fish you out with a boat-hook and bring you to, which they say isn’t pleasant. I only, as the oldest friend of your family, suggested a quicker way.”

Tom turned from the window, and threw himself into a chair.

“Ah! you’re better,” said Hopper, poking the fire up to make it blaze.

“Better!” groaned Tom.

“Yes, ever so much. You’re not fretting about your step-father, but about Jessie: you’re in love.”

Tom was starting up, but the old man forced him back into his chair.

“Sit still, you young fool. You are in love, arn’t you?”

“I suppose so,” said Tom bitterly.

“I’ll give you a dose for the complaint,” chuckled the old fellow.

Then there was a knock at the door, which he opened, and a neat-looking servant bustled in and spread the table with the snowiest of cloths and brightest of old-fashioned glass and silver, ending by placing the first portion of a capitally cooked dinner on the table, and sending all the cats out of the window into the gutter, where they sat down patiently in a row, to gaze solemnly through the panes of glass till the repast was at an end.

“Why, I thought you were very poor!” said Tom, gazing curiously at his shabbily dressed host, as he opened a massive carved oak cellaret, and took out a wine bottle that looked as old as the receptacle.

“Hey? Thought I was poor? More fool you!—you’re always thinking stupid things. You’ve gone about nearly two years thinking Jessie don’t care for you.”

Tom started as if he had been stung; but he sank back in his chair, gazing wonderingly at the quaint old fellow, as he opened the bottle to pour out a couple of large glasses of generous fluid; and began wondering how much he knew.

“There, you handsome young long-eared donkey!” cried Hopper, placing one glass in the young man’s fingers —“that’s the finest Burgundy to be got for love or money. That’ll give you strength of mind, and blood to sustain, and make you take a less bilious view of things than you do now. Catch hold! I’m an old-fashioned one, I am. Here’s a toast. Are you ready?”

Tom took the glass, and nodded.

“Here’s my darling little Jessie. God bless her! and may she soon be happy with the man of her choice.”

He looked maliciously at the young man as he spoke; but Tom set down his glass untasted.

“I can’t drink that,” he said sternly.

“Hey? Not drink it! Why not?”

“Because, if she marries my brother, she will never be a happy woman.”

“Bah! Idiot! Young fool!” chuckled Hopper. “She won’t marry Fred. I’d sooner poison her. Drink! You care for her, don’t you?”

“I do,” said Tom fervently.

“Then drink to her happiness, and don’t be a selfish ass. If you can’t have her, don’t grudge the pretty little sweet bit of fruit to some one else. Drink.”

“Jessie!” said Tom, softly and reverently; and he drained his glass.

“You’re getting better,” chuckled Hopper; “and I shall make you well before I’ve done.”

Certainly a great change did come over Tom Fraser as he partook of the excellent dinner brought in nice and hot by the neat servant; the old fellow seeming to be far less hard of hearing than usual, and chuckling and laughing as he took his wine freely, opened a fresh bottle, and finally brought out pipes and cigars, as the dinner was replaced by dessert.

“Thought I was poor, did you, Tom, my boy?” he cried, slapping the other on the shoulder. “I’m not, you see; but that’s my secret. Your step-father’s got his; your Uncle Dick his; so I don’t see why I shouldn’t have mine. I never bring anybody here hardly. Your father has never been, nor your Uncle Dick neither. Lucky dog! He’s made lots of money, and goes on making it too, a fox—and hang me if I know how.”

“The same way as you, perhaps.”

“No, that he don’t I do a bit in the City, and speculate in a few bills occasionally. I’ve got paper with names on that would startle you, I’ll be bound.”

“I daresay,” said Tom sadly.

“There, there, man! take another glass of your medicine. You’re coming out bad with your old complaint again—lovesickness.”

“Ah!” cried Tom, who had, like his host, got into the confidential stage. “You don’t know what it means.”

“I don’t know what it means?” cried the old fellow, rising, and leaning his hands on the table as he laid down his pipe. “Look there, Tom Fraser—look there!” he cried, crossing to a drawer, unlocking it hastily, and taking out an old-fashioned miniature of a very beautiful woman.

“My grandmother!” said Tom, starting, as he held the portrait to the light.

“And my love,” said the old fellow, in a softened, changed voice. “Yes, Tom, I loved her very dearly—as dearly as I hated the man who took her from me. Not that she ever cared for me. Hah! she was an angel. Your grandfather was a scoundrel, and the blood of the two has run its different courses. Women somehow like scoundrels,” he said, as he reverently put away the miniature.

“They do,” groaned Tom.

“But not all, Tom—not all. There, man, fill up and drink. Here’s my little darling Jessie—your darling, if you’re the man I take you for.”

“If you talk like that, I must go,” said Tom.

“Hey? What! go? Stuff, man! Have a little faith. I don’t say Jessie’s perfect; but she’s a better girl than you believe her. Try her again, man.”

Tom shook his head.

“Fred is always there in my light.”

“Turn him out of it, then. Bah! You weak idiot! You imagine twice as much as you have any grounds for. Take my advice, or leave it—I don’t care which. I only give you the hint for your own sake. Puss, puss, puss!”

He got up, opened the window, and the cats came trooping in, to leap upon him and show their delight, while he petted first one and then another as they thrust their heads into his hands, Tom sitting back and watching him the while.

“Curious, isn’t it?” said Hopper, chuckling. “But a man must have friends. I’ve got very few, so I take to cats, and they are as faithful as truth. Capital things to keep, Tom, my lad. Only behave well to them, and it don’t matter how great a scoundrel you are, they never find you out, nor believe what the world says—they stick to you to the end.”

Tom took another glance round the quaint room, to see dozens of fresh objects at every look—old china, ancient weapons, curious watches, besides articles of vertu that must have been of great value; and the old fellow chuckled as he saw the direction of his glances.

“Queer place to live in, Tom, and queer things about Look at this, my lad: here’s my will. I keep it in this old canister, just where it can be found—ready for my executors. What! Hey? Going? Well, good-bye. Come again—often—I shall be glad to see you.”

“Do you mean this?” said Tom, returning the old man’s warm pressure of the hand.

“Hey?”

“I say, do you mean it?”

“Oh yes! I heard. Mean it? Of course I do, man, or I shouldn’t ask you. Only come in a sensible way, not in a ghostly form. None of your drowned ghosts, without their noses. I mean you in the flesh, not in the spirit.”

“You need have no fear,” said Tom sadly. “My mad fit is past. I should not be guilty of such folly.”

“I should think not!” said Hopper, laughing. “We make nearly all our own troubles, my boy; and then men are such cowards that they run away from them. Have another cigar? That’s right—light up. Good-bye, lad. I say, why don’t you go round by your uncle’s house, and have a peep at some one’s window? There, be off; you’re a poor coward of a lover, after all!”

Volume Two—Chapter Twelve.

Private Inquiry.

Several weeks passed. Jessie seemed to have received a serious shock from the encounter that had taken place at her father’s house; and for days together she would be depressed, silent, and stand at the window watching, as if in expectation of some one coming. Then an interval of feverish gaiety would set in, during which, with brightened eye, she would chat and play and sing, showing so much excitement that Dick would shake his head to his wife and declare it was a bad sign.

“It’s all fretting, mother,” he would say. “She’s thinking of that scamp Fred.”

Whereupon Mrs Shingle would shake her head in turn, and declare tartly that he knew nothing at all about it, for she was sure it was Tom.

“You are very clever, no doubt, Dick, at keeping secrets and hiding things away from your wife—”

“That’s right,” said Dick. “Go it! I wish I was poor again.”

“But you know no more about that poor girl’s feelings than you do of Chinese.”

“Well, I don’t know much about Chinese, mother, certainly, but I’m sure it ain’t Tom. How can it be?”

“I don’t know how it can be,” said Mrs Shingle tartly, “or how it can’t be; but fretting after Tom Shingle she is, and it’s my belief he’s very fond of her.”

“There you go,” said Dick, who was warming himself, with his back to the fire, waiting for the object of their solicitude to come down to dinner—for she had been lying down the greater part of the day—“there you go, mother, a-showing yourself up and contradicting common-sense. I say it’s after Fred she’s fretting.”

“I know you do,” said Mrs Shingle, tightening her lips and giving her head a shake, which plainly said—“I’ll die before I’ll give in.”

“Let me have one word in, mother, if it’s only edgewise,” cried Dick.

“There, go on—I know what you are about to say.”

“No, you don’t, mother; so don’t aggravate. I say it’s Fred.”

“I know you do.”

“For this reason. He’s forbid the house, and I won’t have it; for I hear nothing but what’s bad spoken of him. I won’t have him here. He ain’t worthy of her. So he can’t come, and she, poor girl, frets about it; and if she don’t get better I shall have to give in. Now, you say it’s Tom.”

“Yes,” said Mrs Shingle, nodding her head.

“Well, then, why don’t he come? or why don’t she send for him and make it right? Can’t you see that if it were as you say, all would be right directly?”

Mrs Shingle shook her head.

“That’s right; be obstinate, mother, when you know there’s nothing to prevent his coming.”

Jessie came in directly, looking very pale and sweet in her sadness: her eyes were sunken with wakefulness, but she had a smile for both, and an affectionate kiss before taking her place at the table; where, after kicking himself in his misery, Dick set-to, pretending not to notice his child’s depression, though he felt a bitter pang at his heart as he was guilty of every bit of clowning in his efforts to bring a smile from the suffering girl’s eyes.

At times, though, he was very absent, and his tongue went on talking at random—of the last thing, perhaps, that he had seen—while his mind was far away. In fact, had his brother been present, with witnesses, he would have had strong grounds for saying that Dick’s brain was softening at the very least.

He began with grace, standing up, and very reverently said the customary formula, ending “truly thankful. Amen. Pure pickles, sauces, and jams,” he continued, for his eye had lighted upon the label of a bottle in the silver stand.

He started the next moment, and looked round, with one hand in his breast, to see if the string of his front was all

right, for he occasionally put on one of those delusive articles of linen attire when he dressed for dinner, and always went in torture for the rest of the evening, on account of the treacherous nature of the garment—one which invariably seeks to betray the weakness of a man's linen-closet by bursting off strings or creeping insidiously round under his arm. In fact, one of Richard Shingle's, on a certain evening, deposited the bottom of the well-starched plaits in his soup, by making a dive out from within his vest as he leaned forward.

"Glass of wine, Jessie?" said Dick, as the dinner went on; and to oblige him the poor girl took a little, just as Mrs Shingle exclaimed—

"Bless me! I have no handkerchief. Did you take my handkerchief, Jessie?"

"Lor'! mother, don't talk of your handkerchief as if it was a pill. You do roll 'em up pretty tight, but not quite so bad as that."

The boy, who was waiting at table, exploded in a burst of laughter, which he tried to hide by rattling the glasses on the sideboard, and then turning uncomfortable as his master gave him a severe frown.

"What's the pudden, my dear?" said Dick at last.

"It's a new kind," said Mrs Shingle. "You'll have some? I told the cook how to make it."

"That I will, and so will Jessie. I always like your puddens, mother, they make one feel so good while one's eating them—they're so innocent."

"You've not seen any more of your brother, I suppose?" said Mrs Shingle just then, inadvertently.

"Well, I have seen him," said Dick,—"twice. He's up to some little game."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, that he's got a man always watching me. He follows me like my shadow. He wants to find out my business, or else he's going to try on his little dodge again. But I'm not afraid. Jessie, my gal, what is it?"

"Nothing, father—nothing," she said, trying to smile as she rose from the table. "The room is too hot. I think I'll go upstairs."

"I'll go with you, my darling," exclaimed Mrs Shingle; but Jessie insisted on her staying, and she had her own way, going up to sit at her window, as was her wont, to watch wistfully along the darkened road for the relief that seemed as if it would never come.

She had been there about an hour, when suddenly she started up, and gazed down excitedly into the garden, where she could plainly make out the figure of a man; and as she looked he raised his hands to her and sharply beckoned her to come down.

"At last!" she cried, with a look of joy flashing from her eyes; and, going to the door, she listened for a few moments, hesitated, and then went below to the breakfast-room, which opened with French casements on to the garden, unfastened one, and in the dim light a figure passed in rapidly and closed the window.

There were two men standing in the shadow of a gate on the other side, one of whom scribbled something quickly on a page of a note-book, and gave it to the other, with the words—

"Run—first cab! Don't lose a moment."

A quarter of an hour later, just as Dick and his wife were about to leave the dining-room, there was a sharp knock at the door, followed by the trampling of feet in the hall, and Union Jack's voice heard in protestation—

"I tell you he's at dinner, and won't be disturbed. Master always gives strict orders that—"

"Tell your master that Mr Maximilian Shingle insists upon seeing him on business."

"Does he?" said Dick sharply. And he stood at the door, looking at his brother, and flourishing a dinner napkin about, as his eyes lighted upon his two companions; while a nervous feeling akin to alarm came upon him, for he saw that they were two well-dressed, keen-looking men.

"They're mad doctors—both of 'em," thought Dick, "and they're going to listen to what I say, sign certificates, and have me dragged away. They'll have a tough job of it if they do, though," he muttered. "Yes, and there's the carriage just come up that's to take me off," he continued, as there was the noise of wheels stopping at the door. "Don't open that door, John," he cried aloud.

But he was too late; for the boy had opened the door on the instant, and before he could shut it, Hopper, closely followed by Tom, entered the hall.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said Dick, nodding, and feeling relieved.

"Hey? Yes, it's me," said Hopper quietly. "We thought we'd just drop in."

"Well, then, Mr Max Shingle, perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me what you want, disturbing me at my dinner?" said Dick sharply.

“Well, the fact is,” said Max, smiling maliciously, but rubbing his hands and trying to look smooth the while, “these gentlemen and I—”

“Let’s see,” said Dick coolly; for he felt now that he was well backed up. “But, stop a moment. John, my lad, fetch a policeman.”

“By all means,” said Max eagerly. “Get one, my boy.” The lad, who had been staring with open eyes, unfastened the door, to find one close at hand, beating his gloves together, probably attracted by the scent of something going on.

“Here’s one outside, sir,” cried the boy eagerly.

“That’s right,” said Dick. “Here, you Number something, come in. You’re to see fair over this, my man.”

He nodded to Tom and Hopper, who were both singularly silent, and then turned to Max, as the front door was closed; and Mrs Shingle stood half in the dining-room, a wondering spectator of the proceedings.

“Now, Mr Max, if you please,” said Dick quietly, “proceed. You say these gentlemen—who I know again: they’ve been watching me, I suppose, to make up a case, ever since that little brotherly quarrel of ours; and now, I suppose, they’ve found it all out.”

“You shall hear what they’ve found out directly,” said Max, rubbing his hands.

“My secret, I suppose,” said Dick, laughing. “Well, I don’t mind that.”

“It will be a lesson to a disobedient son, too,” said Max, turning and darting a withering look at Tom. “One who fortunately happens to be here.”

“Well, when you’ve got through the introductory matter, or described the symptoms,” said Dick, laughing, “perhaps you’ll administer the pill. Your friends are mad doctors, I suppose?”

Max laughed derisively; and the taller of the two men—a curious-looking fellow, whose ears stood out at either side of his head so that you could look into them—in a sharp, businesslike way took out his pocket-book, and presented a card.

“That is my name and address, sir,” he said—“E. Gilderoy, private inquiry agent. This is one of my assistants.”

“Thankye,” said Dick, smiling. “There now, let’s have an inquiry in private.”

Max hesitated for a moment, and then went on.

“The fact is, Mr Richard Shingle, I have employed these gentlemen to—”

“I know—watch me,” said Dick sharply. “There, you needn’t shrink, Max; I was quite satisfied with the thrashing I gave you before, and if I want you turned out I shall set X Number something to work.”

“I am accustomed to your insults,” said Max, “so say what you like. I say, I employed these gentlemen in the interest of your wife and child as much as in that of the family, since you are so imbecile that you cannot take care of yourself.”

“All right: go on,” said Dick, coolly picking his teeth.

“I don’t care; say what you like—I deserve something for that kicking I gave you.”

“And these gentlemen have reported to me that for many nights past your house has had a man lurking about it, evidently for no good purpose.”

“One of these two, I suppose?” said Dick contemptuously.

“Your interruptions are most uncalled for,” said Max.

“Besides us, sir,” said Mr Gilderoy, nodding at his assistant.

“Yes, sir, besides us,” said that worthy.

“This evening the matter culminated in the man gaining entrance to your house,” said Max, with a malignant look in his eyes.

“Nonsense!” cried Dick.

“Oh no,” said Max, with a sneer, “it’s truth.”

“I don’t believe it,” cried Dick. “I’ll question the servants.”

“There is no need,” said Max maliciously; “you had better search the house, for he is here still.”

“It’s a lie—an invention!” cried Dick indignantly.

“You’d better ask Miss Jessie if it is,” said Max, laughing. “Ask—ask Jessie?” cried Dick, looking from one to the other. “What do you mean? To—Oh, I won’t have it. Who dares to say anything of the kind?”

“Fact, sir,” said the private inquirer sharply. “Young lady, sitting at window on first-floor, sits there every evening watching along the road.”

“Yes,” said Dick, in a bewildered way; “she does—but—”

“To-night, at seven fifty-six, tall gent in dark coat came up, jumped the railing, crossed the flower-bed, and made signs.”

There was a pause, and Tom sighed.

“Dark gent, with big beard—something like this gent, sir,” said the private inquirer, pointing to Tom.

“Was it you, Tom?” said Dick, with his old puzzled look growing more distinct upon his lined brow.

“No, uncle,” said Tom hoarsely; and then to himself—“Would to God it had been!”

“Oh no, sir, not this gent,” said the private inquirer, referring to his note-book—“something like him, but not him. He signals to the lady at the window. Lady comes down. Lady opens breakfast-room window.”

“How the devil do you know which is the breakfast-room?” cried Dick savagely.

“My duty to know, sir,” said the man, in the most unruffled way. “That’s the breakfast-room door, sir. Gent goes in through window—shuts it after him; and he didn’t come out.”

“How do you know?” cried Dick.

“Men watching back and front, sir,” said the private inquirer imperturbably.

“Well, Max, and if some one did, what then?” said Dick. “Suppose a policeman or some one comes to see one of the maids?”

“You had better turn him out,” said Max. “I should search the room.”

“That’s soon done,” said Dick, throwing open the door. “Here, John—a lighter.”

The boy took a taper to the hall lamp, and a couple of the burners in the breakfast-room being lit, they entered, to discover nothing.

“There,” said Dick, wiping the perspiration from his face, “you see there is no one here. I won’t have any more of your poll-prying about. You pay men to see things, Max, and they see them.”

“That’s an aspersion on my word, sir,” said the private inquirer sharply.

“Serve you right!” cried Dick fiercely. “What do you come watching for? No one else saw, I’ll swear. You saw nobody come in, did you, Hopper?—nor you, Tom?”

Neither answered, and Dick grew more and more excited.

“I won’t have it!” he cried. “I’ll have the house cleared.”

“Without clearing your daughter’s name?” said Max, with a sneer.

“Clear my daughter’s name? It wants no clearing,” cried Dick angrily; and now his nervous, weak manner was thrown off, and he stood up proud and defiant. “Here, stop! You, Tom Fraser, and you, Hopper! I won’t have you go, if it comes to that.”

“I would rather go,” said Tom sadly, from the hall.

“But I say you shall not go.”

“Uncle,” said Tom—and he spoke in a low whisper—“let me go, for Heaven’s sake: I cannot bear it.”

“No,” said Dick sternly; “you shall not go till this has been set right. Do you, too, believe ill of my girl?”

“God forbid, uncle! I only wanted to know that my case was hopeless; and I have heard.”

“Heard what?” whispered Dick.

“What these men told you,” said Tom bitterly.

“Do you dare to say—”

“I say nothing, uncle—only that what those men have said is true.”

“Here!” cried Dick furiously, “mother, quick!—tell Jessie to come here. Oh, you are there,” he cried, as, hearing a door close on the landing, he looked up and saw Jessie.

“Uncle, for Heaven’s sake think of what you are doing,” cried Tom, catching his arm.

“I am thinking, sir, of clearing her name. My girl would not be guilty of—”

He stopped short; for he recalled the little incident in the old home.

“I don’t care,” he cried passionately. “I’m driven to it, and it shall be sifted to the bottom.”

As he spoke, he ran up the stairs, closely followed by Max and his private inquirers.

“Mr Hopper,” cried Tom passionately, “this is your doing, to bring me in here. Come away. It is too cruel to her.”

“Hey? cruel?—I don’t care,” said Hopper sturdily. “I’ll see it out; for look here, Tom, and you too, Mrs Richard,—I say, as I’ve said before, she’ll come out of it clear as day. Now, come up.”

He stumped hastily upstairs, Tom feeling compelled to follow, but hating himself for the part he was playing, the result of hanging about the house time after time, for the sake of catching a glimpse of Jessie, and then telling Hopper that evening what he had seen.

The old man had been astounded when, half-frantic, Tom had met him on his way to Richard Shingle’s; and then insisted upon his coming to have the matter cleared up, vowing that there was a mistake.

As the party reached the large landing, Jessie stood in front of the door of her room, the policeman being the last to complete the half-circle that surrounded her; and then Dick spoke.

“Jessie, my darling,” he said, tenderly, “I know this will upset you; but, my girl, when cruel conspiracies are hatched against us by scoundrels, we must meet them boldly.”

“Yes, father,” said Jessie, who did not shrink, but darted a reproachful look at Tom that went to his heart.

“Your uncle, to stab your fair fame, my dear, has brought these men to swear that they saw you let in some one to-night by the breakfast-room window; and they say he has not gone out. Speak out, my dear, and tell them it’s a lie.”

There was no reply, and Mrs Shingle caught at her husband’s arm; but he flushed up with passion and shook her off.

“Jessie,” he cried in a choking voice, “speak out quick!—is any one in that room of yours?”

Jessie looked wildly from face to face, her glance resting longest on those of Max and Tom.

“I say, is any one in that room?” thundered Dick, catching her by the wrist, which she snatched away, and, spreading her hands from side to side, as she stood back against the door, she cried out, wildly—

“No, father, no!”

As she spoke there was a sharp creaking noise from within, as of a sash being thrown up; and Dick once more caught her by the wrist.

“No, no!” she cried, struggling with him frantically. “Tom, dear Tom, for pity’s sake save me from this disgrace!”

Tom dashed forward, and caught her in his arms, more in sorrow than in anger; for Dick had swung her round with a savage oath, throwing open the door, and dashing in with the private inquiry men, to return dragging out a man with a strong resemblance to Tom, till Gilderoy gave his beard a twitch, and pulled it off, revealing the sallow, frightened countenance of Fred.

Volume Two—Chapter Thirteen.

After the Discovery.

“Fred!” cried Max, in alarm.

“Yes,” said that gentleman savagely—“if you must blab it out.”

“Tom, Tom,” whispered Jessie, “for your own sake save him,—he is your brother.”

He turned from her with a sigh, as he freed himself from her grasp and placed her hands in those of her mother.

“And this is my child!” groaned Dick.

“Oh, father!” cried Jessie, “don’t condemn me unheard. Frederick, speak out.”

“Not I,” he said cynically. “Why should I?”

“And this is my son!” exclaimed Max, who was completely taken aback.

“There, don’t cant, old man,” cried Fred, brutally. “I don’t suppose you have always been so very particular.”

“Fred!” exclaimed Tom savagely, “it is enough that you have brought this disgrace upon your uncle, without insulting the poor girl you have injured.”

“Bosh! I shall be off,” said Fred, flippantly; and, as he spoke, he made for the head of the staircase, not noticing that a movement had bee made in that direction by the private detectives, the principal speaking to the policeman, who nodded sapiently.

“Stop!” cried Max. “You shall not go without hearing a few words from me. You shall listen, as you are present, to advice that may—”

“Do him good,” cried Dick, turning upon him savagely. “Give it him, then, in your own place, and not in mine. You coward—you pitiful miscreant! To revenge yourself on me you stoop to this low, beggarly watching; and when your tools warn you of your opportunity, you are such a high-toned moral man that you come with your scoundrels to degrade and disgrace that poor child before her father. I don’t defend her—she did wrong; but I’m not a high-toned moral man, I’m not. I know what she has suffered; and I say to her, ‘Come here, my poor darling—I’m only a weak fool, and I forgive you.’”

“Father!” cried Jessie, and she sprang to his breast.

“Yes—lie there, my darling,” cried Dick, glancing round at all in turn. “Now let’s see who dare say a word against you—or touch you! You’re my gal, and always will be, come what may. I can’t cast you off and say I have no child; but—but, my darling, I’d sooner have been back, a poor man again, in Crowder’s Buildings, and bullied for my bit of rent, than this should have happened.”

“Oh, hush, father—hush!” whispered Jessie—“wait till they’re gone—wait till they’re gone.”

“No, I’ve nothing to be ashamed of,” cried Dick, “without it is of my brother and his sons. All the world may know that I was a poor man who made his fortune, but never lost his ignorant ways. So I forgive you, my gal.”

“Uncle,” cried Tom, “I have given you no cause to speak to me as you do.”

“Well, perhaps not, my lad—perhaps not. I’d take it kindly of you and Hopper, then, if you’d clear the house and then go.”

“I’ll soon rid you of my company,” said Fred. “Ta-ta, uncle. Good-bye, little Jess.”

Dick’s fist clenched as the young man approached him; and Tom saw that Jessie shrank from him as if with loathing, though she watched his movements with a strange, keen interest.

He laughed lightly as he passed, and then started back, for the policeman placed his hands across from the balustrade to the wall.

“One moment, please, Sir. This is your photograph, I think?”

He held up a card, but Fred struck it down and tried to leap past; but the policeman caught him in his arms and forced him back.

“Oh no, you don’t, sir,” said the constable, laughing. “E. Gilderoy, send your men down to keep the door. The fact is, Frederick Fraser, *alias* Captain Leroux, *alias* the Hon. Algernon Bracy, there’s a warrant out against you, and two-fifty reward. We only knew this afternoon that you were F. Fraser, and you were to have been took this evening; but the job has fallen to us.”

“Man, you are mad, or drunk.”

“I dare say I am,” said the constable, laughing; “but Mr Gilderoy and me means to have that two-fifty.”

“Father—uncle—Tom! this is a lie—an imposition!” cried Fred, wildly glancing round for a means of escape, but seeing none.

“No, sir,” said the constable; “it was them forged bills was lies and impositions.”

“Constable, this is all nonsense—some trumped-up case!” cried Max. “An invention, perhaps, of the poor boy’s uncle,” he added malignantly.

“Oh no, it is not, sir; the game’s been going on for close upon two years, only my gentleman here has been too clever to be caught. There’s over two thou, been discounted. It’s all tight.”

“Fred,” cried Max, “why don’t you knock this lying scoundrel down?”

“Don’t want to bruise my knuckles,” said Fred carelessly. “There, the game’s up, and I’m sick of it.”

“What?” cried Max.

“It’s all right,” said Fred callously. “I had the cake, so I must pay for it.”

“Reprobate!” cried Max furiously: “do you dare to own to my face that this is true?”

“True enough,” said Fred, taking out his cigar-case. “I can smoke, I suppose, constable?”

“Oh yes, sir, and make much of it,” said the man, grinning. “I don’t suppose you’ll get another—not just yet.”

“Good heavens, that it should come to this!” cried Max, raising his hands toward the ceiling. “Lost, depraved, reckless boy! you bring down your father’s grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.”

“What!” shrieked Fred, with a sneering laugh.

“After the Christian home in which you have been brought up!”

“Look here!” cried Fred. “Slang me, if you like, for being an unlucky scoundrel; but, curse it, give me none of your sickly cant.”

“Away with him, constable. Out of my sight, wretch! I disown and curse you!” cried Max.

“Take your curse back,” shrieked Fred savagely. “Example!—Christian home! What of the office? What has been done there? Where is Violante’s money?”

Max stepped back with his jaw fallen.

“Where is the hundred pounds the old man in Australia sent for Uncle Dick? Example, indeed!”

“What?” shouted Dick, starting forward. “Say that again.”

“Say it again!” shrieked Fred, who was now mad with rage: “I say two two hundreds were sent by an old relative in Australia for you and him, and he kept them both.”

“It’s a lie—a base lie!” cried Max, foaming at the mouth.

“Oh, Max, Max, Max,” said Dick sadly, “and when I was close to starving!”

“It’s a lie, I say!”

“It’s the truth, you pitiful scoundrel!” said old Hopper. “But I made you disgorge some of it again, and sent it into the right channel.”

“What, you turn against me, too!” said Max, with a groan. “I say it’s a lie—a conspiracy. No money was sent: there was no uncle to send it.”

“No?” said Hopper quietly. “Well, I can prove it all; for I sent the money, for the sake of Dick here, and to try you both.”

“I tell you it’s a lie!” stammered Max, foaming at the mouth.

“You’ve got to prove it one,” said Fred carelessly. “Come along, constable—let’s be off. Here’s my last half-crown. I’ll go in a cab.”

“Stop!” cried Dick excitedly. “I won’t have it. I forgive Max. I forgive Fred here. I’ve plenty of money, constable. Can’t it be squared? I’ll—I’ll pay the reward. Cash down.”

“No, sir,” said the constable; “not if you doubled it.”

“But I will double it,” cried Dick.

“Hold hard, uncle,” said Fred, smiling. “It’s no go. But you always were a trump—always. Thank you for it! Sorry I’ve disgraced you. Tom, old man, it’s all right. Uncle, it’s all right about your little girl here. I came to-night, and she admitted me, thinking it was Tom; and as soon as I was inside I told her the police were after me, unless she could help me to escape. There’s the bag inside, with her purse and the jewels she gave me to sell, watch and chain, and the rest of it; for I was off across the herring-pond if I could get away. Fetch it out.”

Tom ran into Jessie’s room, and brought out a little travelling bag which lay beneath the open window.

“I didn’t like to jump it,” said Fred, laughing. “It was too high: but I should try if I had another chance.”

“Fred—brother!” cried Tom passionately, as he held out his hand; and Fred seized it for a moment, and then flung it away.

“No, Tom; let me be: I’ve always been a bad one. As for you, Jessie—God bless you! you were a little trump. I told her it would disgrace you all, and poor Tom, if I was taken; and she told a lie to save me. Good-bye, little woman!” he said, holding out his hand.

Jessie ran forward and took it, and he tried to speak in a light, cavalier manner; but his voice faltered, and he had to make an effort to keep from breaking down.

“Good-bye, Fred,” said Tom, stepping before him, as if to shake hands. Then, forcing the little bag into his grasp, he whispered, “Run for it, lad—the window. I’ll cover you—run.”

As he spoke, he gave his brother a push into the bedroom, and then faced round with clenched fists.

For a moment the men were paralysed, but the next they flung themselves on Tom.

Gilderoy was nearest, and a blow sent him rolling over; but the constable evaded a second blow, and closed in a fierce struggle, which, taking place at the doorway, prevented the next man from forcing his way through.

Mrs Shingle shrieked; but Jessie stood firm, gazing with dilating eyes at her lover, as he wrestled bravely with the policeman, whom he kept between himself and the second man, still covering his brother’s flight.

They were well matched, and victory might have been on Tom's side but for the action of Dick, who, seeing the second man about to leap on him, thrust out his foot and laid him sprawling.

It was unfortunate for Tom, though. The man was so near that he tripped over him, and lay for the moment half-stunned; while now all three rushed into the room and to the open window.

"Below there!" cried Gilderoy—"have you seen him?"

"No," was the reply. "He came down with a crash, though, into the shrubs here, and I think he's hurt—he hasn't moved since. Come down, and bring a light."

Jessie's window looked down upon a great clump of lilacs, into which it seemed that Fred must have jumped; and, running back to the landing, the three men dashed downstairs, through Dick's study, into the conservatory, and thence to the enclosed back garden.

As they did so, Fred glided out from behind the window curtains, placed his hand to his lips, and bounded down the staircase, almost into his brother's arms.

Tom saw the ruse, seized a coat and hat from the stand, and opened the front door.

"Cabstand at the corner," he whispered. "Walk—don't run."

Fred went leisurely out, and as Tom closed the door the private inquiry man came back, and placed himself as sentinel to guard the door.

The search went on for a few moments outside, and then there was a shout.

"They've got him," cried the sentry eagerly. "Got him?" he shouted.

"No," cried the constable, running into the hall, hot and panting. "He threw a great ottoman out of the window, and didn't jump. Keep that door; we must search the house."

The search began, and it was not until every nook and corner had been hunted over that the men stood looking at one another in the hall.

"A pretty mess you've made of this, Mr Gilderoy!" cried the constable, at last.

"Two-fifty thrown into the gutter by your bad management," groaned the other.

"P'r'aps you'd better go and search all London now," said Hopper, with a sneer, "for he can't be far off."

The men turned upon him angrily.

"We haven't done yet," said the constable. "We must have some one for this. The law can't be resisted for nothing."

"I'm ready to give up," said Tom quietly.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," cried Hopper, hastily pushing him away. "Here, you there! don't be fools. Come in here. The man's gone—off by the front door. What have you got to say to that?"

"I must have some one," said the constable surlily.

"Hey? Have some one?" cried Hopper. "Then have me."

They followed the old fellow into the dining-room, where a little private inquiry went on; and the result was that soon after they left the house, evidently having forgotten to call Tom's behaviour into question; while, as for Max, he had not been seen to go, which Dick said was a blessing in disguise, as the encounter might have been painful.

Volume Two—Chapter Fourteen.

Jessie's Malady.

"'I cannot forgive myself,'" wrote Tom to Richard Shingle—and the latter read the note aloud—"'I feel, uncle, that I have wronged her twice in thought most cruelly, and that I dare not hope for her forgiveness till time has enabled me to prove myself more worthy of her—'"

"Read more loudly, and don't mumble," said Hopper, who was present.

"'Tell her, uncle, that I love her dearly—more dearly than ever; and some day, if she has not made another choice, I may come and ask you all, humbly, if you can forget the past, ignore the misfortunes of my family, and give me room to hope that there is a happy future where at present all looks black.'"

"I've read that ten times over," said Dick, "and hang me if I know what it means. It's too fine and sentimental for me. Why, if he was half the man I took him for, he'd come down here and say, 'Uncle, blood's thicker than water: shall we cry "wiped out" to all that's gone by?—because, if so, 'ere's my 'art and 'ere's my 'and.'"

"Hey?"

“’Ere’s my ’art and ’ere’s my ’and,” roared Dick.

“And what should you say to that?” chuckled Hopper.

“I should say, ‘Tom, my lad, I don’t want your ’art, and I don’t want your ’and, for I’ve got a ’art as is, I hope, a warm one, and I’ve got a ’and to offer to the man I can believe in and trust. Take yours somewheres else, and offer ’em where they may be taken.’”

Dick winked at his friend, and jerked his thumb over his shoulder, where, seen dimly in the farther room, were Jessie and Mrs Shingle—Dick having taken a house at Hastings, and gone down for change, he said, but really on account of the weak state of Jessie’s health; and now he and his friend were having a pipe together in the inner room.

“He’s too cocky,” said Hopper: “he’s as proud as Lucifer. He won’t come and ask till he’s made money, and can be independent.”

“That’s where he’s such a fool,” said Dick. “Of course I’m not going to say ‘Come down and marry my gal,’ who’s dying to have him; but he can have her when he likes; and as to money, why, there’s enough for all.”

“Tom won’t want for money,” said Hopper, blowing out a great cloud.

“Oh, won’t he?” said Dick. “Well, a good job too. What’s become of Fred?”

“Married that violent girl, who was dead on him, and went and joined him as soon as she knew he was in trouble.”

“Did she, though?” said Dick. “Well, ’ang me if I ever liked her, with her twissened eyes, till now; but that was a good one. Hopper, Max spent all that poor gal’s money, which was hard on her. Could you get to let her have a hundred pounds if I give you a cheque? You can come those dodges of sending money on the sly most artfully.”

Hopper chuckled as Dick poked him in the side with his pipe-stem. “No, no, no, Dick, they are in America by now; and Fred will be better without money. Make him work.”

He began to refill his pipe as he spoke.

“I never could make out how it was he got off so easily to America. The police wasn’t half sharp; but it was a good job. How about the extra tradition, as they called it?”

“Hey? Extradition?” said Hopper. “Ha! there was a reason for that.”

He opened his pocket-book, took out a slip of blue paper, folded it, and, striking a match, lit the paper and held it to his pipe.

“I say,” said Dick, “what’s that you’re burning?”

“An old bill,” was the reply—“I’m using ’em up by degrees.”

“An old bill?” said Dick; for Hopper looked at him curiously.

“Yes,” said Hopper, “I’ve done a deal in bills. This is one of ten—of Fred’s: I bought ’em—for his grandmother’s sake,” he added softly.

Dick stretched out his hand, grasped the other’s, and then turned his chair to have a look at a ship in the offing, which seemed quite blurred.

“Pick! Dick!” screamed Mrs Shingle.

“Yes, yes—what?” he cried, starting up and running in, to find Jessie lying white as ashes in her mother’s arms.

“Quick!” cried Mrs Shingle; “tell—tell the doctor—this is the second time to-day! Dick—Dick!” she cried passionately, “she’s dying!”

Old Hopper was the most active of the party; and long before the doctor could be brought Jessie had revived, but only to lie back listlessly, gazing out to sea; while, when the medical man left, it was with a solemn shake of the head, which sent a chill to the hearts of Dick and his spouse.

They had been sitting by their child for about an hour, when old Hopper came in, and stood looking down at her in a quiet, unsympathising way.

“I’ve come to say good-bye,” he said roughly.

“Good-bye?” said Dick. “Why, you only came yesterday!”

“I know, but I’m no good here. Good-bye, my girl. I wish you better.”

She half raised her head to kiss him, and the old man bent down and pressed his lips to hers very tenderly, before leaving the room, closely followed by Dick.

“I know it’s a dreary place to come to, Hopper,” he said; “and we’ve only had one tune-up together; but when she’s—better—Hopper, old man, if I wrote and asked Tom to come, would it be wrong?”

“Hey? Wrong? Yes. Don’t do anything of the sort. Hey? What’s that?”

“Only a letter for Max. I hear he’s laid up. Don’t let him know who sent it—that’s all.”

The old man nodded, and held out his hand.

“Do you know why I’m going in such a hurry?” he whispered.

“No,” was the reply.

“I’ll tell you,” said Hopper. “If your girl’s left like that, she’ll die. I’m going to send her the best doctor in town.” Ten minutes after Hopper was at the station, where he telegraphed one short message, climbed slowly into his seat, reached the terminus in due time, and on being driven to his chambers found some one waiting for him.

“How is she?” cried Tom eagerly, as the cats crowded round their master.

“Dying!” said Hopper briefly.

“Dying?”

“Yes. I’ve come for the best doctor in London.”

“And you sit still there!” cried Tom. “Have you sent him?”

“No,” said Hopper coolly. “Wait a minute. Tom, my lad, do you think you can throw away your pride to save her?”

“I’d throw away my life,” he cried passionately.

“That wouldn’t save hers. Here, take this. Quick—there’s a hundred pounds. Take it, you young fool! Go down at once to her, and throw away all nonsense. Tell her you love her; ask her to forgive you; and—”

“Yes—yes,” cried Tom. “Go on.”

“And marry her, you young idiot!”

“But a train?” cried Tom despairingly. “It will be too late to-night.”

“You have the money: if necessary, take a special,” said the old man. “What’s fifty or a hundred pounds to happiness, or life?”

Tom caught the old fellow’s hand in his, and it was retained.

“Stop one moment, my lad,” he said. “You feel some shrinking about your brother’s disgrace. I was burning these by degrees. See—the last of the forged bills.”

He took six from his pocket-book, and burned them.

“There,” he said, “that business is dead, and you can go with a lighter heart. Perhaps I shall come down next week. Be off.”

Tom bounded down the stairs, leaped into the first cab, and bade the man gallop to London Bridge station.

“All right, sir.”

The little door in the roof was slammed down, there was a flick of the long whip, and for about half a minute the horse broke into a short canter, one which subsided into a trot a few minutes later.

A loud rattling at the top of the cab spurred the driver to fresh exertions, and once more the wretched horse cantered, but dropped again into a trot, and there was an end of it. Tom had to sit and fume, as at every turn he seemed to be hemmed in by other vehicles; and, no matter how the driver tried, there was always a huge, heavily-laden van in front, blocking up the way.

“I think I’ll take a short cut round, sir,” said the cabman. “The streets is werry full to-night.”

“Anything to get there quickly.” So the driver turned out of the main thoroughfare, and began to dodge in and out of wretched streets, all of which seemed ill lighted, and so strongly resembled the one the other, that Tom soon grew bewildered, and sat back thinking, and trying to arrange his thoughts.

His brain was in such a tumult that he could do nothing, however—nothing but upbraid himself for his folly and madness, “What have I done?—what have I done?” he moaned, as he thought of the anguish that he must have inflicted upon the poor girl, who had slowly pined away, and was now dying—dying through his wretched blindness and want of faith.

He tried to excuse himself—pleaded his term of bitter suffering, but could get no absolution from his own stern judgment. He had doubted one who was all that was purity and truth, and here was his punishment—a bitter one indeed!

He prayed mentally that she might be spared, that he might ask her forgiveness—forgiveness that he knew he should receive—and then covered his face with his hands, as a feeling of hope came upon him that he might still be able to

save her. He might, he thought, bring joy to her heart even yet.

A sudden stoppage nearly threw him out of the cab; and, looking up hastily, it was to find that a barrier was across the street, from which hung a red lantern.

The street was narrow, and he could see beyond, while the driver was sulkily backing and turning his horse, that the paving-stones were all up, and the inevitable long fosse and hill of earth lay by the side.

He sank back shuddering, for it looked as if a grave were yawning in the path; and, with a low moan of despair, he covered his face once more, and tried to reason with himself that this was merely a superstitious fancy.

But all in vain. There was the long, dark cutting fixed upon the retina of his eye; and he could see nothing else as the cab slowly went back over much of the ground already traversed. What was more, his distempered fancy magnified and added to it, so that he could see trains of mourners, the clergyman, hear the solemn words of the burial service; and these the revolving wheels and the rattling cab kept repeating, till at last it settled itself down into a constant reiteration of the words, “In the midst of life we are in death,”—“In the midst of life we are in death,” till he grew almost frantic, and stopped his ears in vain against the weird, funereal sound.

At last, after wearying himself by trying to bring reason to bear, the cab reached the comparative freedom of London Bridge; and then he began to think of the hour, and wondered whether there would be a train.

“Perhaps I shall be in time,” he thought, as he sprang out of the cab, and, paying the fare, ran up to the doors, where a porter was standing.

“You should have gone to the other gate, sir,” said the man sharply.

“No, no,” he replied hastily. “Main line. I want Hastings.”

“Last train for there was at 8:45, sir.”

“What time is it now?” he gasped.

“Ten fifty-five, sir.”

“But—but is there nothing more to-night—say, to take me part of the way?” he exclaimed, for he was mad with the desire to be moving.

“No main line train to-night, sir. Nothing till six in the morning.”

“How long would it take to get a special ready?”

“Oh, not very long, sir. I dessay they’d get you off in half an hour. Costs a deal, sir—’bout a pound a mile.”

“Where is the superintendent?”

“This way, sir,” said the man; and, following him, he was taken to the official’s house, just in time to catch him before he retired for the night.

“I want a special train—engine and carriage—down to Hastings immediately,” said Tom, hardly able to speak for agitation.

The superintendent looked at him curiously, as if he doubted his sanity.

“It’s only excitement—trouble. It is a case of life and death. A dear young friend.”

“All right, sir,” the superintendent said quickly. “I see,” and there was a look of sympathy in his eyes. “But I am only a servant of the company. The charge for a special train is high.”

“If it is a thousand pounds, man,” cried Tom, “I must have it.”

“It won’t be that, sir,” was the reply; “nor yet a hundred.” Then naming a sum, it was hastily placed in his hand, and the superintendent left.

He was back directly, and Tom accompanied him then to the telegraph office, where he gave certain instructions, and the clerk began clicking the instruments in his cabinet very forcibly.

“Sending word on for a clear line,” said the superintendent. “Warning for the special.”

“How long will they be?” asked Tom.

“What, with the special? Oh, not long. There was an engine with steam nearly up. But you had better take some refreshment before you go. The place is closed, but come to my room.”

“I could not touch anything.”

“But you have no wrapper or rug,” said the superintendent.

“No, I came in a great hurry.”

“You must let me lend them to you,” continued the superintendent; “and, excuse me, you have given me all your money. You had better keep the gold; you are sure to want some change.”

He handed him back the cash, and Tom took it mechanically.

“I cannot thank you now,” he said, in a choking voice. “Some day I may.”

“I hope so, sir,” said the superintendent cheerily; “and that the young lady will come and thank me too.”

“Heaven grant she may!” Tom said, with quivering lip; and he turned away to hide his emotion, while the superintendent turned back to his office, leaving Tom walking up and down the platform, where the lamps quivered in the night breeze, and the whole place looked ghostly, dim, and cold.

Away to the side the station was bright and busy, for from there started the local traffic; and trains, with people from the theatres and places of amusement, left from time to time for the various suburban villages of the south-east of London; but where he stood all was shadowy, and in keeping with his terrible journey.

“There, sir—slip that on,” said the superintendent. “Here’s a rug, too, and my flask, with some brandy and biscuits in one of the pockets of the ulster. You’ll find it cold, and you’ll turn faint when you get on your journey. Here she comes.”

There was a sharp whistle, and Tom could see the lights of an engine passing out of a shed, to run a little distance down the line, then back on to another, and come smoothly along to where they stood—hissing, glowing, and bright.

Tom saw at a glance that there was only an engine, tender, one carriage, and the guard’s break; and, turning to the superintendent, “Can I ride on the engine with the driver?” he asked.

“No. In with you.”

The superintendent opened the door of the saloon carriage, and shut him in. Then Tom heard him give a few quick, decisive orders to the guard, there was another sharp whistle, he waved his hand from the window, and the superintendent leaped on to the step:

“Tell them to go as fast as possible,” shouted Tom, as the train was gliding past the platform.

“I have,” the superintendent said quickly. “Hope she’ll be better. Good night.”

As he spoke he leaped off at the end of the platform, and, shrieking and snorting, the little special went rather slowly along, past hissing goods engines and long black-looking trains, such as might be the funeral processions of an army. Lights flashed here and there, and far to right and left shone the glow of great London; while the big illuminated clock of the Parliament Houses loomed out of the darkness like a dull, fog-dimmed moon.

“They are crawling!” Tom exclaimed, as he started up to look out from the window. But, as he did so, the wind was already beginning to whistle more quickly by his ears: they were clear of obstructions, and speed was getting up rapidly. There was the quick, throbbing beat, a crash as they passed under bridge after bridge, and soon after, as the engine gave a weird scream, they seemed to skim through a long station, whose row of pendant lights ran together like closely strung golden beads; and then, as Tom sank back in his seat, he felt the carriage begin to vibrate from side to side, and he knew that the telegraph had flashed its message, that the line was clear, and that, ever increasing in speed, they were off and away through the black darkness of the night—the best doctor in London speeding to the patient dying to hear his words.

Volume Two—Chapter Fifteen.

A Ride by Night.

With the speed of the special train the excitement seemed to increase; but, for a time, Tom’s attention was taken up by the stations they passed, and he tried hard to recall their names, referring at the same moment that they passed through to his watch, so as to endeavour to calculate the speed at which they ran.

But soon they were going so fast that he ceased to hold his watch up to the thick glass lamp in the roof, and he missed count of the places, unable to tell one from the other, seeing merely a streak of light directly after the warning shriek of the engine had told of their coming. And now, as he threw himself back and began to think once more of his trouble, the roar and beat of the engine resolved itself into the words that had troubled him before; and, with feelings of anguish that he could not express, he sat listening to the reiteration—“In the midst of life we are in death,”—“In the midst of life we are in death!”—and, with a groan of anguish, he bent down and wept like a child.

But for the relief those tears afforded his throbbing brain, he would soon have been suffering from fever. The relief was but short, though, and he rose to gaze out of the window at the thick gloom. Then, removing his hat, he lowered the glass and leaned out, letting the cold night air blow upon his heated face as the train rushed on.

All was black darkness, save the glow shed by the rushing train; and he could make out nothing but that they were dashing on at a frightful pace, seeming to tear up the very earth as they thundered along. Once or twice speed was slackened, with the engine whistle sounding loudly; and, looking out, he could see far ahead a red point of light, which, as they neared it, changed into a green, when, with a triumphant shriek, the special glided on once more, and they swept by a station and a hissing engine attached to some long goods train, whose guard stood by with a lantern in his hand, fresh from the operation of shunting to allow them to pass.

“Faster, faster!” Tom began repeating to himself, as, in spite of his efforts to master the fancy, he kept hearing the words into which the noise of the train resolved itself; though, as he leaned out again, he felt a sensation of joy, for he was being borne nearer and nearer to where his darling lay.

Then he would walk to and fro in the narrow space that formed the saloon carriage, the difficulty of preserving his balance taking up some of his attention, and relieving his mind from its dreadful strain. But it always came back to his throwing himself back on a seat, to listen to those dreadful words; and at such times he was for ever seeing the open grave and the funeral procession, and in a despair that was almost maddening he, told himself that by his folly he had dashed away the cup of happiness from his lips, and that if Jessie died he would be little better than a murderer.

“My poor darling! my poor darling!” he moaned; and then her sweet, pensive eyes seemed to look up in his, and he was once again with her in the days of their early love, “And are those times never to come back again?” he asked aloud; to get back for answer the constant dull repetition, “In the midst of life we are in death,”—“In the midst of life we are in death,” till he groaned in the anguish of his heart.

Onward still, with a rush and a roar, through tunnels, with a quick, sharp crash as if wood and brickwork had come into contact; and then on again. Over bridges, with a strange quivering vibration, and a dull metallic roar, and on again through the black darkness, till the engine began to shriek once more, the speed slackened, grew slower and slower, and ended by the little train pulling up alongside a platform.

The guard was at the door as Tom let down the window, and met his question with—

“Tunbridge, sir. Take in water. Engine’s been detached. Back directly.”

“Don’t lose a moment.”

“No, sir. Like to get out, sir?”

“No.”

Tom threw himself back in his seat, and waited impatiently what seemed an hour, but was really only five minutes; when, just as he was rising to thrust his head out of the window, there was a slight concussion, the rattle of chains, and he knew the engine was once more attached.

“Right away!” A whistle from the guard, an answering shriek from the engine, and they glided along the platform, while the night porter on duty looked curiously at the carriage where the young man sat, after giving the signal to start; and in a few minutes, always gathering speed, away they went once more, faster and faster, into the darkness of the night.

It was refreshing to feel the wind blowing against his cheeks, even though at times he could hardly get his breath; but as he gazed forward it was almost with a feeling of wonder that they had had no accident, so black was all ahead.

From time to time a goods train dashed by them in the opposite direction, while as often they rushed by carriages which stood in sidings until those on their urgent way had passed. At last, after trying all he could to contain himself, and grow calm and fit to see the poor sufferer whom he feared to encounter, he sat in despair listening to the dreadful fancied utterances of the train.

With a prayer on his lips that it might not be too late, he lowered the window on the other side, and gazed out through the darkness in the direction that he believed to be the one where Jessie lay. “We must be near now,” he felt; and he began to look out eagerly for the town, which once reached, his journey would soon be ended.

They seemed to be going at a tremendous speed; and, once more returning to his seat, he was in the act of taking out his watch, when the whistle began to pierce the black night air; and directly after, there was a sharp crash, a stunning blow, the end of the saloon carriage seemed to come suddenly upon him, and he knew no more.

Tom’s next recollection was of feeling drowsy, and being troubled by some one holding a lantern close to his face. There was a buzzing of voices about him, and, close by, the glare of a fire, which flared and crackled loudly. Men were moving about, and they would not leave him alone, so it seemed to him; ending by lifting him up and placing him carefully upon cushions, which cushions they had laid upon a gate; and then he was carried some distance to a well-lighted room, where he seemed to go to sleep.

He must have lain some hours quite insensible, for it was broad daylight when he came thoroughly to himself, and found he was upon a mattress in the waiting-room of a station.

“Where am I?” he said wonderingly, for it seemed that the troubled journey must have been all a dream.

“At Broxton,” was the reply; and a gentleman, whom he immediately set down to be a doctor, came forward.

“But how—what is it? I remember now!” he exclaimed, with a dull, aching pain in his head and arm—“there was an accident to the train.”

“Yes,” was the reply. “A couple of goods trucks that were being shunted ran back down the incline, met the special train you were in, and wrecked it. You had a narrow escape, sir.”

“The driver—stoker—guard?” he said eagerly.

“A bit cut and shaken; but you are the great sufferer.” Tom lay still for a few minutes, trying to collect himself; and

then all came clear once more.

“I see,” he cried. “Left arm broken—head contused—cut or two. Much loss of blood, doctor?”

“Not much,” he said. “A fortnight’s quiet. Well, I think—My dear sir, are you mad?”

“I hope not,” said the injured man, sitting up. “There, don’t touch me, doctor. I can judge by my feelings that my case is not serious. When is the next down train?”

“In half an hour, sir,” said a fresh voice, and a man he had not seen came from behind the extemporised couch.

“Here, help me to put on my coat and waistcoat. Doctor, I’m much obliged for what you’ve done; but I was travelling special to a case of emergency. I must go on, if it kills me.”

“I will not be answerable for the consequences if you do,” the doctor said tartly. “Fever is almost certain to supervene if you exert yourself, and then I would not give *that* for your life.”

That was a snap of the fingers, evidently given to get rid of some snuff.

“Make me a sling for this arm,” said Tom; and one being extemporised with a handkerchief, he had to fight hard to master the faintness that kept attacking him; but he persevered—had the bandages on his head replaced by strapping where his hair had been cut away on account of a couple of ghastly cuts; and finally had himself led to the platform, where he sat down waiting.

Twice over the doctor tried to persuade him not to go; but he felt that he must, even at the risk of life; and at last, on the morning train coming up, he stepped in, feeling deathly sick and faint, and leaning back, reached Hastings at last, hardly able to crawl.

It was with a sense of dizziness that he could hardly counteract that he reached Richard Shingle’s house; and then once more he appeared to sink into a dreamy state, in which he was always hearing the words—“In the midst of life we are in death,” and then came a long blank.

Volume Two—Chapter Sixteen.

The Gilded Pill.

One morning, when the sun was making the sea shimmer and glisten like so much frosted silver in constant motion, Tom Fraser awoke, calm and placid, after a long, burning time of fever, to find the soft, pleasant face of Mrs Shingle bending over him; and, on seeing him awake, she stole gently away, and, while he lay wondering and trying to make out what it all meant, and whether it was a dream, the door once more opened, and he knew he was awake, for Jessie appeared, to creep to his bedside and clasp him in her arms.

Invalids recover fast under such circumstances. In his character of the best doctor in London, sick and injured as he was, Tom’s coming had instantaneously effected Jessie’s cure; and now, in turn, she nursed him back to health, ready to become his wife when he should ask her to crown his joy.

It was not long first; for at a meeting one day, old Hopper had proposed to Dick that they should put down so much apiece for the young folks, and this was done without their consent, the donors almost quarrelling as to who should give most.

Old Hopper won.

It was some little time after, when Richard Shingle and his wife had returned to town, that the former called upon his old friend in his chambers, where there was a long chat about the young people, and also about Max Shingle.

“Don’t you make yourself uncomfortable about him,” said Hopper gruffly. “He won’t starve as long as there’s any one to swindle. As for his wife, young Tom will see that she don’t want, and so will I, for the sake of the past.”

“Why, hallo!” cried Dick suddenly, after the conversation had turned upon music, and they had arranged for what was called “a good scrape,”—“what have you got here?”

As he spoke he took a small bill from the chimney-piece, and began looking at it with a grim smile of contempt on his face.

“Can’t you read?” said Hopper roughly. “Plain enough, isn’t it? ‘The Gilded Pill for every ill.’”

“Yes, but—”

“‘Yes, but,’—I haven’t been well lately. And I’m going to take a few: they say they’re good for nearly everything.”

“Oh, but I wouldn’t do that,” said Dick dubiously.

“Hey? not do it? why not? Speak up: this traffic makes such a noise.”

“Oh, take them if you like,” said Dick, smiling. “They won’t hurt you.”

“How do you know?” cried Hopper testily. “Everybody says they’re good. Hey? How do you know?”

“That’s my secret,” said Dick, laughing.

“Your what? Look here: what do you mean?”

“I say, take ’em if you like—hundreds of thousands do. Small boxes one and three-halfpence, large boxes two-and-nine, with the Government stamp.”

“Bah! I know all about that,” said Hopper, rattling a box close to his ear, and then opening it, to show a dozen boluses covered with gold foil. “Have one?”

“No, thanks,” said Dick, smiling. “I know ’em by heart—compound rhubarb and a little new bread. That’s my secret, my fortune, old lad.”

“What!” cried Hopper. “Hey? what! You made your fortune with these?”

“Yes,” said Dick; “the murder’s out now. My bright idea was—*The Gilded Pill*. But I was not at all proud of it, so I kept it dark.”

“Well, I am blessed,” said Hopper.

“Glad of it. So am I, old man. It’s paid me well, but there was always a skeleton in the cupboard.”

“Hey?”

“Skeleton, old man. I’ve paid thousands to Government for stamps, but they wouldn’t have let me off if anything had gone wrong.”

“But these pills couldn’t go wrong, could they?”

“I don’t think so, Hopper; but I never meet a doctor without feeling queer,—the faculty is like a cloud to me, and behind it I always seem to see an inquest coming off through somebody taking too much of my stuff.”

“The idea of your keeping it all to yourself! You might have told me.”

“You never told me you were a wealthy man, and Uncle Rounce in Australia.”

“Humph!”

“I say, Hopper, would you give up the pills now?”

Hopper’s answer was emphatically—“No.”

The End.

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