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Richard Dowling**

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**WARD & DOWNEY, PUBLISHERS, LONDON.**

# **MIRACLE GOLD.**

**A Novel.**

**BY**

**RICHARD DOWLING,**

**AUTHOR OF**

**"The Mystery of Killard," "The Weird Sisters,"  
"Tempest Driven," "Under St. Paul's," &c.**

***IN THREE VOLUMES.***

**VOL. I.**

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# MIRACLE GOLD.

# MIRACLE GOLD.

## CHAPTER I

### TOO LATE.

"The 8.45 for London, miss? Just gone. Gone two or three minutes. It's the last train up to town this evening, miss. First in the morning at 6.15, miss."

"Gone!" cried the girl in despair. She reached out her hand and caught one of the wooden pillars supporting the roof of the little station at Millway, near the south-east coast of England.

"Yes, miss, gone," said the porter. He was inclined to be very civil and communicative, for the last train for London had left, the enquirer seemed in great distress, and she was young and beautiful. "Any luggage, miss? If you have you can leave it in the cloak-room till the first train tomorrow. The first train leaves here at a quarter past six."

She did not speak. She looked up and down the platform, with dazed, bewildered eyes. Her lips were drawn back and slightly parted. She still kept her hand on the wooden pillar. She seemed more afraid of becoming weak than in a state of present weakness.

The porter, who was young and good-looking, and a very great admirer of female charms, thought the girl was growing faint. He said: "If you like, miss, you can sit down in the waiting-room and rest there."

She turned her eyes upon him without appearing to see him, and shook her head in mechanical refusal of his suggestion. She had no fear of fainting. For a moment her mental powers were prostrated, but her physical force was in no danger of giving way. With a start and a shiver, she recovered enough presence of mind to realize her position on the platform, and the appearance she must be making in the eyes of the polite and well-disposed railway porter.

"Thank you, I have no luggage--with me." She looked around apprehensively, as though dreading pursuit.

"Would you like me to call a fly for you, miss?"

"No. Oh, no!" she cried, starting back from him in alarm. Then seeing the man retire a pace with a look of surprise and disappointment, she added hastily, "I do not want a cab, thank you. It

is most unfortunate that I missed the train. Is it raining still?"

"Yes, miss; heavy."

From where she stood she could have seen the rain falling on the metals and ballast of the line; she was absolutely looking through the rain as she asked the question, but she was in that half-awakened condition when one asks questions and hears answers without interest in the one or attention to the other. She knew heavy summer rain was falling and had been falling for more than an hour; she knew that she had walked two miles through the rain with only a light summer cloak and small umbrella to protect her from it, and she knew that she could not use a cab or fly for two reasons; first, she could not spare the money; second, she durst not drive back, if back she must go, for she must return unperceived. When she thought of getting back, and the reason for concealment, an expression of disgust came over her face, and she shuddered as one shudders at a loathsome sight unexpectedly encountered.

The porter lingered in the hope of being of use. He had no mercenary motive. He wanted merely to remain as long as possible near this beautiful girl. He would have done any service he could for her merely that he might come and go near where she stood, within the magic radius of her eyes. Even railway porters, when they are in quiet stations, are no more than other men in the presence of the beauty of woman.

It was almost dark now. Nine o'clock had struck. The straight warm rain was falling through the dusky, windless air. It was an evening towards the end of June--the last Wednesday of that month. There was not a sound but the dull muffling beat of the rain upon the roof. Not a soul visible but the girl and porter.

She took her hand away from the wooden pillar, and gathered her cloak round her, in preparation for going.

"Can I do anything for you, miss? Have you far to walk?" asked the man. Offering service was the nearest thing he could do to rendering service.

She did not answer his question; she asked instead: "Do you think the rain will stop soon?"

He glanced at the thin line of dull, dark, leaden sky, visible from where he stood at a low angle between the roofs of the platform. "No, miss, I don't think it will. It looks as if 'twould rain all night." If she had been a plain girl of the dumpy order, or his own degree, he would have tried to make himself agreeable by prophesying pleasant things. But the high privilege of answering so exquisitely beautiful a young lady demanded a sacrifice of some kind, and he laid aside his desire to be considered an agreeable fellow, and said what he believed to be the truth.

She sighed, moved her shoulders under the cloak to settle it, and saying "Thank you," in a listless, half-awake way, moved with down dropped eyes and drooping head, slowly out of the station, raised her umbrella and, turning sharply to the left, walked through the little town of Millway and under the huge beeches of a broad, deserted road leading southward.

The trees above her head were heavy with leaves, the road was very dim, almost dark, this night of midsummer. The perpendicular rain fell unseen through the mute warm evening. A thick perfume of multitudinous roses made the soft air heavy with richness. No sound reached the young girl but the faint clatter of the rain upon the viewless leaves overhead, the pit and splash of the huge drops from the leaves close to her feet, and the wide, even, incessant dull drumming of the shower upon the trees, looming dimly abroad in the vapourous azure dusk of the dark.

After walking a while the girl sighed and paused. Although her pace had not been quick, she felt her breath come short. The mild, moist, scent-laden air seemed too rich for freshening life and cooling the blood. She was tired, and would have liked to sit down and rest, but neither time nor place allowed of pause. She must get on--she must get back as quickly as possible, or she might be too late, too late to regain Eltham House and steal unperceived to her room there. To that hateful Eltham House, under which to-night rested that odious Oscar Leigh. Oscar Leigh, the grinning, bold, audacious man.

Edith Grace turned her attention for a moment away from her thoughts to her physical situation and condition. She listened intently. She heard the patter of the rain near and the murmur of it abroad upon grass and trees. But there was some other sound. A sound nearer still than the patter at her feet, and more loud and distinct, and emphatic and tumultuous, than the roll of the shower far away.

For a while she listened, catching her breath in fear, not knowing what this sound could be. Then she started. It was much nearer than she thought. It was the heavy, fierce, irregular beating of her own heart.

At first she was alarmed by the discovery. She had never felt her heart beat in this way before, except after running when a child. Upon reflection she recollected that nervous excitement sometimes brought on such unpleasant symptoms, and that the best way to overcome the affection was by keeping still and avoiding alarm of any kind. She would stand and, instead of thinking about the unpleasantness and risk of going back to Eltham House, fix her mind upon the events which prompted her flight. She could not hope to keep her mind free from considering her

present position, and the occurrences leading to it, but it is less distressing to review the unpleasant past than to contemplate a lowering immediate future.

Owing to the loss of the little money left her by her father, she had been obliged to try and get something to do, as she could not consent to encroach on the slender income of her grandmother, Mrs. Grace, the only relative she had in the world. As she had been so long with Mrs. Grace, she thought the thing to suit her best would be a companionship to an elderly or invalid lady. She advertised in the daily papers, and the most promising-looking reply came from Mr. Oscar Leigh, of Eltham House, Millway, who wanted a companion for his infirm mother. Mr. Leigh could not give much salary, but if advertiser took the situation, she would have a thoroughly comfortable and highly respectable home. Mr. Leigh could make an appointment for a meeting in London.

The meeting took place at Mrs. Grace's lodgings in Grimsby Street, Westminster, and although Miss Grace shrank from the appearance and manners of Mr. Leigh, she accepted the situation. The poor old grandmother was so much overcome by the notion of impending separation between her and Edith, that she took no particular notice of Mr. Leigh, and looked upon him simply as a man indifferent to her, save that he was arranging to carry beyond her sight the girl she had brought up, and who now stood in the place of her own dead children who had clung to her knees in their curly-headed childhood, grown-up, and long since passed away for ever.

Mr. Oscar Leigh was very short, and had shoulders of unequal height, and a slight hunch on his back. His face was long and cadaverous, and hollow-cheeked. The eyes small and black, and piercingly bright. His expression was saturnine, sinister, cruel; his look at one and the same time furtive and bold. His arms were long to deformity. His hands and fingers long, and thin, and bony, and where they were not covered with lank, shining black hair, they were of a dull brown yellow colour. His teeth were fang-like and yellow. His voice hollow when he spoke low, and harsh when he raised it. His breath came in short gasps now and then, and with sounds, as though it disturbed dry bones in its course. He drooped towards the right side, and carried a short and unusually thick stick, with huge rugged and battered crook. When he stood still for any time, he leant upon this stick, keeping his skinny, greedy, claw-like hand on the crook, and the crook close against his right side. He wore a glossy silk hat, a spotless black frock coat, and moved through a vapour of eau-de-cologne. His feet were large, out of all proportion to the largest man. They were flat, with no insteps, more like a monkey's than a man's. She would have pitied him only for his impudent glances. She would have loathed him only she could not forget that his deformities were deserving of pity.

"You will have one unpleasantness to endure," he had said. "You will have to make your mind up to one cruel privation." He smiled a hard, cruel, evil smile.

"May I know what my child will have to do without?" asked Mrs. Grace. And then, without waiting for an answer, she said: "I know what *I* shall have to do without."

"And what is that, madam? What will you have to do without?"

"I shall have to do without *her*."

"Ah, that *would* be a loss," he said, with hideous, offensive gallantry. "You are to be pitied, madam. You are, indeed, to be pitied, madam. Miss Grace will have to make up her mind on her side to do without---"

"Me; I know it," broke in the old woman, bursting into tears.

"Yes, madam; but that is not what I was going to say. I was about to say your granddaughter will have to do without *me!*" Here he leered at Edith. "I am much occupied with my mechanical studies in London, and am seldom at Eltham House. I hope you may be always able in your heart to do without *me*." He was standing leaning his misshapen, crooked body on his misshapen, crooked stick. He did not move his right hand from his waist, into which it was packed and driven by the weight of his body upon the handle of the stick. He put his long, lean, left, dark hand on his right breast, and bowed low by swinging himself to the right and downward on the crook of his stick. "Miss Grace will see, oh! so little of me," he added, as he rose and looked with his bold eyes at Edith and her grandmother.

"Oh!" cried the unhappy, tactless old woman, "I dare say she can manage that."

"I dare say she can," he said, gazing at Edith with eyes in which boldness and scorn seemed strangely, abominably blended, or rather conflicting.

At the time she felt she could cry for joy at the notion of seeing little of this hideous, deformed, monstrous dwarf.

The bargain was there and then completed, and it had been arranged that she should go to Eltham House that day week.

This night that was now upon her and around her, this dull, dark, heavy-perfumed, rain-drowned midsummer night, was the night of that day week. Only one week lay between the visit of this hunchback to their place in Grimsby Street, Westminster, and this day. This morning she had left London and seen Millway for the first time in her life. She had got there at noon and

driven straight to Eltham House, two miles south of the little coast town. The hire of the cab had made considerable inroad on the money in her pocket. The sum was now reduced to only a few pence more than her mere train fare to London--not allowing even for a cab from Victoria Terminus to Grimsby Street, Westminster. When she got to Victoria she should have to walk home. Oh! walking home through the familiar streets thronged with everyday folk, would be so delightful compared with this bleak, solitary Eltham House, this hideous, insolent, monstrous, deformed dwarf.

It was impossible for her to stay at Eltham House, utterly impossible. This man Leigh had told her he should see little or nothing of her at the place, and yet when she reached the house his was the first face and figure she laid eyes on. He had opened the door for her and welcomed her to Eltham House, and on the very threshold he had attempted to kiss her! Great heavens! it was incredibly horrible, but it was true! The first man who had ever dared to try to kiss her was this odious beast, this misshapen fiend, this scented monster!

Ugh! The very attempt was degradation.

The girl shuddered and looked around her into the dim, dark gloom abroad, beyond the trees where the grass and corn lay under the invisible sky, and where the darkness of the shadow of trees did not reach.

And yet, when she halted here, she had been on her way back to Eltham House! There was no alternative. She had nowhere else to go. For lack of courage and money she could not venture upon an hotel. She had never been from home alone before, and she felt as if she were in a new planet. She was not desperate, but she was awkward, timid, afraid.

Wet and lonely as the night was, she would have preferred walking about till morning rather than return to that house, if going back involved again meeting that horrible man. All the time she was in the house he had forced his odious, insolent attentions upon her. He had followed her about the passages, and lain in wait for her with expostulations for her prudery in not allowing him to welcome her in patriarchal fashion to his house! Patriarchal fashion, indeed! He had himself said he knew he was not an Adonis, but that he was not a Methuselah either, and his poor, simple, paralysed mother told her he was thirty-five years old. She would not take all the money in the world to stay in a house to which he was free. At eight o'clock that evening she had pleaded fatigue and retired to her own room for the night. She then had no thought of immediate flight. When she found herself alone with the door locked, she thought over the events of the day and her position, and in the end made up her mind to escape and return to town at once, that very evening. She wrote a line to the effect that she was going, and placed it on the dressing-table by the window.

Her room was on the ground-floor, and the window wide open. Mrs. Brown, the only servant at the house, slept not in the house but in the gate lodge. Mrs. Brown had told her the gate was never locked until eleven o'clock, when she locked it before going to bed in the lodge. So that if she got back at any hour before eleven, she could slip in through the gate and get over the low sill of her bed-room window. She could creep in and change her wet boots and clothes and sit up in the easy-chair till morning. Then she could steal away again, walk to the railway station and take the first train for London.

She felt rested and brave now. She would go on. Heaven grant she might meet no one on the way!

## CHAPTER II.

### VOICES OF THE UNSEEN.

Edith Grace gathered her cloak around her and began walking once more. The road, under the heavy trees, was now blindly dark. She had taken nothing out of that house but the clothes she wore, not even her dressing bag. In the first place, she had not cared to encumber herself; and, in the second place, if she by chance met Mrs. Brown or Oscar Leigh, she would not appear to be contemplating flight. She could write for her trunk and bag when she found herself safely at home once more.

She was new to the world and affairs. She did not know or care whether her action in leaving Eltham House was legal or not. The question did not arise in her mind. If she had been told she

had incurred a penalty, she would have said: "All I own on earth is in that house; but I would forego it all, I would die rather than stay there." If she were asked why, she would have said: "Because that odious, insolent man lied when he said I should see little of him. He was the first person I met. Because he dared--had the intolerable impudence to try and kiss me. Because, having failed in his attempt, he pursued me through the house with his hateful attentions. I am very poor. I am obliged to do something for a living. I am not a cook or a dairymaid. My father was a gentleman, and my mother was a lady. We come of an old Derbyshire family. I am a lady, and you can kill me, but you cannot make me bow my head or shame my blood. If, when he tried to kiss me in the hall, I had had a weapon, I should have stabbed him or shot him. If I had a father or a brother he should be chastised. I know nothing of the law, care nothing for it."

If she had been asked: "Do you think his offence would have been less if you happened to be a cook or a dairymaid?"

She would have answered: "I am not concerned to answer in a purely imaginary case. I am not a cook or a dairymaid. I am a lady. All I know is that attempting to kiss me was an unpardonable outrage, and if he ventured upon such an attempt again I should kill him if I had a weapon by me. Yes, kill him!"

And now, for want of a few shillings, she was returning to the house from which she had fled in indignation and dread a little while ago. She could not walk about all night in this unknown country. She had not the means to secure accommodation at an hotel. She could not spare money enough even for a cab from the railway station. She had in her pocket no more than her fare to London, and a few odd, useless pennies.

Dark and unfamiliar as the road was to Edith Grace, there was no chance of her losing the way. It was an unbroken line from the little town of Millway to Eltham House. A few by roads right and left made no confusion, for they were at right angles. The road itself was not much frequented by day, and by night was deserted. The heavy rain of the evening kept all folk who had the choice under cover. From the time the girl cleared the straggling outskirts of the town until she gained the high hedge and gateway of her destination she did not meet or overtake a soul.

With serious trepidation, she pushed the gate open and entered the grounds. The gate groaned in opening and shutting, and she was thankful that no dog found a roof in that house.

The tiny gate lodge was dark and silent. From this she judged Mrs. Brown had not retired for the night. Mrs. Brown had told her that when Mr. Leigh was not at home, and Mrs. Leigh had no companion, she slept at the house. But that when there was either Mr. Leigh or a companion, she always spent the night in her own little home, the gate lodge. This night Mr. Leigh, his mother, and Mrs. Brown believed a companion and Mr. Leigh would be in the house. Well, there would be, but not exactly as it was designed and believed by them. She had given no word--made no sign that she was leaving. She had found her bed-room window open, and she had not shut it. Owing to the warmth of the night, that fact was of itself not likely to claim attention.

The unshaded carriage-drive from the gate to the house was winding, and about a hundred yards long. A straight line across the ill-kept lawn would not measure more than fifty paces. Edith chose this way because of the silence secured to her footsteps by the grass, and the additional obscurity afforded by its darker colour. In front of the house ran a thick row of trees and evergreen shrubs. So that in daylight, when the trees were in leaf, the ground-floor of the house was hidden from the road, and the road from the ground-floor of the house.

The house itself was of modest appearance and dimensions. In the front stood the porch and door, on each side of which was a window. On the floor above were three windows, and in the roof three dormers. On the right hand of the hall lay the drawing-room, on the left-hand side the dining-room, behind the drawing-room the library, which had been converted into a sleeping chamber for Mrs. Leigh, who, owing to her malady, was unable to ascend the stairs. Behind the dining-room stood the breakfast parlour, which had been converted into a sleeping chamber for Mrs. Leigh's companion, so that the companion might be near Mrs. Leigh in the night time. At the rear of the companion's sleeping chamber was a large conservatory in which the invalid took great delight, seated in her wheeled chair. Behind the library was the kitchen, no higher than the conservatory. The back walls of the breakfast-room and library formed the main wall of the house. The conservatory and kitchen were off-builds, and separated from one another by a narrow flagged yard, in which were a large uninhabited dog kennel, water butts, a pump, and ashbin. Beyond the flagged yard lay a large, neglected vegetable garden. The flower garden spread beneath the conservatory, and on the other side of the house to the right of the kitchen, as one looked from the lawn, languished an uncared-for orchard.

The floor above consisted wholly of bed and dressing-rooms, except the large billiard-room, in which there was no table. Above the first floor nestled a number of attics, for servants and bachelors in emergency. Only two of the bedrooms on the first floor were furnished, and the attic story had been locked up all the time Mrs. Brown acted as lodge-keeper, about five years.

The few people who had ever asked Oscar Leigh why he kept so large a house for so small a household, were informed by him, that it was his white elephant. He had had to take it in lieu of a debt, and he could neither sell nor let it at a figure which would pay him back his money, or fair



interest on it. Besides, he said his mother liked it, and it suited him to go there occasionally, and forget the arduous, scientific studies in which most of his days were spent in London.

But very little or nothing of Mr. Oscar Leigh or his affairs was known in Millway. He had no friends or even acquaintances there, and spoke to no one in the town, save the few tradespeople who supplied the household with its modest necessities. Indeed, he came but seldom to his mother's home; not more than once a month, and then his arrival brought no additional custom to the shops of the town, for he generally brought a box or hamper with him full, he told the driver of the fly he hired, of good things from the Great Town. The tradespeople of Millway would gladly have taken more of his money, but they had quite as much of his speech and company as they desired--more than they desired.

Edith Grace walked straight to the left hand corner of Eltham House, and looked carefully through the trees and shrubs before venturing out on the drive. Not a soul was stirring. She could hear no sound but the rain which still fell in heavy sheets. No light was visible in any room, but whether this was due to the absence of light inside, or to heavy curtains and blinds she could not say. Against the glass of the fan-sash in the porch a faint light, like that of a weak candle or dimmed lamp, gleamed, making a sickly solitary yellow patch upon the black, blank front of the house.

The rain and the soddenness of the gravel were in Edith's favour. The sound of the rain would blunt the sound of her footsteps, and the water among the gravel would lessen the grating of the stones.

She emerged from the cover of the trees, and hastened across the open drive. She gained left-hand corner of the house, and passed rapidly under the dining-room windows in the left side.

Should she find the sash of her room down? That would be a distracting discovery. It would mean she should have to pass the night in the open air. That would be bad enough. It would mean that her flight had been discovered already. It might mean that Oscar Leigh was now lying in wait for her somewhere in this impenetrable darkness behind her back. That would be appalling--unendurable. Hurry and see.

Thank heaven, the window was open!

It was much easier to get out through that window than back through it. But at last, after a severe struggle, she found herself in the room. Strange it seemed that she should feel more secure here, under the roof which covered this man, than outside. Yet it was so. He might, in the dark, outside, spring upon her unawares. He looked like a wild beast, like some savage creature that would crouch, and spring, and seize, and rend. Here she felt comparatively safe. The door was locked on the inside. She had locked it on coming into the room hours ago. If she sat down in the old arm-chair she could not be approached from behind. However, ere sitting down she must get some dry clothes to put on her, and she must find them and effect the change without noise or light. It was now past ten o'clock, and no one in the house must fancy she had not gone to bed, or there might be knocking at her door to know if she required anything. She required nothing of that house but a few hours' shelter.

With great caution she searched where she knew her trunk lay open, found the garments she needed, and replaced her wet clothing with dry. This took time; she could not guess how long, but as it was at length accomplished, and she was taking her first few moments of rest in the easy-chair, she heard the front door shut. Mrs. Brown had gone back to her lodge, and under the roof of Eltham House were only Oscar Leigh, his paralysed mother, and herself.

The banging of the front door made her shudder. The knowledge that Mrs. Brown had gone away for the night increased the isolation of the house. There were now only three people within its walls instead of four, and this circumstance seemed to bring the loathsome Oscar Leigh closer to her. She resolved to sit still. It was eleven o'clock. It would be bright daylight in a few hours. As soon as the sun rose she should, if the rain had ceased, leave the house and wander about in the bright open daylight until the time to take the first train for London. It would be dawn at three o'clock. From eleven to three was only four hours. Four hours did not seem long to wait.

The chair she sat in was comfortable, spacious, soft. There was little danger of her falling asleep. In her present state of excitement and anxiety sleep would keep off. But even if she should happen to doze, there was small risk. Nothing could be more unlikely than that she should slip out of that capacious chair and attract attention by the noise of her fall to the floor.

She sat herself further back in the chair to avoid the possibility of such an accident. She had remarked during the day, that sound passed easily and fully through the building, owing, no doubt, to the absence of furniture from many of the rooms and the intense stillness surrounding the house.

Until now, she had not noticed the utter silence of the place. All day long she had been too much agitated to perceive it. She was accustomed to the bustle and hum of Great London, which, even in its quietest streets, day and night, never suffers solution of the continuity of sound, artificial sound, sound the product of man. In that deepest hush, that awful calm that falls upon London between one and three in the morning, there may be moments when distinct,

individualized sound is wanting, but there is always a faint dull hum, the murmur of the breathing of mute millions of men.

Here, in this room, was not complete silence, for abroad the rain still fell upon the grass and trees with a murmur like the secret speeding of a smooth fast river through the night.

She sat with her back to the partition between her and the dining-room. She had not dared to move the heavy chair for fear of making noise. The chair stood with its back to the partition. It was midway between the outer wall of the house and the partition of the inner hall. On her left, four yards from where she sat, rose a pale blue luminous space, the open window through which she had entered. On her right, at an equal distance, was the invisible door which she had locked upon retiring hours ago. The large, old-fashioned mahogany four-posted bedstead stood in the middle of the room, between the door and the window. The outline of the bedstead facing the window was dimly discernible in mass. No detail of it could be made out. Something stood there, it was impossible to say what. All the rest of the furniture was lost, swallowed up in gloom, annihilated by the dark.

The room was large and lofty. It was wainscotted as high as a man could reach. Above the wainscot the wall was painted dark green. A heavy cornice ran round the angles of the walls. From door to window was twenty feet. From the partition against which she sat to the wall opposite her was twenty-four feet. The curtains of the bedstead were gathered back at the head and foot posts.

Of all this, beyond the parts of the bedstead fronting the window, Edith could see nothing now. She sat with her hands folded in her lap, her arms close to her side, her head resting on the back of the chair. She closed her eyes, not from drowsiness, but to shut out as much as possible the memory of the place, the thoughts of her situation. She told herself she was once more back in her unpretending little room in Grimsby Street. She tried to make herself believe the beating of the rain on the trees and glass of the conservatory and gravelled carriage sweep in front of the house was the dull murmur of London heard through some new medium. She should hear her grandmother's voice soon.

"Have you done, Oscar?"

"Yes, mother. I have finished for the night."

Edith Grace sat up in her chair and gasped with terror. The words seemed spoken at her ear. The voices were those of Oscar Leigh, the hunchback dwarf, and his mother, Mrs. Leigh, the paralysed old woman! Whence came those voices? What was she about to hear?

For a moment Edith hardly breathed. She had to exercise all her powers of self-control to avoid springing up and screaming. The voices seemed so close to her she expected to hear her own name called out, to feel a hand placed upon her shoulder.

"Yes," the voice of the man said, "I have made the drawings and the calculations. It has taken me time. A great deal of time, mother. But I am right. I have triumphed. I generally *am* right, mother. I generally *do* triumph, mother." He spoke in a tone of elation that rose as he progressed in this speech. His accents changed rapidly, and there was a sound of some one moving. "But, mother, you are tired. It has been a long day for you. You would like to go to your room." His voice had fallen, and was low and guttural, but full of eager solicitude and tenderness.

"Not tired; no, Oscar. I am feeling quite well and lively and strong to-night. For an old woman, who has lost the use of her limbs, I keep very well. When you are with me, Oscar dear, I do not seem so old as when you are away from me, my son." The voice was very low, and tremulous with maternal love.

"Old! Old!" he cried with harsh emphatic gaiety. "You are not old, mother! You are a young woman. You are a girl, compared with the old women I know in London, who would fly into a rage if you hinted that they were past middle life--if you did not, in fact, *say* they were young. Why, mother, what is seventy? Nothing! I know dozens of women over eighty, and they keep up their spirits and are blithe and gay, and ready to dance at a wedding, if any man should only ask them. Up to sixty-five, a woman ages faster than a man, but once over sixty-five, women grow young again." Towards the end his voice had lost its tone of unpleasant excitement, it became merely jocular and buoyant.

"My spirits are always good when you are here, my son. But when you are away I am very dull. Very dull, dear. It is only natural for me to feel dull, when half of my body is dead already. I cannot be long for the world, Oscar."

"Nonsense," said the other voice gaily. "Your affliction has nothing to do with death. The doctors say it is only a local disturbance. Besides, you know, cracked vessels are last broken. You are compelled to take more care of yourself than other women, and you *do* take care of yourself, I hope. If you do not, I shall be very angry, and keep away altogether from Eltham."

"I take every care of myself, Oscar dear. Every care. I do not want to go away from you. I want to stay with you as long as I can. Oscar dear, I hope it may be granted to me to see your children before I die, dear." The voice was low and tremulous and prayerful. The mournfulness of a

mother's heart was in the tone.

"And so you shall, mother," he said briskly, cheerfully. "I mean to astonish you soon. I mean to marry a very handsome wife. I have one in my eye already, mother." He added more gravely, "I have a very handsome wife in my eye. I mean to marry; and I mean to marry her. You know I never make up my mind to do anything that in the end does not come off. But before I marry I must finish my great work. When I have put the last touches to it I shall sell it for a large sum, and retire from business, and live here with you, mother, at my ease."

"And when, my dear son, do you think the great clock will be finished? Tell me all about it. It is the only thing in the world I am jealous of. Tell me how it gets on. Have you added any new wonders to it? When will you be done with it?"

The fright had by this time died out of Edith's heart. She now understood who the owners of the voices were, why the speakers seemed so near. Oscar Leigh was talking to his mother in the dining-room. They both believed she was in deep sleep and could not hear, or they forgot the thinness of the substance separating them. Between the dining-room and where she sat was only the slight panel of a folding door. This room, now a sleeping apartment, had once been the breakfast-parlour. She had not in the daytime noticed that the two rooms were divided only by folding doors. If she had the alternative, she would have got up and left the room. But she had no alternative. She would much rather not hear the words, the voices of these two people. If she coughed, or made a noise, she would but attract attention to herself, bring some one, perhaps, knocking at her door. Nothing could be more undesirable than a visitor, or inquiries at her door. If she coughed, to show the speakers that she was awake, Mrs. Leigh, or he, might knock and speak to her. Mrs. Leigh might, on some plea, ask to see her, ask to be allowed to roll her invalid chair into the room, and then she would find the tenant of it dressed for out of doors, the bed untossed, the floor littered with the scattered contents of her trunk, the wet bedraggled clothes and boots she had taken off. There was nothing for her to do but to remain perfectly still. She was not listening, in the mean or hateful sense of the word. She did not want to overhear, but she could not help hearing. She could not cover her ears, for that would shut out all sound, and the use of hearing was essential to her own safety, her own protection, situated as she found herself. Leigh had given her to understand he was a mechanician. He was telling his mother of his work. He was about to give her particulars of a clock upon which he was engaged. Let them talk on about this clock. It was nothing to her. She was interested intensely in the passage of time, but in no clock. She did not want to hear of an hour-measurer, but of the hour-maker. She cared nothing for man's divisions of time: she prayed with all her heart for a sight of God's time-marker, the sun.

## CHAPTER III.

### AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

"Soon, soon, mother. I shall be finished soon. I cannot tell exactly when, but not very far off. I see the end of my labours, the reward of all my study, the fruit of all my life," said the voice of the hunchbacked dwarf.

There was a pause in the speech. "Hah," breathed Leigh, in loud inspiration. Then there was a snuffing sound, and another loud inspiration. "Hah! that is refreshing--most refreshing. Will you have some, mother? Do. You won't? Very well. What was I saying?"

The strong, subtle vapour of eau-de-cologne penetrated through the slits and joints of the folding-doors, and floated past Edith towards the open windows.

"About the clock," said Mrs. Leigh. "You were going to tell me what new wonders you have added to it, and when the crowning wonder of all was to be fixed."

"What?" cried the voice of the dwarf, loudly, harshly, angrily. "What do you know of the crowning wonder? Tell me, woman, at once!" His tone was violent, imperious, threatening.

"Oscar! Oscar! What is the matter? What do you mean by calling me 'woman'? Oscar, my son, are you ill? What is the matter? Why do you look at me in that way? You are crushing my hand. What is the matter, Oscar, my own boy?" The woman's accents were full of alarm.

"Agh! Agh! Pardon me. Agh! Pardon me, my dear mother. Agh!" he coughed violently, hoarsely. "The spirit of the eau-de-cologne must have gone down my throat and caught my breath. I am quite right now. Pray excuse me, mother. What was I saying?"

"Something about the clock, dear. But, Oscar, do not mind telling me about it now. You seem not well. Perhaps you had better rest yourself. You can explain about the clock to-morrow."

"Oh, ay, the clock. Of course. I am quite well, mother. You need not be uneasy about me. What was I going to tell you about the clock?"

"You were going to tell me--I do not know really what. I asked you when it would be completed. That is my chief anxiety, for then you will be always here--always here, near me, my dear son."

"Certainly; when I sell my unrivalled clock, I'll give up living in London and come down here to you, mother, and become a private gentleman."

"But why can't you come down and stop here always, my Oscar? Surely your clock could be brought to Millway, and back to London again when 'tis finished?" The voice of the woman was caressing, pleading. "I have not very long to live, Oscar. Might not I have you near me that little time?" The tone was tremulous and pathetic.

"Dear, dear mother," he said softly, tenderly. "I cannot--I cannot move the clock. You forget how large it is. I have told you over and over again it would half fill this room. Besides, I have other business in London I cannot leave just now. I will come as soon as ever I can. You may take my word for that. Let us say no more on that subject at present. I was going to explain to you about my marvellous clock. Let me see. What have I already told you?"

"Oh, it was too wonderful to remember. Tell me over again."

"Very well. To begin with, it will, of course, measure time first of all. That is the principal and easiest thing to contrive. It will show the year, the month, the day of the month, the day of the week, the hour of the day, the minute of the hour, the second of the minute, the tenth of the second. All these will be shown on one dial."

"That much alone puzzles and astonishes me. It will be the most useful clock in the world."

"So far that is all easy, and would not make it even a very remarkable clock, mother. It will take account of leap year, and be constructed to run till the year ten thousand of the Christian era."

"When once wound up?"

"Oh no, you simple mother. It will have to be wound up every week."

"But will not the machinery wear out?"

"Yes, the metal and the stones will wear out and rust out before eight thousand years. But the principle will have eight thousand years of vitality in it. Steel and brass and rubies yield to friction and time, but a principle lives for ever if it is a true principle----"

"And a good principle," interrupted the voice of the old woman, piously.

"Good or bad, if it is true it will last," said the voice of the hunchback, harshly. Then he went on in more gentle and even tones. "On another face it will tell the time of high water in fifty great maritime cities. There will be four thousand Figures of Time, figures of all the great men of the past, each bearing a symbol of his greatest work, or thought, or achievement, and each appearing on the anniversary of his death, thus there will be from eight to twenty figures visible each day, and that day will be the anniversary of the one on which each of the men died years ago."

"Four thousand figures! Why, it will cost a fortune!"

"Four thousand historic figures each presented on the anniversary of death! I am at work on the figures of those who died on the 22nd of August just now. They are very interesting to me, and one of them is the most interesting of all, the most interesting of all the four thousand figures."

"And who died on the 22nd of August, Oscar? Whose is the figure that interests you most of all, my son?"

"Richard Plantagenet of Gloucester," fiercely.

"Eh?" in a tone of intense pain.

"Richard Plantagenet of Gloucester, commonly called Richard the Third of England, and nicknamed the Hunchbacked Tyrant," maliciously.

"Oscar!" in a tone of protest and misery.

"Yes. Hump and all, I am now making the figure of the most famous hunchback in history. I take a delight in modelling the figure of my Hunchback Tyrant. In body and soul I can sympathise

with--him." He spoke furiously, and there was a sound in the room as if he rose.

"Oh, you break my heart, my boy, my boy, my son! Don't, for God's sake, don't. You cut me to the soul! You frighten me when you look in that way." She spoke in terror and anguish.

There were hasty, halting, footsteps pacing up and down the dining-room. The folding-doors behind Edith's head trembled, the windows of the dining-room rattled. The girl wondered he did not think of her. He knew her room lay beyond the dining-room, and he must be aware nothing divided her room from the front one but the thin panels of the folding-doors. It was plain to her now he did not care whether she heard or not.

"Break your heart, mother!" he went on in a tone of excitement but less acerbity. "Why should what I say break your heart? What hurt can words do? Look at me! Me! If I were to say my heart was broken, no one would wonder. I am not reproaching you. Heaven knows, if I turned upon you, I should have no friend left in all the world. Not one soul who would care for me--care whether I lived or died, whether I prospered or was hanged by the common hangman on a gibbet!"

"Oh, Oscar, what is it? What has done it? What has soured you so? You never talked in this way until now. What has changed you?" The voice of the woman was broken. She was weeping through her words.

"A girl's face. A girl's face has changed me. I, who had a heart of adamant, a heart of the core of adamant befitting the crooked carcass in which it is penned and warped and blackened by villainous obstructions. But there! I have been vapouring, mother. Let my words pass. I am a fool and worse to break out in such a way before you, my good, gentle mother." His voice became less excited, his steps more slow and light. "It is passed. I am myself again. I know your advice is good. I mean to follow it. I will marry a wife. I will marry a pretty, shapely wife. You shall have grand children at your knee, mother, before long, before you go. Well-favoured and gay and flawless, and straight-backed, and right-limbed little children who will overtop me, exceed me in height before they begin their teens, but will never, never, never mother, grow to near the degree of love I have for you." His voice and steps ceased, as though he paused at her side.

"Do not kneel," she whispered huskily. "Do not kneel, my son. I was frightened a moment ago, and now I feel suffocated with joy. There! That is right. Sit in your own chair again."

For a while Edith heard sobs--the sobs of a man.

The woman had ceased to weep.

When the sobbing stopped, the woman said: "Who is she? Do I know her? Do I know even her name?"

"All that is my secret, mother. I will not say any more of her but that I am accustomed to succeed, and I will succeed here. I will keep the secret of her name in my heart to goad me on. I am accustomed to succeed. Rest assured I will succeed in this. We will say no more of it. Let it be a forbidden subject between us until I speak of it again; until, perhaps, I bring her to you."

"As you will, Oscar. Keep your secret. I can trust and wait."

"It is best. I feel better already. That storm has cleared the air. I was excited. I have reason to be excited to-day. At this moment--it is now just twelve o'clock--at this moment I am either succeeding or failing in one of my most important aims."

"Just now, Oscar. Do you mean here?"

"No, not here. In London. You do not believe in magic, mother?"

"Surely not. What do you mean? You do not believe in anything so foolish?"

"Or in clairvoyance or spectres, mother?"

"No, my child. Nor you, I hope. That is, I do not believe in all the tales I hear from simple folk."

"And yet not everything--not half everything--is understood even now."

"Will you not tell me of this either?"

"Not to-night, mother. Not to-night. Another time, perhaps, I may. You know I had a week ago no intention of coming here to-day. I did not come to welcome Miss Grace. I had another reason for coming. I am trying an experiment to-night. At this moment I am putting the result of many anxious hours to the touch. If my experiment turns out well I shall come into a strange power. But there, I will say no more about it, for I must not explain, and it is not fair to tell you, all at once, that I have two secrets from you. And now, mother, it is very late for you. We must go to bed. That patent couch still enables you to do without aid in dressing?"

"Yes. I am still able to do without help. I think some of the springs want oiling. You will look at them to-morrow?"

"Yes. But it must be early. I am going back to town at noon."

"So soon? I did not think you would leave till later, Oscar. I don't want to pry into your secrets, but you spoke of gaining some strange powers. Do you think it wise to play with--with--with?"

"With what, mother?"

"With strange powers."

"That depends on what the strange powers are."

"But tell me there is no danger."

"To me? No, I think not."

"Oscar, I am uneasy."

"We have sat and talked too long. You are worn out. I will wheel you to your room. I am sleepy myself."

Edith Grace heard the sound of Mrs. Leigh's invalid chair moving towards the dining room door, then the door open and the chair pass down the hall and into Mrs. Leigh's bedroom. Words passed between the mother and son, but she did not catch their import. She heard the door of Mrs. Leigh's room opposite her own close and then the dragging, lame footsteps of the hunchback on the tiles of the back hall.

The girl listened intently. She did not move. She was sitting bolt upright in her chair with her face turned towards the door of the room.

Leigh's irregular, shuffling footsteps became more distinct. He was crossing the hall from his mother's room to the stairs, which began at the left-hand side of the back hall, close to the door of the room where Edith sat.

"He is going upstairs to his own room. When he is gone the house will be still and I shall be at ease. Daylight will soon come and then I can slip away again and wait till the first train for London--for home! He must be mad. Even if he had not pressed his hateful attentions on me I would not stay in this house for all the world," thought Edith Grace.

The slow, shuffling footsteps did not ascend the stairs. They paused. They paused, she could not tell exactly where. All her faculties were concentrated in hearing, and she heard nothing, absolutely nothing, but the rain. Could it be he had reached the stairs and was ascending inaudibly? Could it be he had already ascended? She thought it was but a moment ago since he closed his mother's door. He might have gone up unheard. It might be longer since the door shut than she thought. She could not judge time exactly in the dark, and when she was so powerfully excited. Should she get up out of that chair, open the door as quietly as possible, and peer into the hall? What good would that do? If he were there he would see her; if he were not there all was well. Besides, it would be quite impossible to unlock the door and open it without making a noise, without the snap of the lock, the grating of the latch, the creaking of the hinge. It was better to remain quiet.

Suddenly she heard a sound that made her heart stand still, her breath cease to come. She grew rigid with terror.

She heard a something soft sliding over the outside of that door. A hand! It touched and rattled the handle. The handle turned, and with a low, dull sound the door opened! She could not see the door. The light which had illumed the fan sash in the porch had evidently been extinguished, for there was no gleam through the open door. That part of the room was so intensely dark, even the masses in it were invisible. But she knew by the dull, puffing sound the door had been opened, and by the surge of the heavy, damp, warm air.

She could not move or cry out if she would. She was completely paralysed, frozen. She was aware of possessing only two senses, hearing and seeing. She was not conscious of her own identity beyond what was presented to her sensations through her ears or her eyes. She did not even ask herself how he had come there, how he had opened from the hall the door she had left locked upon the inside.

He entered the room with slow, deliberate, limping steps. She could hear the footfall of his left foot and the slight, brushing touch of his right foot as he drew it after the left.

On slowly he came until he touched the bed. She could dimly make out the white of his face and shirt-front against the gleam from the window as he advanced. It was plain he could not see as well as she, for he walked up against the bed. His eyes had not become accustomed to the darkness.

He turned to his left, towards where she sat, and came on, feeling his way by the bed. She heard him feeling his way. As soon as he reached the foot-post he turned right, round where she sat in the deepest gloom of the room and then walked to the window.

When he reached the window he stood full in front of it and muttered: "Rain, rain still." He thrust his arms out of the window and drawing them back in a moment, rubbed his face with his hands. "That is refreshing," he muttered. "Hah! They say rainwater is the best lotion for preserving the beauty of the skin. Hah! They do. They say Ninon de L'Enclos kept her beauty up to past seventy by rain-water. Hah! They do. They say she did. Hah! I wonder how long would it preserve *my* beauty. Ha-ha-ha! More than a century, I suppose. I wonder would rain-water preserve the beauty of my hump. I believe my hump is one of the most beautiful ever man wore. But it doesn't seem to count for much among a man's attractions. People don't appear to care much for humps, whether they are really beauties of this kind or not. Hah! They don't. People don't. Hah! They are not educated up to humps. Hah!"

At each exclamation "Hah!" he made a powerful expiration of breath. Before each exclamation he rubbed his forehead with one hand drawn in wet from the rain falling outside the window.

"*She*, for instance," he went on, "doesn't care much for humps. She prefers straight-backed men with straight strong legs. And yet straight-backed men with straight strong legs are common enough in all conscience. Most of the beggars even are straight-backed and strong-legged. I am not. Hah! How cool and refreshing this rain-water is. I am a novelty and yet people don't care for such a novelty as I am. No; they prefer men cut to pattern. *She* would rather have a straight-backed beggar than me, and yet I am more interesting, more uncommon. I am more remarkable to look at, and then I have genius. Yes; I have a form of body far out of the common, and a form of mind far out of the common, too. I have a hump and genius. Hah! But no one cares for a hump or genius. *She* doesn't, for instance. Hah! But I mean that she shall like me. I mean to make love to her. I mean to woo her, and to win her. Hah! She doesn't know me now as well as she will know me later. I have never been in love before. I can't say I like the feeling. I used to be very valiant and self-sufficing, and at my ease in my mind. Hah! I looked on women as the mere dross of humanity--not worthy to associate with cripples. Hah! Of course, I except my mother, who is the best and dearest soul God ever sent to earth. But now I am in love, and this girl, this young girl, seems precious to me. Hah! Certainly I shall win her. I have not yet learned to fail, and I don't mean to learn how to fail now. Hah! How cool and refreshing the rain is. What is it I came into this room for? Stay. Let me think. Oh, yes! my mother asked me to put the window down before I went upstairs. Hah! Yes. I will. There!"

He let the window down without any regard to the noise. It smote harshly upon the sill. Edith did not move, did not make a sound. She was glad at the moment, though she did not realize that she was glad, because he had let down the window. The diminished light would reduce the chance of his seeing her even now that his eyes had grown used to the darkness. She did not realize that she was glad until afterwards. All her consciousness was still concentrated on hearing and seeing.

Leigh turned away from the window, and began slowly retracing his steps to the door, muttering as he went along the side of the bed opposite the window:

"Yes, she has run away. Run away from this house a few hours after entering it. Run away, frightened, terrified by my ugliness."

He had reached the foot of the bed by this time, and, crossing between where she sat, turned in the darkness at the foot-board. Only his head rose above the high foot-board. His hand moved in dim relief against the background of the white head part of the bed discernible over the foot-board.

As he spoke these words her first thought beyond a desire to hear and see entered her mind. It gave her instant and enormous relief, although as before she was not at the moment attentive to the relief. The feeling, however, took in her mind the form of words. "He knows I left the house. He does not know I have come back."

He paused directly in front of her, and seemed to rest against the foot-board. He muttered in a voice more deep and faint than the one in which he had hitherto spoken:

"She ran away, this Edith Grace, she ran away from my ugliness. Ha-ha-ha! We shall see, Edith Grace. We shall see. I did not tell my mother the name of the girl I mean to marry. She shall know it soon enough, and not all the wiles or force of man shall keep me from my purpose, keep Edith Grace from me!"

He thrust his arms out to their full length in front of him and drew them back swiftly towards him. The air from the motion of his long thin hands touched her cheek.

She drew her head back a hand's breadth. Otherwise she did not stir. She sat motionless. She had no power over the actions of her body. She could not cry out or move further.

Oscar Leigh turned, crept slowly along the foot and right side of the bed, fumbled for the door handle, and, having found it, went out of the room, closing and latching the door quietly after him.

Then she heard him toilfully, ponderously, going up stairs. Presently a door above was closed and complete silence fell upon the house.

The spell lifted from the girl, and covering her face with her hands she sank back in the chair with a tremulous, heavy sigh of relief.

## CHAPTER IV.

### ON THE WING.

Edith lay in the large easy-chair for a long time without stirring. She did not even think. It was enough that she had been delivered from the danger of discovery, and that she was free to take wing and fly away at the streak of earliest dawn.

She did not know how long she sat with her face covered with her hands. She had resolved not to move for a long time, and for a long time she remained motionless. There was no fear of her sleeping. Although her mind was not actively employed about anything it was sharply awake. The first thing to challenge her attention was a sound. No boding or terrible sound, but the faint, weak shrill chirp of a bird. She scarcely realized what it was at first, for she was unfamiliar with the country and unused to the early notes of field and wood.

She took her hands from before her face and looked at the window. The light was still very grey and blue. But it was light, and, moreover, light that would grow stronger every minute, every second. When the day is breaking for joy or deliverance, the light fills the veins with an ethereal intoxication. Thoughts which during darkness can be met only with pallid terror can, when the shadow of night has passed away, be faced with vital courage and endurance.

She rose with care, but there was firmness and decision in her movements. She was fully dressed for walking. The rain had stopped and the sky above the trees spread clear and stainless, a vast plain of open blue.

Oscar Leigh had lowered the window. She caught the sash and raised it very gently but with no trepidation. If the door had that moment opened, she would have simply sprung through the window, without a word. The want of sleep dulls the apprehensions of fear as well as the other faculties of the mind. It sobers the judgment and reduces the susceptibility to extravagance of emotion.

When she had got the sash up to its full height, she stepped resolutely out on the gravelled carriage-sweep. She felt almost at ease. She paused a moment, looked back into the room, and under the shadow of her hand saw that the note she had placed on the table was gone. She turned away from the window and began walking along the gravelled drive towards the gate.

In the face of freedom and the growing light of day the events of last night were beginning to lose all aspect of mystery or terror and to assume a commonplace aspect. The wild talk of the hunchback with his mother grew to have little or no significance worthy of attention, and the soliloquy at the window was, upon review, becoming absurd. Indisputably she was right in leaving that house. It would be entirely unpleasant to live in a house where a man whom she did not like, forced attentions on her. She would go back to London and tell her story at home, and get another place. That was all. No one but her grandmother and herself need know of this first unpleasant experience of trying to earn her bread.

Here was the gate. Locked! Of course. Mrs. Brown had told her the gate was locked by her every night when she came from the house at eleven o'clock. Edith had forgotten this. She had not bargained for finding her way barred a short distance from the house. A couple of hours ago this would have seemed an insuperable obstacle. Now she was free, and quite destitute of terror, of fear, of even grave uneasiness. She felt she could be almost angry, indignant, with this gate and those who had shut and fastened it against her egress.

She turned her face from the gate and looked back at Eltham House. All there appeared quiet and asleep. She looked at the little lodge on her right. Here all seemed quiet and asleep too. The door was shut, the curtains of the windows, one on each side of the door, were close drawn. She could hear no sound but the chatter of the small birds in the hedges, the cawing of distant rooks, and afar off the vexatious crowing of a cock.

The solitude of morning in the country around her was widely different from the solitude of the night just gone by. The solitude of midnight seemed designed for the return of banished spirits; the solitude of the dawn a desert from which man had fled for ever. A sense of desolation came upon her. She wanted to be free, to be at the other side of that gate, but when she found herself on the open road what should she do? For hours to come the people of Millway would not



be stirring. She was fleeing from that house into a desolate and uninhabited plain, for though there might be people within call, they were not within sight. Anyway, she could not stay here at the gate. She was now the most conspicuous object on which the upper windows of the house looked, and if he were to come to a front window he could not fail to see her. If anyone happened to pass along that road she would be a conspicuous and most remarkable figure inside that gate at this hour.

She walked to the door of the lodge and softly placed her hand on the latch. It yielded to her touch. She pressed against the door; it moved inward. Disclosed to view was a tiny square hall, in which were two doors. Close to the door which she had opened a large iron holdfast projected from the wall, and upon the holdfast hung a large, clumsy key. The key of the gate? Perhaps so.

In a moment she had taken the key off the hook, gone back to the gate, and inserted the key in the lock. In a minute she was outside the gate on the open road. She closed the gate noiselessly behind her, and hastened away, she knew not whither.

Before she had gone a hundred yards she discovered she had turned to the right instead of to the left. She intended walking towards the town, and it lay on her left as she came through the gateway. She hastened back and found the gate quickly. She kept on at this pace until she was about as far on this side of the gate as she had been on the other. Then she slackened her speed, moving demurely along the road.

After all, from what was she fleeing? Why was she hastening away? What prevented her staying in the house until ten o'clock, and then going to the railway station, in the ordinary way?

She could not remain in the house to be found there when it was believed she had left it for good. But why had she rushed out of it the previous night in a panic? Surely there had been nothing to alarm her. No doubt Mr. Leigh had tried to kiss her upon her arrival, and she could not stay after that affront. It was intolerable that any man should attempt to kiss *her*. He had tried to excuse himself by saying he had only offered her a patriarchal welcome. The idea of a man who was only thirty-five years claiming the privileges of age was absurd. But, upon reflection, he might not have meant patriarchal to imply length of life, but method of life. He might have intended to convey that he, as male head of the house, assumed the privileges which obtained in patriarchal times, in remote times, when the head of the house posed as the father of all dwelling within its gates. But even if that were so, there was an affront in any such presumption, and she could not consent to remain under that roof longer than necessary. His gallantries of bows, and civil speech, and offers of service, following his atrocious attempt, were enough to warrant her in leaving if there had been no other provocation.

But there had been no occasion for mysterious or surreptitious flight. Plainly no desire existed of detaining her against her will. She had been permitted to retire to her room on pleading fatigue, the window was then fully open, the gate had not been fastened, and even when the gate was locked for the night the key was left lying accessible to anyone within the grounds. True, he believed her to be now in London. He did not know she had lost the train. Seemingly, he had taken not the least trouble to detain her in the house or to ascertain what her movements were when she quitted it.

Viewed by the sober light of day it appeared she had been making a silly romance out of some half-jocular attentions paid to her by a vulgar man, almost old enough to be her father! His soliloquy at the window about making her his wife had been only a little more absurd than his share in the dialogue between him and his mother. Presently, in a few days, the whole affair would appear nothing more than an unpleasant dream. In all likelihood she should never see Mrs. Leigh or her son again. The chances were a million to one against her encountering either during the remainder of her life. She would dismiss the whole affair from her mind and think of other matters.

Not a soul to be seen or heard yet. What a ridiculous thing it was to say that people of the country were earlier risers than people of the town! Fancy walking a mile at any time in the morning through London without meeting a soul!

About half-a-mile from Millway a seat had been placed by the side of the road. It was formed of three square bars of wood supported upon three square pillars of stone. Edith sat down and rested. She did not move until she heard the sound of approaching wheels and horses. She rose and walked briskly in the direction from which she heard the sounds. She walked quickly, with her head down, as though knowing well whither she was going, and being in haste. Two sleepy men in a cart looked with drowsy eyes at her as they passed, but said nothing. These were the first people she had met since she left Eltham House. They did not speak to her, ask her any questions, seem to take the slightest interest in her. This was reassuring. When the cart was out of sight, she returned to the seat and rested again. She would not go back towards the house lest she might be seen by Mr. Leigh or Mrs. Brown; she would not go among the sleeping houses lest she might attract attention, invite inquiries. No one else came near for half-an-hour. Then a scattered group of labourers, tramping doggedly onward from the town, disturbed her solitude. She got up and passed these quickly, as before. One of the men said "Good morning," civilly. Before they disappeared from view a second cart sounded on the road. The country was at length awake. It would not be desirable for her to sit on that bench in the view of people at that early hour. She resolved to keep moving now until the railway station opened.

After leaving that bench finally, she walked into the town as if on business of urgency, but of no alarm. It would not do to seem careless of her route or speed; it would not do to seem eagerly in haste; it would not do to seem as though she was strange to the place. She had no fear but that shy fear of attracting attention instinctively developed in those who flee, no matter from what they flee.

She wandered through many streets and roads that day, but took no note of them. She adopted a plan to avoid losing her bearings. There were six roads leading out of Millway. She took them one after the other from her left hand, went forward upon each a thousand steps, counting each step in her mind, and then came back to the point from which she had started, also counting each step as she returned. This prevented her wandering far, or losing her way. Counting the steps kept her mind fully occupied, and prevented her noticing the fatigue, or becoming unhappily conscious of her unusual position.

Upon comparing the numbers of outward and backward steps, she found that the stretch of road which measured a thousand from town, measured never more than nine hundred and fifty back. As soon as she turned towards Millway, although she knew the station would not be open when she arrived there, she unconsciously increased the length of each pace.

Only once in her monotonous and fatiguing task did anything unpleasant come in her path, and then the unpleasant object was a plain white-washed wall. Yet it gave her a sick thrill of terror. Fortunately it was in her last radiation from Millway.

She was quite unfamiliar with the town. She had never seen it until the day before, and then only as the fly drove from the station to Eltham House. This morning she had determined her course from left to right, taking the wide and open streets, down which she could see far. She passed by several ways which did not look main arteries of traffic. When it was half an hour of train time, she left behind two narrow and unpromising-looking streets, and coming upon the broadest and most open one she had yet encountered, committed herself to it without hesitation, merely making the reflection, "This is my last turn. It will be time to go to the station when I reach this corner again."

After that she took no heed of the street in which she was, but kept on. Fatigue, and the knowledge that her walk was approaching an end, made her duller and more indifferent than before. She did not look around her. She counted her steps in a purely mechanical manner. They, as it were, went on counting themselves without effort on her part. It is doubtful if she then could have stopped the enumeration. Her plan up to this had been to count up to a hundred and then begin again, closing up a finger for each five score told.

The road was not straight. She did not notice that at the end of the first hundred, the street had narrowed, and the flagging ceased. Before the end of the second hundred was chronicled, the pathway disappeared, the houses grew mean and dilapidated. Before she counted two hundred and fifty, she was traversing an alley, filthy under foot, with battered, squalid houses and hovels on either side. This was the most foul and disreputable part of Millway. It was inhabited by the unfortunate, the dissolute, and the disreputable. No one of good repute and appearance had been down there for years and years.

She saw nothing of what lay around her, did not notice the filthy, ruddy ground on which she trod; did not observe the windless, noisome air through which she moved.

All at once she drew up with a quick start, and uttered a suppressed cry of alarm. She was in front of a blank white-washed wall. She glanced around in terror, looking for an avenue of escape. There was none except the way by which she had come. She found herself at the end of a frowsy, villainous-looking *cul-de-sac*.

She shuddered and stood still, not knowing for the moment what to do. There was no going forward; to go back, was to confess she had lost her way. Even the white radiance of the morning could not make that close, fœtid, ruinous street look innocent. It had vice and crime written too deeply on its evil face. Fortunately, no one was stirring in the street, but each house and hovel had windows, and windows of fearful aspect, and behind these windows she imagined hideous winking eyes, and fleering faces. What, if some one, some hulking, slouching figure, should shamle out of one of those sinister doorways, and plant itself in the middle of the lane, blocking up her path, and forbidding her flight!

She caught her breath, and stooped her head, and ran swiftly, fiercely, madly, as though pursued by a pack of ravenous wolves. She fancied she heard the clatter of swift, relentless feet, the clamour of ruthless voices behind her ears. She imagined she felt the touch of claw-like hands upon her shoulder. She imagined she could see out of the corners of her eyes the foul fingers of her pursuers on her shoulder, on her sleeve! She thought she heard, felt, their breathings at her ears! She ran as for life from awful death.

All at once the figure of a man barred her way, blocked her path. With a cry of despair she stood still. The man seemed to be awaiting her approach. He moved a step towards her and said: "Beg pardon, miss. You need not run. There's plenty of time. The train does not start till six-fifteen, and it's only a quarter to six."

This was the friendly railway-porter of the night before. He had just stepped out of his lodging. She had failed to notice that she had left the reeking slum behind her, and was once more in the main street of the town.

She made a powerful effort and collected herself.

"Plenty of time, miss," said the man respectfully, "if you are going up to London by the six-fifteen." He waved his hand in the direction of the station.

"Thank you. I am much obliged to you. I--I did not wish to be late." Her breath was so short from running she spoke irregularly and with difficulty.

"I am going to open the station, miss. Would you like to sit in the waiting room?"

"Thank you. I would."

He drew aside and she passed him. He followed at a deferential distance.

In five minutes they stood on the platform. He opened the door of the waiting room. Then he paused and thought a moment. He turned to her and said, pointing to a line of carriages drawn up at the platform: "That's the train for London. You haven't to change until you get there. Are you going to Victoria or Ludgate?"

"Victoria."

"That," pointing, "part of the train is for Victoria--the forward part, miss." He looked at her again, and noticed that her boots showed signs of a long walk. "Perhaps you would like to go straight into a carriage?"

"I should prefer that."

"I can see to your luggage and get your ticket for you, miss, so that you need not stir once you get in."

"I have no luggage here. It will be sent after me. Not first-class, thank you. I shall travel third, if you please." She coloured a little more deeply. Her usually pale face was faintly flushed from her late haste and excitement. "Here is the money for the ticket. You have been very kind to me--I am extremely sorry I--I--I can't make you a little present--but----"

"Don't mention it, miss. It's my duty, miss, to do what I can to oblige passengers. Take the far corner with your back to the engine. I'll lock you in. We haven't many passengers by this train, and I may be able to keep the carriage altogether for you, at starting, anyway. The ticket office won't be open for a few minutes. With your back to the engine, miss. I'll bring you the ticket in time. You are locked in now, miss, and you need not stir until you get to Victoria."

She thanked him again and he left her. Now the full effect of her long walk, the reaction from the excitement of the night and want of sleep, fell upon her with leaden weight of drowsiness. She was safe, at rest now, on her way home. This was a blessed change from the strain of mind in the darkness, and the weary, weary walking and counting in the light. She went on counting still, exactly at the rate of her paces on the road.

Her head rested in the corner of the narrow compartment. Her brain still went stolidly on counting whether she would or not. She closed her eyes. A delicious numbness began to steal over her. She had a faint consciousness that a few people were out on the platform. She heard as from afar off the sound of voices and feet.

"Your ticket, miss."

Something was placed in her hand, she started and caught it in her gloved fingers, closely.

"I'll lock the door again, miss. You are all right now till you get to Victoria."

"Thank you, very much."

This dialogue sounded faintly in her ears, she had no clear perception that she had taken part in it. In another minute she was fast asleep with her head resting in the corner of the carriage and a soft smile upon her lips.

After her eyelids closed and she became unconscious in sleep, the following dialogue took place on the platform, outside the window of her carriage:

"You are not to go in there, sir, that compartment is engaged."

"Third class compartment engaged! Rubbish! Open the door, I say, at once!"

"No, sir, I cannot. I do not mean that the compartment is engaged by paying for it."

"Open it this instant."

"The lady has been very ill of some catching complaint and must travel alone. See, she is asleep."

"No matter. *I* too am very ill of a catching complaint. Open the door. You won't! Oh, it doesn't make any difference, I'll open it myself. I always carry a key. Porter, you have lost a shilling. But there, I won't be vindictive, here's a shilling for being good to the lady. She is a friend of mine. You are doing well this morning, porter. She paid you first for reserving the compartment, then I pay you instead of reporting you for being impertinent and corrupt."

"She gave me nothing. The lady had only her bare fare to Victoria, and if you know her she will tell you that I got her ticket and she had no money left."

"You're new to this place. I never saw you here before. Go away. Only you are so young a fool I'd get you into trouble."

All this was said in low voices so as to be inaudible to the girl, even if she had been awake, but she was not awake, she was in profound sleep.

The new passenger was seated in the compartment, and, as the porter turned away, he closed and locked the door softly. In less than a minute the train steamed out of the station. The girl slept on with a smile of relief and deliverance around her fresh young mouth.

The second traveller sat facing the engine on the side opposite Edith, and directly in front of her, by the open window. He was a short deformed man and carried a heavy crooked walking-stick. For a few minutes after the train began to move he remained without moving. The girl slept heavily, swaying slightly from side to side with the motion of the train, her two gloved hands lay placidly on her lap. Between the thumb and fore-finger of her right hand was the ticket bought for her by the friendly porter, and representing all the money she had had beyond a few half pence.

When the train had been five minutes on its way and had gained its full speed, the man leaned forward towards the sleeping girl, and with infinite gentleness and care drew the ticket out of her hand, keeping his eyes on her eyelids the whole time. Without taking his eyes off her face, he raised his right hand, thrust it, holding the ticket between his thumb and finger, out of the carriage window, and dropped the ticket into the rushing air. Then he sat back in his corner opposite Edith, and sighed and smiled.

## CHAPTER V.

### MR. LEIGH'S DEPUTY.

It was early in the afternoon the same day, the last Thursday of June. The rain of the night before had been general in the South of England. It had fallen heavily in London, and washed and freshened the dusty, parched streets. Now all London capable of being made fresh and blithe by weather was blazing gallantly in the unclouded radiance of summer. Even Chetwynd Street, a third rate thoroughfare of the less delectable and low-lying part of Westminster, looked gay in comparison with its usual squalor, for it had been scoured clean and sweetened by the waters of Heaven. The wind, and the rain, and the sun of Heaven, were all the friends Chetwynd Street seemed to have. Man had built it. It was man's own, and man seemed to despise his handiwork, and neglect his duty towards what he had made.

Few civilians with good clothes and sound boots visited Chetwynd Street. Policemen go everywhere, and were to be seen in this street now and then, and soldiers often strayed into it, for they are common in all the region. But although the publicans and pawnbrokers of the thoroughfare were well-to-do people, they did not put their wealth upon their backs. It would have been considered ostentatious for ordinary mortals to wear broadcloth within the precincts of the street. The sumptuary laws of the place forbade broadcloth for every-day wear to all except clergymen, doctors, and undertakers. On Sundays, or festivals, such as marriages and funerals, broad-cloth might be worn by the prosperous tradespeople without exciting anger or reproach.

The two most prosperous shopkeepers in the place were Mr. Williams, landlord of the Hanover public house, at the corner of Welbeck Place, leading to Welbeck Mews, and Mr. Forbes, baker, at the opposite corner of Welbeck Place. Mr. Williams's house was all glitter and brightness on the ground floor. He had two large plate-glass windows, divided only by a green and gilt iron pillar, looking into Chetwynd Street, and two large plate glass windows, divided only by a green and gilt iron pillar, looking into Welbeck Place. The door of Mr. Williams's house faced Chetwynd

Street. Mr. Forbes was not so lavish of glass or gaslight as his neighbour, of the Hanover. His only window on the shop-floor, looking into Chetwynd Street, was composed of panes of crown glass of moderate size. In Welbeck Place, on the ground floor, he had a blank wall, and farther up the Place, a modest door. In Chetwynd Street, beyond the shop door, was another door belonging to him; the door to the staircase and dwelling part of the house above the shop. The door in Welbeck Place led also to the base of the staircase, and to the bakehouse at the rear. The side door was not used for business purposes of the bakery. The back of the bakehouse at the rear stood in Welbeck Mews, and here was a door through which Mr. Forbes's flour and coal came in and loaves went out. Mr. Forbes had several bakeries in the neighbourhood. He did not reside in the upper part of his house in Chetwynd Street. He used the first floor as a warehouse. He stored all kinds of odds and ends here, including empty sacks, and sometimes flour. One of the rooms he had used as an office, but gave it up, and now kept it locked, idle. It was not easy to let the upper parts of houses to respectable people in this street. It would not suit his business to let the house in tenements to any lodgers who might offer.

For the second floor he had a most respectable tenant, who paid his rent with punctuality, and gave no trouble at all. There were three rooms on the second or top floor. A sitting-room, a bed-room, and a workshop. The sitting-room was farthest from Welbeck Place, being over the hall and part of the shop. The bed-room was over the middle section of the shop. The work-room was at the eastern end of the house. The bed-room looked into Chetwynd Street. The sitting-room looked into the same street. The work-shop looked into Welbeck Place. The bed-room and sitting-room were immediately over that part of the house used by Mr. Forbes as a store or lumber room. The workshop on the top floor was directly over what once served as an office for the baker, and was now locked up.

The man and his wife in charge of the business slept in the bakehouse at the back which opened into the mews. The only person sleeping in the house proper was the tenant of the second floor. At the top of the staircase, on the second floor, there was a stout door, which could be locked on either side, so that the tenant had a flat all to himself, and was as independent as if he owned a whole house. In the matter of doors, he was rather better off than his neighbours, who had whole houses; for he had, first of all, the door of his own flat at the top of the stairs, and was allowed a key for the outer door into Chetwynd Street, and one for the door into Welbeck Place. For the door at the back, that one from the bakehouse into the mews, he had not been given a key by the landlord, nor did he ask for one. When something was said about it on his taking the place, he laughed, and declared, "Two entrances to my castle are enough for a man of my inches."

The tenant of the top floor of the bakery was Mr. Oscar Leigh. The room over the hall was his bed-room: the room over the store was his sitting-room; the room looking into Welbeck Place was his workshop.

Mr. Oscar Leigh made an unclassified exception to the rule of not wearing broad cloth in Chetwynd Street. He never was seen there in anything else. The residents took no offence at his glossy black frock-coat. The extreme oddness of his figure served as an apology for his infringement upon the rules. In Chetwynd Street the little man was very affable, very gallant, very popular. "Quite the gentleman," ladies of the locality who enjoyed his acquaintance declared. Among the men he was greatly respected. They believed him to be very rich, notwithstanding that he pleaded poverty for living so high up as the top floor of Forbes's bakery, and dispensing with a servant. Mrs. Bolger, the old charwoman, came in the morning and got him his breakfast, and tidied his rooms. That is she tidied the sitting-room and bed-room. No one had ever been admitted to the workshop. Mrs. Bolger left about noon, and that was all the attendance Mr. Leigh needed for the day. He got his other meals out of his lodgings.

The men of the district in addition to believing him rich credited him with universal knowledge. "Mr. Leigh," they said, "knew everything." They always spoke of him as "Mr." Leigh because they were sure he had money. If they believed him to be poor or only comfortable they would have called him little Leigh. His appearance was so uncommon they readily endowed him with supernatural powers. But upon the whole they held his presence among them as a compliment to their own worth, and a circumstance for congratulation, for his conversation when unintelligible seemed to do no one harm, when intelligible was pleasant, and he was free with his society, his talk, and his money.

That Thursday afternoon he walked slowly along Chetwynd Street from the eastern end, nodding pleasantly to those he knew slightly, and exchanging cheerful greetings with those he knew better. When he came to the Hanover public-house, lying between him and his own home, he entered, and, keeping to the right down a short passage, found himself in the private bar.

The Hanover was immeasurably the finest public-house in the neighbourhood. The common bar was plain and rough, and frequented by very plain and rough folk; but the private bar was fitted in mahogany and polished white metal. There no drink of less price than twopence was served, and people in the neighbourhood thought it quite genteel and select. A general feeling prevailed among the men who frequented the private bar of the "Hanover" that the only difference between the best West End club and it was that in the former you got more display, finer furniture, and a bigger room; but that for excellence of liquor and company the latter was the better of the two. It was a well-known fact that Mr. Jacobs, the greengrocer who came from Sloane Street to get three-pennyworth of the famous Hanover rum hot, never smoked anything

less than cigars which he bought cheap of his friend, Mr. Isaacs, at sixpence each. It was a custom for the frequenters in turn to say now and then to Mr. Jacobs, "That's a good cigar, Mr. Jacobs; my word, a good cigar." At which challenge Mr. Jacobs became grave, took the cigar out of his mouth and looked at it carefully while he held it as though making up his mind about its merits, and then said "Ay, sir; pretty fair--pretty fair," or other modest words to that effect. He spoke almost carelessly at such times, as though he had something else on his mind. About once a month the thought he was reserving followed and he added: "I bought a case of them from my friend, Isaacs of Bond Street. They come to about sixpence each." After this he would put his cigar back into his mouth, roll it round carelessly between his lips, and take no more heed of it than if he had bought it for twopence across the counter.

When Mr. Oscar Leigh found himself in the private bar, neither Mr. Jacobs nor anyone else was there. Behind the bar in his shirt-sleeves was the potman who attended to the ordinary customers, and Mr. Williams, the proprietor, in a tweed coat of dark and sober hue.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Williams," said the new-comer, wriggling up on a high cane-seated stool, pulling out a white handkerchief and rubbing his face vigorously, puffing loudly the while.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Leigh," said the landlord in a gracious and pleasant voice. "Very hot walking out of doors."

"Very. Will you have a brandy--a split?"

"It's almost too hot. But I will for the sake of company, as you are kind enough to ask me."

The landlord busied himself getting the drinks, and then set them on the counter. Mr. Leigh took his up, nodded to Williams, saying laconically, "Health," to which the other responded in due form. The hunchback drained his glass at one draught, the landlord sipped his.

"I wanted that badly," said Leigh. "It's good stuff. Anything wrong?" "Well, Mr. Williams, it is my breakfast and dinner--up to this."

"Ah. That's bad. Why didn't you get your breakfast. A man isn't any good unless he eats a hearty breakfast, I say. What's the matter, Mr. Leigh. Anything wrong down in the country?"

"No, no. I feel better already. As you say, that's fine brandy. Give me another. I'm tired. I've had such a morning. I feel better, a good deal better. Isn't it hot?"

"Blazing. So you have had a busy morning?"

"Yes. Oh, very busy morning, Mr. Williams, No breakfast yet, but this," tapping the second glass of brandy and soda. "I must be careful not to knock up my digestion, Mr. Williams. When a man's digestion is upset he isn't fit for figures, for calculations, you know. It takes a man all his time, and the coolest head he can saw off a brass monkey, to make calculations such as I deal in."

"You're a wonderful man, and I always say it." Mr. Williams was a personable, good-looking man, with a large white face and lardy skin. He believed that Mr. Leigh knew a vast number of things, and that he himself had a great reserve of solid wisdom which, for reasons undefined to himself, he kept inactive for his own secret pleasure, as a man might hoard a priceless jewel, gloating over the mere sense of possession. He had a firm conviction that if it were only possible to mould Mr. Leigh's mind and his own into one, the compound might be trusted to perform prodigies, always provided that Mr. Leigh had little or nothing to do with the direction of its activities.

Up to this point of the conversation it had been obvious the two men were not speaking freely. Williams was hesitating and laconic beyond his custom; Leigh was too vivacious, tired, exhausted. During the pauses of their talk the pair frequently looked at one another in a way which would have provoked enquiry.

Mr. Williams at last made a backward jerk of his head at the potman, and then a sideway nod of his head towards the door leading into the bar-parlour. The gesture meant plainly, "Shall I get rid of him?"

Leigh nodded quickly and cordially.

"Tom," said the landlord, turning fully round and putting his back against the bar, "the bitter is off. Go down and put on another."

"Right, sir," said Tom, as he hurried away.

As soon as he was out of view, and before he could be heard among the casks and pipes, Mr. Williams turned round and said, leaning over the counter and speaking in a whisper: "He's gone. No one can hear now."

Mr. Leigh sprinkled some eau-de-cologne from a tiny silver flask in his palm, buried his face in his hands and inhaled the perfume greedily. "Hah! That is so refreshing. Hah!" The long lean hands, with the glossy shining black hairs, shook as he held them an inch from his face. The withdrawal of the potman seemed to have relieved him of restraint.

"Well," he said, laying both his thumbs on the pewter top of the counter, and pressing hard with his forefingers under the leaf of the counter, "you were saying, Williams----?" He looked into the face of the other with quick blinking eyes and swayed his misshapen body slowly to and fro.

"I wasn't saying anything at all," said the landlord, raising his black, thin, smooth eyebrows half-way up his pallid, smooth, greasy forehead.

"I know," whispered Leigh eagerly. He now drew himself up close to the counter "I meant what you were going to say. Did you watch?" keenly and anxiously.

"I did."

"At between twelve and one?"

"Yes."

"And did you see anything?" tremulously.

"I did," stolidly.

"What? Tell me what you saw?"

"You told me a man was to come and wind up your clock, as near to twelve as could be, and you asked me to watch him, and keep an eye on him, to time his coming, and see that he was sharp to his hour and that he wound up the machinery by the left-hand lever close to the window."

"Quite right, quite right. I wanted to find out if the fellow would be punctual and do my work for me while I was away in the country, down in Millway. Did you see him come? Did you see him come in through the shafts and straps and chains?" The blinking of the eyes had now ceased and Leigh was staring fixedly, with dark devouring eyes upon the pallid, lardy, stolid face of the publican.

"No, I did not see him come. The window," pointing up to the top window of the house at the opposite corner of the road, "was dark at twelve by our clock."

"By *your* clock. But *your* clock is always five minutes fast, isn't it? You didn't forget *your* clock is *always* five minutes fast?"

"No, I did not forget that. Our clock is fast to allow us to clear the house at closing time. But I thought he might be a few minutes too soon."

"He couldn't. He couldn't be a minute too soon. He couldn't be a second too soon. He couldn't be the ten thousandth part of a second too soon."

Williams smiled slightly. "Couldn't be a second too soon, Mr. Leigh! What's a second? Why *that!*" He tapped his hand on the pewter top of the counter before and after saying the word "that."

"Let me tell you, Mr. Williams, he couldn't have been there the one millionth part of a second before the stroke of twelve. But go on. Go on. I am all anxiety to hear if he was punctual. Tell me what you *did* see." His eyes were blazing with haste.

"Well, you are a strange man, and a positive man too. At twelve by my clock the room was dark. We were very busy then. I looked up again at six minutes past twelve by *my* clock here, a minute past twelve by my own watch, which I always keep right by Greenwich, and it's a good chronometer, as you know----"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the little man hastily. "It's a good watch. Go on!"

"Light was in the room then. A dull light such as you have when you're at work."

"Yes, dim on account of my weak eyes. And by the light you saw----?"

"I saw the man sitting in your place, and in a few seconds he began to wind up the machinery by the lever on the left near the window."

"You saw him working at the lever?" in a voice almost inaudible.

"Yes."

"You saw him often between that and closing time? between that and half-past twelve?"

"Well, yes, I may say often. Three or four times anyway."

"And each time he was winding up the machinery?"

"Now and then."

"Hah! Only now and then."

"About as often as you yourself would, it seemed to me."

"And, tell me, did you see his face. Did he waste any of his precious time gaping out of the window into the bar?"

"He turned his head towards the window only once, while I was watching, and I saw him plain enough."

"What was he like? Very like me?"

"Like you, Mr. Leigh! Not he! Not a bit like you! Stop, are you trying if I am speaking the truth?" Williams became suddenly suspicious, ready to resent any imputation upon his word.

"No, no, no. My dear Williams. Nothing of the kind, I assure you. Only I am most desirous to know all facts, all you saw. You know how well I have guarded the secrets of my great clock. I am most anxious that no one but this man who wound the clock for me last night should learn anything about it. Suppose he let several people into the room, I should have all my secrets pried into and made common property."

"And can't he tell everybody if he cares to betray you?"

"Not very well. He cannot. He is deaf and dumb, and can't write," with a triumphant smile. "Describe what the man you saw was like."

"Well, you are a wonderful man, Mr. Leigh. He was a broad-shouldered big man with fair hair and beard. He wore a round hat the whole time, and, like you, sat very steady when he was not winding up.

"That's he! That's he to the life! I told him how to sit. I showed him how to sit. And tell me, when closing time came he stood up and wriggled out of the clock?"

"I did not see. We were shut a minute before half-past twelve by my own watch. I kept my eyes on him until half-past twelve. He must have turned out the light before he got up, for the gas went out at half-past twelve, just as he stopped working the lever."

"Yes. And did you watch a while after, to see there was no danger of fire?"

"Yes, a minute or two, but all kept dark and I knew he was gone."

"Hah! Thank you, very much, Williams. I am very, very much obliged to you."

"Oh, it's nothing."

"Williams, it's a great deal. If you want to do me another favour say nothing about the matter. I don't want anyone to know this man was in my workshop. A lot of curious and envious thieves would gather round him and try to get some of my secrets out of him."

"All right. I'll say nothing."

Leigh took out his little silver flask of eau-de-cologne, moistened his hands with the perfume and drew the pungent fragrant vapour noisily into his nose. "So refreshing," he whispered audibly, "So refreshing." Then lifting his face out of his hands he held the flask toward the landlord, saying, "Try some. It's most refreshing."

"Pah, no," said Williams with a gesture of scorn, "I never touch such stuff."

"Hah! If you were like me you would. If you were always reeking with oil, steeping in the fish-oil of machines, you'd be glad enough to take the smell of it out of your nose with any perfume. I told you I have been busy this morning. The want of my breakfast, and the business I was on, pretty nearly knocked me up. Bah! The dust of that job is in my throat still."

"Drink up your brandy and soda and have another with me," said the landlord encouragingly.

"No, no. I won't have any more. Hah! it was a dusty job."

"What was it, Mr. Leigh, may I ask?"

"Well, you have done me a good turn in keeping your eye on that fellow for me, and you're going to do me another good turn by saying nothing about it; so I'll tell you. Have you ever heard anything of Albertus Magnus?"

"Albertus Magnums? No, I never heard of magnums of that brand."

"Hah! 'Tisn't a wine, but a man. Albertus Magnus was a man who studied magic, one of the greatest of the magicians of old. He attributes wonderful powers to the powdered asphaltum of mummies."



"Oh, magnums of Mumm? Of course I have heard of magnums of Mumm."

"No! I don't mean wine; the mummy coffins were filled with a kind of pitch, and Albertus attributes wonderful powers to this old pitch which the ancient Egyptians poured hot over the dead. It was used by the Egyptians to prevent the ravages of time upon the faces of the dead. Now, I am going to paint the dials of my clock with mummy-pitch to prevent time ravaging the faces of my clock. Do you see? Hah!"

"I always said, Mr. Leigh, that you were a wonderful, a most wonderful man." Williams's mind had been plunged by the words of the other into a dense mist. He could see nothing and he was sure there must be a wonderfully profound meaning in the speaker's words because he could make nothing of them.

"And to-day I bought a mummy, the mummy of a great Egyptian prince, for I must have good mummy asphaltum to preserve the faces of my clock from the influence of time. Asphaltum is a bituminous pitch, as you know," said Leigh, getting down off the high stool and preening himself like a bedraggled raven.

By this time Williams began to realize that the dwarf had, for some reason or other, with a view to use in some unknown way, become possessed of a mummified prince. He had never before spoken to any one who owned a mummy; he knew, by report, that such things were to be seen in the British Museum, but he had never been inside the walls of that crushing-looking fane of history. It was utterly impossible for him to imagine any way in which a mummy could be employed; but this only went to prove how necessary to Leigh a mummy must be. Now that he came to think of the matter he found himself surprised Leigh had not had a mummy long ago. His face relaxed into a smile. "And what are you going to do with his royal highness?" he asked, chuckling.

"I only want the asphaltum as a pigment."

"But what are you going to do with his royal highness?" he repeated, being slow to relinquish this cleverness of his, which to him had the rare glory of a joke.

"Oh," said Leigh, preparing to go, "I am told they burn beautifully. What do you say to burning him as a guy in Welbeck Place on the fifth of November? Ha-ha-ha!" and with a harsh laugh the little man hurried out of the Hanover, leaving Mr. Williams pleased and puzzled.

## CHAPTER VI.

### OSCAR LEIGH'S CAVE OF MAGIC.

When Mr. Oscar Leigh emerged from the door of the public house, he crossed to the other side of Welbeck Place and moved rapidly along the front of Forbes's bakery until he reached the private entrance to that house. Then he opened the door with a latch-key and entered. In the hall there was nothing but a small hand-truck standing up against the wall. He ascended four flights of stairs, found himself opposite the door of his flat, opened that door with another latch-key, and went in.

The door at the head of the stairs rose up from the edge of the topmost step so that there was no landing outside it. The whole depth of the landing was enclosed by the door and belonged to the tenant. The little man slammed the door behind him and went down a passage leading east. He came to the sitting-room, passed through it, then through the sleeping chamber beyond and thence into a completely dark passage, out of which opened two doors, one into the sleeping chamber from which he had come, and one into the workshop or clock-room. The latter door he unlocked with a small patent key. He pushed the door open very cautiously. Before the space between the edge and the jamb was an inch wide, some small object placed on the inside against the door, fell with a slight noise. He now pushed boldly, entered, and closed the door behind him. It shut with a snap and he was locked in.

The noise of some object falling had been caused by the over-turning of a small metal egg-cup on the floor. It had been so placed that the door could not be pushed open from the passage without upsetting it, for a strip of wood two inches wide was fixed on the door an inch and a half from the ground and this ledge touched the egg-cup while the door was shut and pressed against the upper rim of the cup the moment the door began to move inward. Around the spot on which the vessel had fallen spread a little pool of liquid on the floor.

Leigh stooped, dipped the tip of his long thin left forefinger in the liquid and then touched the top of his tongue with the wet tip of his finger. A gleam of satisfaction and triumph shone on his face. "Sweet," he whispered, as he straightened his crooked figure. "Sweet as sugar! Any fool who wanted to find if his sanctuary had been defiled by strange feet during his absence might think of placing a vessel of water against the inside of his door. There is nothing easier than to draw it up close to the door from the outside. All you have to do is to place the vessel on a long slip of paper in the line of the door, and then, having shut the door, draw the paper carefully under the door and away from beneath the vessel. The ground must be level and the paper smooth, and you must have a nice ear and a steady hand. Any fool could manage that.

"Then if defiling hands opened the door and overturned the vessel and spilt the water, and the hands belonged to a head that wasn't that quite of a fool, the hands could replace the vessel full of water against the shut door as it had first been placed there. But the sugar was a stroke of genius, of ray genius! Who that did not know the secret would think of putting sugar in the water?" Leigh touched his tongue again with the tip of his finger. "Sweet as honey. Here is conclusive proof that my sanctuary has been inviolate while I have been from home. Poor Williams! A useful man in his way; very. One of those men you turn to account and then fling on a dung-hill to rot. A worthy soul. I have succeeded in my first great experiment. I wonder how it goes with my dumb deputy of last night? Ha-ha-ha!"

He turned away from the door and confronted a thicket of shafts and rods and struts and girders and pipes and pulleys and wheels and drums and chains and levers and cranks and weights and springs and cones and cubes and hammers and cords and bands and bells and bellows and gongs and reeds, through all of which moved a strange weird tremulousness and plaintive perpetual low sounds, and little whispers of air and motion, as though some being, hitherto uncreate, were about to take visible life out of inertia, and move in the form of a vast harmonious entity in which all this distracting detail of movement would emerge into homogeneous life.

From where Oscar Leigh stood, contemplating his machine, it would be absolutely impossible for anything stouter than a wand to reach the one window through the interminable complicacies of the clock.

Again a look of satisfaction and triumph came into his narrow swarthy face as he muttered, "Even if anyone had got as far as where I stand, he could stir no further without unintentionally blazing his way as plainly as ever woodman did with axe in Canadian forest."

The framework of the clock consisted of four upright polished steel pillars, one at each angle of a parallelogram. The pillars touched the ceiling of the room about nine feet from the floor. One side of the parallelogram measured twelve feet, the other ten. The sole window in the room was in the middle of one of the larger sides of the parallelogram, and could be approached only through the body of the clock itself. The body of the clock close by the window was not fully filled up with mechanism, and this free space, combined with the embrasure of the window, made a small interior chamber, in which were a stout high-backed easy Windsor chair, and an oak watchmaker's bench. The framework of the clock was secured to the floor by screws.

From the outside, where Leigh now stood leaning his back against the wall, it was impossible to approach the window except through the body of the clock; for the mechanism filled all the space from floor to ceiling, and with the exception of the bay around the window, all the space from the outer pillars to the wall.

The main body of the mechanism within the four polished steel pillars filled about half the room. In the remainder, which took the form of a narrow passage running round three sides of the clock, were small pieces of mechanism, some detached from the main body, some connected by slender shafts or tiny bands. This passage contained a single chair, a small oak table, and a narrow stretcher bed.

After a long and searching look through the metallic network of the machine, Oscar Leigh sat down on the one chair, and resting his elbow on the table, gave himself up to thought.

The ticking, and clicking, and clanking, and whizzing, and buzzing of the machinery made altogether no louder sound than the noise of a busy thoroughfare in London, and there was no perceptible vibration. In that room Leigh was completely unconscious of sound. While all the machinery went as designed, he heard nothing of it unless he bent his attention upon hearing. If any movement became irregular, or any movement that ought to go on suddenly stopped, he would have been as much startled as though a pistol had been exploded at his ear. So long as all went well he heard nothing of it. When he began to work at the clock he indulged in the habit of telling himself aloud what he was meaning to achieve with the mechanism; later he altered his method, and told the clock what it was going to do, speaking to it as if it were a docile child of enormous potentialities. Later still, he spoke much aloud to himself on many subjects when in the loneliness of his isolated lodging; he knew that distance from people secured him from being overheard, and the sound of his own voice mitigated his solitude. Here in this place, the sound of his own voice was often the only way he had of assuring himself that he had still power independent of the machine, that all his movements were not because of some weight or spring involved in the bewildering intricacies of the clock.

"Ay," he said, this Thursday afternoon, crossing one of his short legs over the other. "I have succeeded so far in my labours here. I began my clock as an excuse, as a cloak to cover"--he waved his hand as if to waft aside smoke before his eyes, although he was not smoking--"to cover any other matter that might come my way. It has grown on me from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, from year to year, until it has swelled in size and efficacy altogether beyond my original designs or desires. I wished to have a slave that might be used as an excuse for solitariness and eccentricity in dealing quietly in precious metals and precious stones, and now I find myself face to face with a master. Whither will this master lead me? I do not know. I do not care. I first intended this room as a chamber of mystery; it has become a cave of magic. My heart ought to be drunk with joy. My heart would be drunk with joy only for----"

He paused and waved his hand once more before his eyes as if to clear the air before him. "Only for that girl. This mere girl, this mere Edith Grace, this mere Edith Grace whom I have seen but----"

He paused and rose. An unusual sound in the street, aroused him.

"What noise is that in the street? Something out of the common in Welbeck Place."

He caught hold of one of the polished steel pillars that formed the framework of the breathing machine and dropped his chin on his misshapen chest. "With care I could now become rich--no matter how. A fortnight ago I brought all my arrangements to perfection. I have hit upon a plan for transcending the wonders of mystery gold with its tin and platinum and copper imposture. I have hit upon the plan of making miracle gold! Ay! miracle gold, the secret of which will die with me when it has served my purpose. I can be rich and give my poor old mother every luxury and pleasure riches may secure for one so old and so afflicted. A fortnight ago I had made up my mind to go on with the manufacture of miracle gold. I am but a weak, fickle creature, I who had been so firm and strong, and whole hearted! I who had been as whole hearted as I am marred bodied! I advertise for a companion for my poor old mother and I see this girl, this Edith Grace, with her airs and graces and high notions.

"I took that sight of her as a sign, as a bid for my soul, for my better self. I said to myself, 'Will you forego the miracle gold and cleave to her instead?' I would have given all the fair gold and foul gold in the world for her, with her airs and graces and high notions. A man must fill his heart with something, no matter in what kind of a body that heart may be lodged. I had made up my mind to fill it with the god of wealth. I had made up my mind to erect the throne of Plutus in my soul. I would make gold, some way, and I had lighted upon an ingenious method, an original method, an old alchemy under a new name, and then I saw her, and my resolve was shaken, it crumbled down with Plutus and his throne.

"And now she will not have me, she will not rest under the roof to which I am free, she flees from me as from vile contagion, and I am driven back upon this miracle gold. Timmons will be here with some of it tonight. That is the first step on the way Down----"

"There's that noise again below. Let me see what it is."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE NEGRO JUGGLER.

Meanwhile two unusual things had taken place in Chetwynd Street; from the western end (the street ran nearly due east and west) the canons regarding broadcloth had been violated once more, for John Hanbury, twenty-six years of age, of independent fortune, had entered it in a black frock coat and low black felt hat, with Dora Ashton, aged twenty, to whom he was privately engaged to be married. Dora had never seen any of the poorer parts of London, and he, after much expostulation and objection, consented to escort her through Chetwynd Street, not a mile distant from Westminster Abbey.

At the eastern end, William Sampson, Negro, and Street Entertainer, had entered, passed down the street until he came to Welbeck Place, and there prepared to perform, hoping to win a few coppers from the loungers about the mews and the Hanover public-house. Men with faces blackened by pursuit of various trades and arts were common in Chetwynd Street; but a black man, wholly a product of nature, was a rare visitor.

"I-I never was in a place of this kind before, Jack," said Dora Ashton, clinging more closely to Hanbury's arm as they moved along the left-hand side of the street.

"I should think not," he said shortly. He did not like the expedition at all. He was not accustomed to wearing a round topped hat when escorting a lady in London; but on this occasion he put one on rather than provoke the inhabitants to throw brickbats at him. When Dora suggested that he should wear a tweed coat he declined point blank. A line must be drawn somewhere.

"I'm--I'm not in--in the least afraid, Jack," she said with grave tremulousness in her fresh voice.

"Not in the least, of course!" he said ungraciously, scornfully. "But you *would* come, you know. Nice place, eh? Nice looking houses, eh? Aren't you glad you came?" His manner was contemptuous, almost fierce. Jack Hanbury had the reputation of being, clever, extremely clever. He was very fond of Dora, but like many clever young men, he had a great scorn of women when they assumed, or took an interest in things out of their sphere. Dora knew the impetuous, volcanic nature of Jack, and, under ordinary circumstances, admired and smiled at his outbursts, for she knew that while they might be provoked by her, personally, they were not directed against her personally, but against her sex generally.

"Indeed, Jack, you wrong me, if you think I am alarmed. I am only surprised, not frightened."

"You would come, you know," he repeated, a little softened. The heart of the man would be hard indeed, if he could be insensible to the beauty of her face and her voice, and the touch of her trembling, confiding, delicate, brown-gloved hand.

With a little shudder of reassurance, she looked round, "And, Jack, are these the people who live here?"

"Yes," he answered, moving his eyes from right to left in disdain, "these are the people who live here. I told you they weren't nice. Are they? How should you like to live here in *this* part of Westminster?"

She shuddered again and pressed his arm to convince herself of his presence and protection. "It is of no consequence whether I should like to live here or not----"

"No; because you are not obliged to live here."

"That is not what I was going to say. It is of no consequence whether I should like to live here or not. What is of consequence is that these poor people have to live here, Jack."

"They aren't people at all, I tell you. The *people* of no country are people in the sense of fine ladies."

"Jack!" she said, in protest and expostulation.

"They are not people, I say. It is only philanthropists and other idle men, and those who want the applause of the crowd, who call them people. Look at him, for instance. There is a creature who is more than one of the people. He is a Man, and a Brother too. Ugh!" Hanbury turned away in disgust.

William Sampson, the negro, a tall man with round shoulders and restless eyes, was gesticulating violently, at the open end of Welbeck Place, and addressing loud speech, apparently to the first-floor windows of the houses opposite him in Chetwynd Street.

"What is he, Jack?" asked the girl, whose composure was gradually returning.

"Can't you see, he's a Nigger?"

"I know. But what is he going to do? Why is there a crowd gathering about him?"

The two drew up under the windows which the Negro seemed to be addressing. A couple of dozen people had drifted near the Negro, who was now declaring, in stentorian voice, that he undertook to perform feats hitherto unattempted by man.

"I don't know what he's going to do, at first. Collect money in the end, I am certain. Conjuring; balancing straws or chairs; fire-eating, or something of that kind. Would you like to stay and see, Dora?" His manner softened still further, and he bent his body towards her in a caressing and lover-like way.

She looked up and down, apprehensively. "Yes, if you are not afraid."

"Afraid! Afraid!" he laughed, "afraid of what? You do not think he is a cannibal? and even if he were, they don't permit Niggers to eat harmless English folk in the public streets of London. The days for that kind of thing are gone by here," and he laughed again.

She looked at him protestingly. "You know I didn't mean any such folly. You ought to know what I did mean."

"I confess I don't. Tell me what you did mean."

She coloured slightly. "I meant did you think this is a fit place for me to stand still in?"

He became grave all at once and glanced hastily around. "No one of your acquaintance will see you here, if you mean that."

"Then I will stay," she answered with a little sigh. She had not dreaded any one seeing her. Jack was very dull, she thought.

He caught a look of disappointment on her face, and gathered from it that he had not answered her question as she expected. He added quickly: "They will not molest you, if that is your doubt."

She shook her head. "I cannot bear--it's very silly, I know--I cannot bear to hear people say dreadful things. Will that Negro swear, Jack?"

He laughed. "That Negro swear! Oh, dear no. The Lord Chamberlain would not license the piece if there were any bad language in it. Let us cross over, Dora, if you would really care to see. You may be sure he will use no bad language. He would not dare go half as far in that way as the writer of a comedy for a Quaker audience."

The two crossed and stood in front of Forbes's bakery, a few yards from the thin crowd around the Negro. The people noticing that the young girl and her companion were well dressed, fell back a little right and left to leave a clear view of the performer. The people did this not from servility or courtesy, but that the Negro might benefit by the contribution from the well-off strangers.

The Negro turned his face towards John Hanbury and Dora Ashton. He had beside him, on the ground, two cubes of stone, one the size of an iron half-hundredweight, the other somewhat bigger. In his hand he held a small square of thin board.

"Yes, ladies and gentlemen," said he, "like a great opera singer, I earn the bread I put into my mouth with the mouth I put it into. I have a lovely mouth," opening an enormous cavern and showing a magnificent set of teeth, the lower row of which projected half an inch beyond the upper.

Dora shuddered and clung closer to her companion. Hanbury straightened his back and squared his shoulders, and whispered: "Don't be afraid, Dora." He was tall and powerful, and solid-looking for a man of six-and-twenty. He could have answered for any man among the spectators. The Negro stood half-a-head taller, and looked powerful and stubborn. Hanbury surveyed him curiously and finished his examination by thinking, "I shouldn't mind taking him on. I dare say he knows how to use his fists." He himself had taken lessons with the gloves, and was a creditable amateur in the art. Young amateur boxers always look on every strange man as a possible antagonist. Hanbury felt great pleasure in his own physical prowess when he thought of the hand of the young girl on his arm and looked down at the pale olive face and into the confiding hazel eyes. "Don't be afraid," he murmured.

"Yes, ladies and gentlemen," the Negro went on, "I grind my own corn with my own mill-stones," showing his fine, large, white teeth. "Men in Parliament are celebrated for their jaw, so am I. I am like them all round. With my teeth and my mouth and my jaw, I get my living. Here is my stock in trade," patting his chin and cheek and teeth, "and I never can sell them that puts faith in me, as the Parliament men do, for these here things of mine would be no use to anyone else, and I couldn't sell 'em the same as votes if I would." He made a hideous grimace, at which there was another laugh mingled with a cheer.

This laugh brought Mr. Williams, landlord of the Hanover, to his door, and finally into the street. He glanced at the Negro and the crowd with benignant toleration, then turning his eyes upwards he saw Leigh at the window, whither he had been attracted by the noise of the crowd. The window was open, and Leigh was leaning out and watching the group below.

Williams called out to the hunchback, "His trumpeter isn't dead," nodding to the Negro. "Come down Mr. Leigh, and see the fun." A man who could afford to give good English money for a dead Egyptian prince would surely be interested in a living African black, whom he could see and hear for nothing.

Leigh hesitated for a moment, then called out, "All right," and disappeared from the window.

Meanwhile the athlete was continuing his harangue. Such artistes are prodigal of personal history, reticent of the feats they intend to perform. This one told the audience his name was William Sampson, but that the President of the United States, King Ja-Ja, and the Emperor of China, called him Black Sam, when he dined with them in private. "The ladies, who are to a man fond of me, call me Black Sam too. You may laugh, but you won't see me blush when you laugh at me. You don't find this Nigger so green as to blush because he's popular with the ladies. Not me! I was born at midnight, in the Black Country near Brummagem, that accounts for my dark complexion, and I'm in mourning for my great grandfather, Adam, which accounts for my being called Sam, and also for my nobby head of hair."

He paused awhile, and walked round the two cubes of stone which he had placed on the

ground. He surveyed them as though they were living animals of priceless value. Then he returned to his first position facing Welbeck Place, and resumed:

"I carry them stones there about with me to prove to any man, who won't take my word for it, that I am the strongest jawed man in all the world. Ladies and gentlemen, when I was last in America, I went out West. You have often heard of the Rocky Mountains--there," pointing to the stones, "there they are. Now I am going to prove my words to you."

"What will he do with the stones, Jack?" whispered Dora, with some apprehension of danger.

"Eat them," answered Hanbury in a whisper. "Didn't you hear him say so?"

At this point Oscar Leigh opened the side door of Forbes's bakery, the door in Welbeck Place, and stepped into the street.

"You're just in time," shouted Williams, across the street, "He's going to begin."

John Hanbury, with Dora Ashton on his arm, was standing at the curb on the footway in Chetwynd Place against the blank wall of Forbes's bakery.

About fifty people, men, women, and children, were now gathered at the head of Welbeck Place. Half-a-dozen men stood behind the Negro, between him and the gateway of Welbeck Mews, at the end of the Place. There was a clear view of the Negro from where Hanbury and Miss Ashton stood, and from where Williams the landlord lounged directly opposite. When Leigh reached Williams's side nothing intervened between him and the stranger except the Negro.

Leigh took up his place by the landlord, without a word, and stood leaning heavily on his stick. He fixed his quick, piercing eyes on the Negro.

Black Sam had finished his introductory speech, and was getting ready for his performance. His preparations consisted in violent gestures menacing the four cardinal points of the heavens, and then the four cardinal points of earth, and finally the two stone cubes on the ground in front of him.

Leigh watched with a cynical smile. "What is he going to do with the stones, landlord?"

"Try which is the hardest, his head or them," said Williams, with a laugh. He had a great turn for humour when in the open air near his house.

"Then the stones are going to have a bad time?" said Leigh.

The Negro first took up the smaller block, tossed it high into the air, and let it fall on the road, saying, in a defiant voice, "Eighteen pounds." Then he took the larger block, and treating it in the same way, said, "Twenty-four pounds. The two together forty-two pounds!"

"And not an ounce more taken off for cash down?" said a man in the crowd.

"Any gentleman that doubts my word is at liberty to weigh them. If I am a pound out, I'll stand a bottle of champagne to the men, give a shilling's worth of jujubes to the children, and present each lady here with a gold wedding-ring." The people laughed.

"And a husband?" asked the man who had spoken before.

"And the best husband in this whole country--meaning myself." He placed his hand on his heart and bowed profoundly.

The people were in the best of good humour, except the children, who thought that a serious matter, such as jujubes, was being treated with disgraceful levity.

Then Black Sam began a series of tricks with the stones. Before starting, he placed on the ground the square piece of white thin board he held in his hand. It was about a quarter of an inch thick, and six inches by four. Then he balanced a stone on the point of the first finger of each hand, and then jerked the lesser stone from the point of his left fore-finger to the top of the larger stone, still balanced on the fore finger of his right hand, and kept both upright on the point of his right fore-finger for half a minute.

Suddenly he dropped both towards the ground together, and kicking away the heavier one as they fell caught the lighter one on the toe of his left foot, flung this stone into the air, and received and retained it on his right shoulder.

"That must hurt his shoulder dreadfully," whispered Dora.

"Padded and resined," said Hanbury laconically, unsympathetically. He was interested in the performance by this time. It was new to him, and an amateur athlete is always wanting to know, although always extremely knowing.

The Negro stooped carefully, seized the larger stone, threw it a few feet into the air, and caught and balanced it on the top of the smaller one still resting on his shoulder.

"Good," said Hanbury, in the tone of a connoisseur, who, although he knows much, is not ungenerous.

The people applauded out loud, and twopence were cast on the ground close to the black man's huge feet. He smiled at the applause, and affected to know nothing of the twopence. The mercenary spirit ought not to exist in the bosom of the real artiste--for pence, anyway.

Black Sam shook his back, and the two stones fell to the ground. Then he stooped once more and took up the piece of flat white board and placed it between his gleaming teeth, rolling back his lips so that the spectators might see the white teeth closed upon the white wood. His lower jaw projected enormously, even for a Negro. By no motion of the lower jaw could its front teeth be made to meet the front teeth of the upper.

"Going to bolt the timber?" asked the landlord of the Hanover, with a laugh and a wink at Leigh.

The Negro took no notice of the question. Leigh did not see the wink. Something more wonderful than the contortions of Black Sam had at that moment attracted Leigh's attention. He had caught sight of Dora Ashton; the roadway between her and him was free save for the Negro, and Leigh's eyes had travelled beyond the burly man of colour and were fixed on the slender form and pale olive face of the girl, with an expression of amazement. He looked like an animal that suddenly sees something it dreads, and from which it desires to remain concealed. He seemed stupefied, stunned, dazed. All the scorn had gone out of his face. He leaned forward more heavily than formerly on his crooked stick. He appeared to doubt the evidence of his senses.

The Negro went on with his performance.

John Hanbury's attention was wholly absorbed in Black Sam. Leigh never took his fascinated gaze off the girl at Hanbury's side. Hanbury was an athlete examining the feats of another athlete. Leigh was a man looking at the incredible, seeing the invisible, beholding in full daylight a ghost whom he must not challenge, and whom he cannot leave. Dora was watching with mingled fear, disgust and pity, the dangerous gyrations of a man of pathetically low type, a man who seemed in his own person connecting the race of man with the race of beasts, as put forth in recent theories.

With a piece of wood in his mouth, Black Sam made the circuit of the little crowd. The line of gleaming white teeth upon the line of white wood in the distorted ebony face made the head seem cut in two at the line of the folded back upper lip, and the polished upper part of the head with its rolling eyes, as if placed on a trencher.

At length he took up his position in the centre of the ring. Then he stooped, raised the lesser stone, and placed it on the piece of white board, now at right angles to the ebony glittering face, and parallel to the horizon.

Then he did a thing that looked horrible.

Still keeping the piece of white board parallel to the horizon, he began slowly leaning his head back. This he did by gradually opening his huge mouth from ear to ear, the piece of wood being jammed in the angle of the jaws, and resting on the teeth of the huge undershot lower jaw. He bent back the upper part of his head until his eyes stared vertically into the unclouded blue sky of the June afternoon. It appeared as if the Negro's lower jaw had been torn down from the skull by the weight of the stone, and would presently be rent from its place and dashed to the ground. The red palate and arch of the gullet were visible above the white tongue of wood lying on the teeth, and jammed into the angles of the jaws above the invisible red tongue of the mouth.

All eyes were fixed on the Negro, all eyes but those of Oscar Leigh. His eyes were rivetted on the face of Dora Ashton.

The crowd watched the Negro in breathless expectancy. Oscar Leigh watched the girl in amazement, incredulity, fear.

With both hands Black Sam bespoke attention. All saw and responded, all but Oscar Leigh. He had eyes for no one, nothing but the girl opposite him. He was in a trance of wonder.

Suddenly, while the head remained motionless, the lower jaw of the Negro swept upon its hinges, the piece of wood was brought into swift contact with the upper teeth, and the stone, impelled from the catapult formed by the muscles of the jaws, flew over the Negro's head, and fell to the ground a dozen feet behind his clumsy heels.

There was a shout of applause from all.

Dora drew back with a sigh of relief.

"I never saw anything like that," said the landlord of the Hanover to Oscar Leigh, with the Negro in his mind.

"Nor I," said Oscar Leigh, "anything like it," having the girl opposite in his mind. "Pray excuse

me!" He crossed the road, and placed himself on the curb within a couple of paces of where she stood, and stared at her furtively with unbelieving eyes.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE JUGGLER'S LAST FEAT.

After the shout of applause this time fell a little shower of coppers. The Negro, with as much rapidity as he had before shown deliberateness, placed the heavier stone on the piece of board and shot it still further behind him by the force of the mere muscles of his jaws.

"He's about done now," said the landlord of the Hanover to the air. Leigh was no longer near, and no one else within hail seemed worthy of a prosperous licensed victualler's speech outside his own bar and house. Inside the portals he was a publican, outside he was a private being with individual existence, rights and tastes, an impressively large waistcoat and watch-chain to match, and an opinion of himself out of all proportion with even his waistcoat or watch-chain. When half a man is concealed from you behind a counter, his individuality can never impress you nearly so much as when he stands forth disenthralled from sole to crown. The ordinary man glides into his most private aspect when he slips behind the door of his own home; the publican when he emerges from his house.

The Negro now took up the two stones and placing the less on the greater and the greater on the white ledge of wood jerked them both together over his head, as easily as he had thrown the light one by itself.

Then he made a gesture for silence. All the spectators were more than attentive, all except Oscar Leigh, who with the air of one in a trance of perplexity and wonder stole glances at the exquisite line of the girl's cheek and forehead; no more of her face could be seen from his position. She was bent forward and breathless with excitement. She had often seen feats of strength and dexterity before, many more wonderful than Sam's; but she had never until now stood in the arena with the performer. The propinquity was fascinating, the presence horrible, the situation novel, exciting, confounding.

Black Sam drew the two stones towards him with his huge unhandsome feet, and stooped down, holding the piece of wood still in his mouth. He moved his feet a little this way, a little that, selecting their final resting place with care. He passed the cubes back between his legs and, setting one on the other, sat on the upper of the two, looked up and expanding his chest drew a full breath. The people could not now take their gaze off him if they tried. Still Oscar Leigh had no eyes for him. He watched the girl as though his life, the fate of his soul, depended on not losing sight of her for an instant. "She must have seen me, and yet she does not notice me! Are her presence here and her indifference to my presence the result of magic--of real magic, not charlatan tricks?" he thought.

Black Sam lifted his body a couple of inches, resting his entire weight on his feet then passing his hands back he slid them under the lower cube, and raised both hands from the ground, the lower cube resting on the palms. With back bent like a bow he thrust out his head, holding the piece of board in his mouth parallel to the horizon, then he swung his body, first forward, then backward, and with a prodigious effort and violent thrust of his arms and head between his legs, threw the two cubes up into the air, straightened himself like a flash, stepped back a pace and, still holding the piece of white board in his enormous mouth parallel to the horizon, caught the two cubes on it as they fell.

There was a loud cry of exultation. Hanbury forgot the girl by his side, forgot everything but the black man and his feat and shouted:

"Well done by---, Nigger!"

Dora started as though she had been stung. She had more horror of an oath than of a serpent or a blow. She had never heard one so near her before. The words men utter with no thought behind them beyond the desire for emphasis had to her a meaning, not only a meaning through the reason but through the imagination. When she heard the oath her imagination became filled with the spectacle of an august and outraged Presence. Profanity was more horrible to her than almost any other crime. It was a deliberate impiety, a daring and blasphemous insolence.

Hanbury became conscious of the girl's presence by her abrupt withdrawal of her hand from his arm. He turned his eyes, flashing with admiration of the Negro's dexterity and strength.



"Wasn't that good?" he asked Dora joyously.

She looked bewildered, and glanced hastily round as though seeking a way of escape. She opened her mouth to speak, but no word came.

"What is it?" he asked in alarm. "Are you not well, Dora?"

"Oh, Jack, how dreadful! You terrify me!"

"I--I--I," he cried swiftly, and in sore and sudden perplexity and dismay. He had shouted out the oath without consciousness that he spoke. In a moment his words came back upon his ears and he recollected her dread. He flushed with confusion and remorse. "Oh, Dora, I beg your pardon, I am miserably ashamed of myself. There is no excuse for me; it was the act of a blackguard--worse still, Dora, of a cad. Pray, pray forgive me."

"I--I am frightened now," she said turning pale and swaying slightly to and fro. She looked at the entrance to Welbeck Place; it was by this time choked up with a dense crowd of people watching the performance.

"Would you like to go away dear? You look ill. Oh, pray forgive me! What I said was forced from me by the excitement of the moment. It was only the result of a bad habit. There was no meaning in my words."

She began to recover her equanimity. To force a way through that crowd would be very disagreeable to her. She replaced her hand on Hanbury's arm saying: "No. Let us stay and see this out. I am all right again. I am very foolish, Jack. Try to forgive me, Jack."

"Forgive you, my darling! Forgive you for what? The only thing I can't forgive you for is tolerating a beast like me."

"Hush, Jack! Don't speak of it again. I am quite well now, and you are the dearest Jack in the world, only don't say that dreadful thing any more, it makes me quite ill. It may be silly, but I cannot help myself. What is the Negro going to do now? Look!"

"I don't know. I don't care. I only care for you, about you, and here I have distressed you, shocked you. It is horrible. You feared to stay lest the Nigger should use strong language, and now it is I, your protector, who offends against good manners and good morals, and outrages your ears!" He had drawn her close to him by the hand that lay on his arm and was pouring his words in a low voice into her ears, his eyes blazing with earnestness, his face working with solicitude and remorse.

"There, Jack, it is all over and forgiven long ago. If you want to please me, let the matter rest. I am much interested in the performance. I never saw anything like it before. Tell me what he is doing now? I cannot make out. What does he mean by throwing himself down in that way and lying still? What are the people laughing at? Is he ill? Is he hurt? Why doesn't someone go to him? What do these foolish people mean by laughing? The man is hurt? Look, look! They cannot see. They are all in front of him. Look there! What is that oozing under his face? Go, see, help him, Jack. Look under his face on the ground! That is Blood!"

John Hanbury did not move. He too had seen something was wrong. He too saw the swelling pool of bright scarlet blood under the black face of the Negro now lying at full length. Still, he did not move. He had grown deadly pale and cold and limp. His head felt light, the colour faded out of objects, and everything became a white and watery blue. The light shivered and then grew faint and far away. Sounds waxed thin, attenuated, confused.

"I can't go, Dora. I am not well. I always faint at the sight of blood," and he staggered back, dragging her with him until he leaned against the blank wall of Forbes's bakery. She disengaged her arm from his, and sought to support him with both her hands. His legs suddenly bent under him, and he slipped from her grasp and fell with legs thrust out across the flagway, and back drooping sideway and forward partly supported by the wall.

At that moment Oscar Leigh stepped back from his post on the curb, and uncovering his head, bowed lowly to Dora, and said: "I beg your pardon. Will you allow me to assist you?"

In her haste, confusion, anxiety, Dora glanced but casually at the speaker, saying: "It is not I who want assistance, but he."

"I would assist even my rival for your sake," he said humbly, bowing low and remaining bent before her. "I did not hope to meet you again so soon. I did not think it would be my good luck to meet you once more to-day until I called at Grimsby Street."

The girl looked at Hanbury's recumbent form with anxiety and dread, and then in dire perplexity at the hunchback who had just raised his uncovered head: "If you will be so good as to help me I shall be very much obliged. Oh! I am terrified. But I do not know what you mean by saying you met me to-day. I have, I think, never seen you until now. What shall I do? Is there a doctor here?"

"He has only fainted. Never seen me before! Never at Eltham yesterday! Not to-day! Not this morning, Miss Grace, am I mad."

"You are mistaken. I never saw you before. My name is not Grace. My name is Ashton, and this is Mr. John Hanbury. Oh! will no one help me?"

The crowd had by this time gathered closely round the prostrate Negro. No one but Leigh was near Miss Ashton and Hanbury.

Leigh seized Hanbury and drew him away from the wall. "The best thing we can do is to lay him flat. So! The others are too busy with the Nigger, and we are better off without a crowd, they would only keep the air away. Pray, forgive and forget what I said, Miss Ashton. I was sure you were Miss Grace, a lady I know, whom I met yesterday and this morning. Such a likeness never was before, but I can see a little difference now; a difference now that you look at me and speak." He had placed the young man flat on his back, and was gazing up into the face of the girl with a look half of worship, half of fear.

She could not see or hear clearly. "Oh! can nothing be done for him?" she cried pitiously. She fell upon her knees beside the prostrate man, and raised his head in her arms.

"Don't do that. Do not raise his head. Have no fear. I will fetch some brandy. Here, bathe his forehead with this. I will be back in a moment." He handed her a small silver flask of eau-de-cologne from which he had screwed the top, and then hastened away.

He skirted the crowd and rushed into the Hanover, crying out "Brandy!" The place was deserted. No one in front of the counter. No one in the bar. With strength and agility, for which none would give him credit, he seized the top of the counter in his long arms, and drew himself up on it, and jumped into the bar, clutched a bottle of brandy from a shelf, and with a glass in his other hand was back over the counter again in a minute, and hurrying to where Dora knelt beside the insensible Hanbury. Leigh knocked the head off the bottle with a blow of his stick, shook out half the brandy to carry away the splinters, and poured some of what was left into the glass.

"Can you open his mouth? Let me try. Raise his head now." He knelt down and endeavoured to force the spirit into Hanbury's mouth. "Now, please, stand up. Leave him to me. You are not strong." She hesitated to rise. "Oh, pray get up! You will only make yourself ill. He will be quite well in a few minutes."

The girl rose. She was trembling violently. She placed one hand against the wall to steady herself. Her breath came short and sharp.

Leigh forced the mouth open and moistened them with brandy and moistened the temples also. Dora, weak and pale and terrified, with lips apart, looked out of dilated eyes down on the swooning man.

In a few seconds he showed signs of life. His eyelids flickered, his chest heaved, his colour began to return, he sighed and raised his hand. Leigh lifted his head higher and forced more of the brandy into his mouth. Then he got up, and stood waiting the result. Gradually Hanbury came to himself, and with the joint aid of Leigh and Dora tottered to his feet.

"There, take some more of this," said Leigh holding out the glass to Hanbury. The latter passed his hand across his eyes to collect his faculties and clear his vision.

"I must have fainted," he whispered. "Is the man dead? I fainted twice before when I saw blood. Once at the gymnasium. Is he dead?"

"Swallow the stuff," said Leigh. "It will put you right." He looked around. The crowd bearing in its core the form of the Negro, was moving through the archway at the bottom of Welbeck Place into the Mews. "I don't know whether he is really dead or not. It looks like it. Do you feel better?"

"Thank you, I feel quite well again. Would you mind fetching a cab. Dora, I am very sorry for my miserable weakness. I could not help it. I am everlastingly disgraced. Would you be kind enough to fetch a cab?"

The request was addressed to Leigh, who glanced with pity and worship at Dora, and said, without looking away:

"Yes; I'll go for a cab. You are not able to walk yet. Stay here till I come back. Will you have more?" He turned and held out the neckless bottle to Hanbury.

"No, thank you."

Leigh threw the bottle and glass into the road and hastened off on his errand. He had no thought of serving Hanbury. If the young man had been alone Leigh would have left him where he stood until the convalescent was strong enough to shift for himself. But he was under a double spell, the spell of the extraordinary likeness between this girl, Miss Ashton, and that other girl, Miss Grace, and the spell of Miss Ashton's beauty. As a rule his thought was clear, and sharp, and particular; now it was misty, dim, glorious, vague. Edith Grace had, at first sight, wrought a

charm upon him such as he had never known' before; Dora Ashton renewed and heightened the charm and carried it to an intolerable yearning and rapture. He was beside himself.

"Dora," said Hanbury, after a little while and much thought, "Will you promise me one thing?" He looked around. They were quite alone. The crowd had followed the bearers of the Negro into the mews, through which there was a short cut to an hospital.

"Yes, if I can do what you ask, Jack."

"Say nothing to a soul about my fainting. You will not tell your father or mother, or my mother? I was able to keep the other occasions quiet. If this got about I should have to clear out of London. I'd be the laughing stock of the clubs. That man need not know more than he has seen."

"But he will return with the cab. You can ask him not to say anything about it."

"Come, Dora," he said, with sudden and feverish energy, "let us go. I feel a horrible repugnance to this place."

"But the man with the cab? He will be here in a minute," she said, looking at him in pain and surprise. Surely he was selfish.

"No, no. Not a second. I feel as if I should faint again. There isn't a cab-rank within a mile, and he cannot be back for half-an-hour. Come, Dora."

She took his proffered arm with a view to giving, not receiving, aid, and he hurried her along Chetwynd Street until he met the first cross road leading north; into this he hastened, casting a quick glance behind, and finding to his great relief that he was not followed. After a couple of hundred yards he reduced the pace, and said: "I am afraid, Dora, I have been going too fast for you; but I would not wish for anything that my name should get into the newspapers in connection with this miserable affair and place. It would be bad enough to have a fellow's name connected with such a place as Chetwynd Street; but to have it published that a fellow fainted there because he saw a Nigger drop dead, would be against a fellow for life. It would be worse than an accusation of crime--it would make a man ridiculous."

"And I wonder," said the girl, looking up quietly at him, "how my name would look in print connected with this miserable affair and place, and that Negro and *you*?"

He stopped short, dropped her arm, and looked at her with an expression of alarm and apology. "Dora, Dora. I beg your pardon. I most sincerely beg your pardon. There is something wrong with me to-day. I never thought of that. You would not, Dora, be very much put out if you saw your name connected with mine in print? Our engagement is not public, but there is no reason it should not."

"Under these circumstances? I should most surely not like the publicity of the papers. But I did not think of that until you spoke of your own name."

He looked at her as she walked now slowly by his side. He felt cut to the quick, and the worst of it was he experienced no resentment, was not cheered and sustained by anger. He had allowed consideration for his own personal risk to swallow up all consideration for everyone else, Dora Ashton included. If a line of soldiers were drawn across this wretched street with levelled rifles, and his moving towards them would draw their fire into his breast, he would there and then have marched up to them rather than that harm should touch Dora.

It was in accordance with Dora's wishes the engagement between them had not been announced. She had views which in the main he shared and admired. She was intensely independent. Why should the world know they were pledged to one another? It was no affair of the world's. But to have her name bracketed with his in newspapers and *then* their engagement announced, would be hideous, unbearable to her.

He would freely give his life to save her from hurt, but to be laughed at--Oh! Any man who was half a man would rather die heroically than be laughed at. To be the subject of amusing paragraphs in the sly evening papers! To be ironically complimented on his nerve--Oh! To become a by-word! To hear men at the clubs chuckle and whisper "Nigger!" and then chuckle again and say louder some word that had nothing to do with the matter! To be asked significantly if he felt better, and recommended tonics and a bracing climate! Oh! To see the hall-porter smile! To be asked by the waiter if he wished his coffee black! Oh! Oh! Oh!

"There's a cab at the end of the street," she said.

"So there is--a four-wheeler, too." He started at her voice, and then called the cab. "I cannot tell you how much I am ashamed of myself, for the third time to-day," he said to her.

"Of fainting?" she asked coldly, chillily.

"I could not help that. No! Not--not of fainting. I was ashamed of the fainting a few minutes ago. I was not thinking of that now. It was wrong of me to faint, no doubt."

"You could not help it, you know," she said coldly still.

"I could not help it then, but I should have taken precautions against anything of the kind by familiarizing myself with unpleasant and trying sights. No man ought to be a----"

"Woman," she said, finishing the sentence for him with an icy laugh. His want of consideration had exasperated her.

"Yes," he said gravely, "no man ought to be a woman."

"But which is it more like a woman, to faint at a hideous sight or run away from a paltry unpleasantness?"

His face grew very dark. He did not answer.

At this moment, the four-wheeler he had called drew up. Hanbury opened the door, and handed her in. He was about to follow when she stopped him with a gesture. "It now occurs to me that you had better go back and see that man who was so good to me, and whom you sent for the cab for yourself." Her eyes were flashing angrily now.

"Why?" he asked with the door in his hand.

"Well, I just recollect that I gave him your name and my own. You had better see him if you want to keep our names out of the papers. Drive on."

## CHAPTER IX.

### "ONLY A WOMAN."

John Hanbury turned away and began retracing his steps slowly. When he reached Chetwynd Street he looked up and down it anxiously. He saw no appearance of anything unusual, no undue crowd, no hurrying of people; he heard no loud talk, no excited exclamations.

He had now completely recovered from the effect of the weakness which had seized him a few minutes ago. He stood at the corner, and drew himself up to his full height, with his chin well in, his head back, and a contemptuous look on his face.

He was dark-eyed, dark-skinned, dark-bearded, close upon six feet, good-looking, but not handsome, and yet his face was more attractive than most faces regularly ordered. The whole mask was extremely mobile, and always changing when he spoke, or when the current of his thoughts altered; a flashing and flitting light seemed to come, not from his eyes only, but from all his face. The eyes were large and restless, or perhaps it would be more correct to say unresting, and when animated they flamed and burned with passion and earnestness. His figure was thick-set for his years, but his height carried off the bulk. He was lithe, active, hardy, and the last man anyone would expect to faint or show physical weakness. Some men who became illustrious surgeons have had to overcome this revulsion from blood, and horror at the sight of it.

He turned to the right and began walking rapidly. A few small groups of people were gathered around the mouth of Welbeck Place, discussing the event of that afternoon. Hanbury looked around. If that man had come back with a cab he must have dismissed it, for no cab was in sight.

For a moment he paused in doubt. He approached one of the little knots of people. "Could you tell me, if you please, where I should be likely to see a low-sized gentleman who carries a heavy stick? I think he belongs to this neighbourhood," said Hanbury to a man standing at the corner, a very low-looking type of man, in a shabby jacket.

"You mean little Mr. Leigh?" said the man.

"I don't know his name. He is a small man, and there is something wrong with his back."

"It's Mr. Leigh you want," said the man. "That's him; 'e's a humpback."

"Yes," said Hanbury, who had waited in vain for an answer to his question. The man in the jacket had forgotten his question. He was in sore want of sixpence, and was wondering how he could come by the money. On principle he had no objection to using honest means, provided they were not laborious. He was not a good specimen of the natives of this part of London.

"Do you know where I should be likely to find him?"

"Where you'd be likely to find 'im? No I don't. If 'e was about 'ere you couldn't see 'im very heasy, 'e's that small, and 'e isn't about hany where, as you can see if you look." The speaker had observed Leigh go into the Hanover five minutes before, and knew he was even now in the private bar. But then he wanted sixpence badly, and saw a chance of making it out of this stranger and his knowledge of Leigh's person, ways and locality.

Hanbury looked around as if about seeking information elsewhere. The man felt the money slipping through his fingers, and hastened to add, "I'm hout of work, I ham, gov'nor, an' I'd be glad of hany job. *You'd* never be hable to find 'im 'ere, but I think I could, if you want me to."

"Very good. If you find out for me where he is I'll give you half-a-crown," said Hanbury, putting his hand in his trouser's pocket.

This was a serious and perplexing matter for the man in the jacket. It would be only right to show a pretence of earning the money, and it would be unsafe to leave the offerer of the reward alone, for he might fall into the hands of sharks, and so the half-crown might get into the pocket of some one not half so deserving as he. "I'm not sure, sir, where 'e is, but if you come with me I'll show you where I think 'e is." He led the way to the door of the Hanover, and pointing to the entrance marked "Private" said: "If you try in there, and if you don't find 'im I'll go round with you, sir, to all the places 'e's likely to be in, for I'm 'ard set for what you was so kind has to promise me." This was a very excellent way out of his difficulty. It secured the reward in the present, and saved appearances at the expense of a promise which he knew need not be fulfilled.

Hanbury looked in, and seeing Leigh, paid the man in the jacket the money and entered the private bar. The dwarf was there alone. This apartment had few visitors until evening, and all the idle people had been drawn off in the wake of the Negro's litter. Even Williams the landlord had been induced by curiosity to make one of the crowd.

"Hah," said Leigh, when he saw Hanbury come in and shut the door. "You thought better of waiting for that cab. I wasn't very long. I am glad you came back. I hope you are again quite well? Eh?" His words and accent were polite--too polite the young man thought. There was a scornful glitter in the hunchback's eyes. A huge volume bound in red cloth lay on the polished metal counter beside him. When Hanbury saw the volume his face flushed vividly. The book was the *Post Office Directory*.

"I am quite well again, thank you. I came back on purpose to see you." He drew a high stool towards him and sat down, trying to cover his confusion by the act.

"Greatly honoured, I'm sure," said the other man, with all the outward seeming of sincerity, but with that nasty glitter in the bright deep-sunken eyes.

"No, no," said Hanbury, with emphatic gestures of his arms. "My going off so suddenly must have seemed strange----"

"Oh dear no! Hah! I have often heard of men going off in a dead faint in the same way. I was just trying to make up my mind which of the Hanburys in the *Directory* you were. Let me see," opening the huge book.

"I don't mean my--my illness. That's not what I meant when I said 'going off.' I meant that you must have been surprised at my going away before you came back with the cab. But I was anxious to get away, and quite confused at the moment, and it was not until the lady with me reminded me of your kindness that I resolved to come back. I am sure I don't know how to thank you sufficiently. Only for you I cannot think how I should have got on. The lady----"

"'Miss Ashton,' she told me her name was," said Leigh, with a peculiar smile that made the young man flush again. The implication he took of the smile being that she was able to speak when he was senseless.

"Yes," he said with constraint; he could not bring himself to utter her name in such a low place, a common pot-house!

"May I ask you if you are Mr. John Hanbury?"

"That is my name," said he, looking around apprehensively.

"Hah! I thought so. I had the honour of hearing you speak----"

Hanbury again looked round as though in fear of hearing his own name, and interposed: "Please do not. You will add to the great favour you have already done me if you say nothing of that kind. I am most anxious to have a little conversation--private conversation with you--this is no place," again he cast his eyes around him apprehensively. There was no one but the potman, Tom Binns, in the bar, and in the "public department," only the man who had got the half-crown.

"It is the best, the only good place, hereabouts, unless you would condescend to cross my humble threshold and accept the poor hospitality I can offer you." It is difficult to say where the

politeness was overdone in the manner, but the overdoing was as conspicuous in the manner as in the words; but again allowance is always made for people of exceptional physical formation. Hanbury could not tell why he disliked this man and shrank from him, but he looked on him as if he were a dangerous wild beast playing at being tame. He did want five minutes' talk with him. It could do no harm to accept his invitation.

He got briskly off the stool, saying: "I shall be delighted to go to your place with you, I am sure."

Leigh led the way in ceremonious silence, and opened the private door in Chetwynd Street, and bowed his guest in, saying: "I shall have to trouble you to climb two pair of stairs. The poor of earth, we are told, will be rich hereafter. In this life, anyway, they live always nearest to Heaven."

Preceded by Hanbury he mounted to his flat, and ushered his companion into the sitting-room.

"I am only an humble clockmaker, and in my business it is as well to keep an eye on the sun. One cannot guard too carefully against imposture. Pray take a chair. You were pleased to say you wished to speak to me in private. We are alone on this floor. No one can hear us."

Hanbury felt greatly relieved. This was the only man who knew his name. There had not yet been time for him to tell it to any one likely to publish it in the newspapers. He began:

"In the first place I have again to thank you most sincerely for your great services to me a while ago. Believe me, I am very grateful and shall always hold myself your debtor."

"You are too kind. It is a pleasure to do a little service for a gentleman like Mr. Hanbury, the great orator. If only Chetwynd Street knew it had so distinguished a visitor it would be very proud, although the cause in which I heard you speak in Bloomsbury is not very popular in the slums of Westminster. However, you may rest assured the public shall not be allowed to remain in ignorance of the distinction conferred upon our district, this obscure and poor and unworthy corner of Westminster. When you saw me in the Hanover, I was preparing a little paragraph for the papers." The dwarf smiled ambiguously.

Hanbury started and coloured and moved his feet impatiently, uneasily. He could not determine whether the clockmaker was sincere or not in what he had said in the earlier portions of this speech; he was startled by what he said at the end. "Mr. Leigh, you have done me a favour already, a great favour, a great service. They say one is always disposed to help one he has helped before. Do me another service and you will double, you will quadruple, my gratitude. Say nothing to any one of seeing me here, above all let nothing get into the papers about it."

"Hah," said Leigh, throwing himself back on his chair, thrusting his hands down to the bottom of his trousers' pockets and looking out of the window. "Hah! I see! I understand. A woman in the case," in a tone of conviction and severity. He did not remove his eyes from the window.

The colour on Hanbury's face deepened. His eyes flashed. It was intolerable that this low, ill-shapen creature should refer to Dora, to Dora to whom he was engaged, who was to be his wife, as "a woman in the case." Something disgraceful generally attaches to the phrase. Anyway, there was nothing for it but to try to muzzle Leigh. He forced himself to say calmly. "Oh, dear no. Not in the unpleasant sense. The lady who was with me is----"

"Miss Ashton."

"Yes. She told me she gave you her name and mine. Well, Mr. Leigh, you are good enough to say you remember me as a speaker in Bloomsbury. I am seriously thinking of adopting a public career. I could not, for a time at all events, appear on any platform of disputed principles if this unfortunate fainting of mine got into the papers. Some opponent would be certain to throw it in my face. Will you do me the very great favour of keeping the matter to yourself?"

Hanbury was extremely earnest; he leaned forward on his chair and gesticulated energetically. Leigh swiftly turned his face from the window and said: "It can't be done, Mr. Leigh. I suppose you will allow that I, even humble I, may have principles as well as you?"

"Most assuredly, and it would be bad for the community if all public men agreed. Politics would then corrupt from stagnation."

"Well," said the clockmaker, shaking himself into an attitude of resoluteness. "You are a Tory, I am a Radical. Fate has delivered you into my hands, why should I spare you, why should I not spoil you?"

Hanbury winced and wriggled. This was very unlooked-for and very unpleasant. "I may have spoken on a Tory platform but I have never adopted fully the Tory programme----"

"Tory programme, bah! There never was and never can be such a thing, except it be a programme to cry. 'Hold on.'"

"Well, let me substitute Tory platform for Tory programme; anyway, whatever side I may take the publication of this affair would cast such ridicule upon me that I should be compelled to keep

off any kind of platform for a time."

"You are an extremely able speaker for so young a man. Mr. Hanbury, I am afraid it is my duty to send a paragraph to the papers. A paragraph of that kind always tells. Anything unkind and true invariably amuses our own side and injures the other side and sticks like wax."

Hanbury writhed. "The hideous beast," he thought. He would have liked to throw the little monster through the window. He rose and began walking up and down the room hastily. "Mr. Leigh, if you will not, as a party man, let this unfortunate thing lie still, will you oblige me personally and say nothing about it? If you do I will consider myself under a deep obligation to you." He had an enormously exaggerated idea of the importance of the affair, but so have most men and particularly young men when the affair threatens to cover them with scorn or ridicule.

"A personal favour from me to you. On what grounds do you put the request?"

"On any honourable grounds you please. You said you were not rich----"

"I did not say I was corrupt." His manner was quick, abrupt, final. His face darkened. His eyes glittered. "Mr. Hanbury you are a rich man----"

"Not rich, surely."

"You are rich compared with any man in this street. You are a rich man. You got your money without work or risk. You are young and clever and tall and straight and healthy and good-looking and eloquent and dear to the most beautiful lady I ever laid eyes on----"

"Curse him!" thought Hanbury, but he held his peace, remained without movement of limb or feature.

"Rich, good-looking, sound, beloved, eloquent, young. Look at me with the eyes of your mind, and the eyes of your body. Poor, ill-favoured, marred and maimed, loathed, ungifted in speech, middle-aged. Do not stop me. I have no chance if I allow you, a gentleman of your eloquence, to speak against me. Think of it all, and then work out a little calculation for me, and tell me the result. Will you do so candidly, fairly, honestly?"

"Yes, indeed, I will."

"Very well. You who are gifted as I have said, come to me who am afflicted as I have said, and ask me to do you a favour, ask me to sell you a favour. Suppose the favour you ask me to do you cost me ten, at how much do you estimate its value to you?"

"A hundred. Anything you like."

"I am not thinking of money."

"Nor am I. Anything ten-fold returned to you I will freely give."

"Wait a moment. Let me think a while."

Hanbury ceased to walk up and down, and stood in the window leaning against the old-fashioned folding shutters painted the old-fashioned dirty drab.

Leigh sat with his chin sunken deeply on his chest, and his eyes fixed on the floor. Then he spoke in a low tone, a tone half of reverie:

"Nature deals in wonders, and I am one of them. And I in turn deal in wonders, and there are many of them. If I chose I could show you the most wonderful clock in all the world, and I could show you the most wonderful gold in all the world, more wonderful a thousand times than mystery gold. But I will not show you these things now. I will show you a more wonderful thing still. Will you come with me a little way?"

"Yes, but you have not set me that question in arithmetic yet."

"I cannot do so until you have come a little way with me. I want to show you the most wonderful thing you ever saw."

"May I ask what it is?"

"*You* need not be afraid."

"Why need not I be afraid?"

"Because *you* are not hump-backed and chicken-breasted and lop-sided and dwarfed and hideous."

"But what are you taking me to see?"

"Something more wonderful and more precious than any mystery gold, than my own miracle gold or my clock, and yet of a kind common enough."

"What?"

"A woman."

"But why should I go?"

"Come, and if you ask me that when you have seen, I will ask nothing for my silence."

"Only a woman?"

"Only a woman."

They descended the stairs.

## CHAPTER X.

### LEIGH PROMISES ONE VISIT AND PAYS ANOTHER.

That morning when Edith Grace fell asleep in the corner of the third-class carriage, on her way from Millway to London, she sank into the most profound unconsciousness. No memory of life disturbed her repose. No dreams intruded. The forward movement of the train was unheeded. The vibration did not break in upon her serenity. At the various stations where the train stopped people got in or out, the door banged, men and women talked to one another, the engine shrieked, and still Edith not only slept, but slept as peacefully and free from vision or fear as though all were silent and at rest. Before closing her eyes she took fully into her mind the friendly porter's assurance there would be no need to change her carriage between Millway and the end of her journey.

When she opened her eyes they had arrived at Grosvenor Road, where tickets are taken up for Victoria. She was conscious of being shaken by the shoulder; she awoke and saw opposite her a stout, kind-faced countrywoman, with a basket on her arm. The woman said: "This is Grosvenor Road. We are just at Victoria. They want your ticket."

Two other women were in the carriage--no man. A ticket-collector standing at the door, impatient of delay, was flicking the tickets in his hand.

She started and coloured, and sat upright with all haste and began searching quickly, anxiously, despairingly. Her memory up to the moment of giving the money to the friendly porter was perfect. After that all was dim until all became blank in sleep. She could not clearly recollect the man's giving her the ticket. She remembered a dull sensation in her hand, as though she had felt him thrust the ticket into it, and she remembered a still duller sensation of peace and ease, as though she believed all was right till her journey's end. Then came complete oblivion. She was now burning with confusion and dismay.

"Ticket, please, the train is waiting."

"I--I can't find my ticket."

"Pray, try. The train is waiting."

"I cannot find it."

The collector said nothing, but made a sign, and entered the compartment. The train moved on. "Try your pockets well, miss," said the collector civilly; "you are sure to find the ticket. You had one, of course?"

She tried her pocket and stood up and looked around her. Misfortunes came thick upon her. She had but just escaped from Eltham House, had thrown up her situation, had been wandering about the country all the morning, and now was back in London without a ticket or a sixpenny piece! People were sent to prison for travelling without a railway ticket. She had slept nothing last night, was she to spend this night in gaol? She sat down in despair.

"Indeed, I cannot find it." She was white now, and the trembling with which she had been seized on finding her loss had gone. She was pale, cold, hopeless, indifferent.

"Where did you come from?"



"Millway. I got in at Millway. The porter said he would get my ticket for me. I gave him all the money I had, only enough for the ticket, and----"

"Did he give you the ticket?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know! Don't know whether he gave you the ticket or not?" The collector's manner, which had been sympathetic and encouraging, hardened into suspiciousness.

"I do not know. I fell asleep in the carriage, and did not wake up until just now. What shall I do?"

"You will have to pay your fare from Millway."

"But I can't. I told you I haven't any money. I gave it all to the porter."

"If you haven't a ticket and can't pay it will be a bad job. Is it likely any friend of yours will be waiting for you at the station?"

"Oh, no! I am coming up quite unexpectedly."

"It's a bad job, then," said the collector.

"But you will let me go home? You will not keep me here? You will not detain me?" she asked piteously. Her indifference was passing away and she was becoming excited at hideous possibilities conjured up by her imagination while the train glided slowly into the terminus.

"I don't know. We must see what the Inspector says."

The train had stopped and the two other women got out, the one who had spoken to her saying: "I hope it will be all right, my dear. You don't look as if you was up to anything bad. You don't look like one of them swindling girls that they sent to prison for a fortnight last week."

"Oh, my God!" cried Edith piteously, as she stepped out on the platform. She covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

She was one of the last passengers to leave the train and the shallow fringe of alighting passengers had thinned and almost cleared away. She felt completely overwhelmed, as if she should die. She caught with one hand the side of the open carriage door for support, and kept the other hand before her face. She ceased to sob, or cry or weep. The collector and two guards were standing round her, waiting until she should recover herself. Presently a fourth man came up slowly from the further end of the train and stood among the three men.

"What is the matter?" he asked softly of one of the guards. "Has anything happened to the lady? Is she ill?"

A shiver went through Edith. There was something familiar in the voice, but unfamiliar in the tone.

"Lost her ticket and hasn't got any money. We have sent for the Inspector," answered the collector.

"Pooh, money," said the new-comer contemptuously. "I have money. Where has the lady come from? How much is the fare?"

"Come from Millway," answered the collector.

"Millway! So have I. What class? First?"

"No; Third. Five and twopence."

"Here you are." The new-comer held out his hand to the collector with money in it.

"This gentleman offers to pay, miss," said the collector turning to Edith. "Am I to take the money?"

The girl swayed to and fro, and did not answer. It was plain she heard what had been said. Her movement was an acknowledgment she had heard. She did not answer because she did not know what to say. Two powerful emotions were conflicting in her. The feeling of weakness was passing away. She was trying to choose between gaol (for so the matter seemed to her) and deliverance at *his* hands.

"Of course, the lady will allow me to arrange this little matter for her. She can pay me back at any time. I will give her my name and address: Oscar Leigh, Forbes's bakery, Chetwynd Street."

"Am I to take the money, miss? We are losing time. The train is going to back out. Here's the Inspector. Am I to take the five and twopence from this gentleman?"

"Yes," she whispered. She loosed her hold upon the carriage door, but did not take down her hand from her face.

The collector wrote out and thrust a ticket into her disengaged hand. The touch of the hand recalled the dim memory of what had happened earlier that day. Her fingers closed firmly, instinctively, on the paper.

"Now, miss, it's all right. Please stand away. The train is backing out."

She dropped her hand from her face, moved a pace from the edge of the platform and looked round. She knew she should see him with her eyes, she had heard him with her ears. She shrank from the sight of him, she shrank still more from the acknowledgment she should have to make.

Leigh was standing in front of her, leaning on his stick and gazing intently at her. With a cry of astonishment he let his stick fall and threw up his arms. "Miss Grace! Miss Grace, as I am alive! Miss Grace here! Miss Grace here now!"

He dropped his arms. His cry and manner bereft her of the power of speech. She felt abashed and confounded. She seemed to have treated badly this man who had just delivered her from a serious and humiliating difficulty.

"Pray excuse me," he said, bowing low and raising his hat as he picked up his stick. "The sight of you astonished me out of myself. I thought you were miles and miles away. I thought you were at Eltham House. To what great misfortune does my poor mother owe your absence? You are not-please say you are not ill?"

"I am not ill." It was very awkward that he should speak of his mother's loss, of her abandoning his mother. She had felt a liking in their short acquaintance for the poor helpless old woman. She had come away without saying a word to Mrs. Leigh. True, she had left a note, and as she was quitting the place that morning the note had not been where she had placed it. Perhaps it had merely been blown down or knocked away by the wind or by herself, or by him in the dark. She was conscience-stricken at having deserted Mrs. Leigh, she was bewildered at the inconsistency of his words now, and his visit to that room from which he believed she had fled last night. She had, too, overheard him say to his mother that he would put something right in Eltham for her this day. She had gathered he had had no intention of leaving Eltham until about noon, and it was not nine o'clock yet! He surely did not know she was in that dark room when he made the soliloquy. To suppose he thought she was there would be madness. He knew at that time she had left the house with the intention of not returning and he believed she had not returned. How then could he imagine she was still at Eltham? Why had he left Millway so early? Ah, yes, of course, as far as that went, Mrs. Brown must have discovered her flight on missing the key of the gate from its hook in the little hall of the gate-house. She must have given information and he must have come up by this train, but why? Ah, the whole thing was horribly confused, and dull, and dim, and she heard a buzzing in her ears.

All this went through her mind as quickly as wind through a tree, and like wind through a tree touching and moving the many boughs and branches of thought in her mind simultaneously.

Leigh, upon hearing her say "I am not ill," drew back with a gesture of astonishment and protest, and said, "You were not ill, and yet you fled from us, Miss Grace! Then we must have been so unfortunate as to displease Miss Grace unwittingly. But you are tired, child, and I am inconsiderate to keep you waiting. You are going where?" His voice became suave and gracious. His manner showed to advantage contrasted with his half sly and wholly persistent manner of yesterday.

"I was going home to Grimsby Street."

"Then this is our way. You have no baggage, I presume?"

"No, I left it behind me. I also left a note----"

"Hah! Here we are. Now Miss Grace, you must be far too tired and put out by your early journey and this most unpleasant experience on the platform to be allowed by me to speak a word of explanation. Pray step in. I shall call to enquire how you are later in the day."

He hurried her into a four-wheeler and gave the driver his fare and the address before she had time to hesitate or protest. Then he turned briskly away, and leaving the terminus, clambered to the top of an omnibus going east.

When he arrived at the Bank he descended. He looked sharply around, and after scrutinizing the faces of all those standing or moving slowly near him, walked rapidly a few hundred yards back over the way the omnibus had come, along clattering and roaring Cheapside. Then he pulled up suddenly, and cast quick, furtive glances at the men on either side, particularly those who were standing, and those moving slowly.

It was certain Oscar Leigh was trying to find out if he was watched.

"Hah!" cried he under his breath. "No one. All right." He then turned into one of the narrow

streets leading south out of the main thoroughfare and walked rapidly. Here were large, slow-moving vans and carts and drays in the roadway and a thin stream of men, with now and then a woman of homely aspect and dingy garments, hurrying by. As one walked it was quite possible to take note of every person and no one escaped the dark flashing eyes of Leigh. In the eyes of City men when they walk about through the mazes of their own narrow domain there is always an introspective look. They are not concerned with the sticks and stones or the people they encounter. They know every stick and stone by rote and they are not abroad to meet people in the street, but to call upon people in warehouses, shops, or offices. Their eyes are turned inward, for their minds are busy. As they step swiftly forward they are devising, inventing, calculating, plotting, planning. They are on their way from one place to another and all the things they pass by are to them indifferent. They have the air of sleep-walkers who have only their bournes in their minds and are heedless of all things encountered by the way.

Oscar Leigh was the very opposite to the denizens of the City. His whole attention was given to his environment. He kept on the left-hand pavement and close to the houses so that he could see all before him without turning his head. Thus he obviated any marked appearance of watchfulness.

When he came to a cross street he stood still, looked back and mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. He waited a minute and then, muttering again a satisfied "Hah! No one," struck into the cross street by the left and proceeded very slowly. This was a still narrower artery than the former one. When he reached the end of it he paused once more, and stood regarding the ground he had just covered. It was plain that by this time all anxiety had been removed from his mind.

He faced about, threading his way through alleys of great secrecy and gloom and silence, and moved in a south-easterly direction until he emerged at the head of London Bridge.

He crossed the river on foot, and keeping to the right through mean streets out of Borough High Street found himself in London Road, where from noon to midnight, all the year round, a market for the poor is held on the pavement and in the kennel.

He crossed this street and entered another, Tunbridge Street, the dirtiest and dingiest one he had yet traversed. It seemed given up wholly to vehicles out of work. Here were a couple of dozen large, unhandsome, stores, warehouses and small factories, and half-a-dozen of very poor houses, let in tenements. An ill-smelling, close, foul, low-lying, little-used street.

The ground floor of one of the houses was devoted to commerce. The floor, as far in as one could see, was littered with all kinds of odds and ends of metal machines and utensils and implements. On a washed-out blue fascia-board, in washed-out white letters, over the door, were the words "John Timmons," in large letters, and beneath in small letters, once black and now a streaky grey, "marine store dealer." Into the misty twilight of this house of bankrupt and forgeless Vulcan Leigh disappeared. Any one passing down Tunbridge Street a quarter of a minute after he stepped across the threshold would not have been able to detect any living being in the business establishment of Mr. John Timmons, marine-store dealer.

But if a listener had been at the back of the store, behind the boiler of a donkey-engine, or leant over the head of the dark cellar in the left corner, he would have heard the following dialogue carried on by careful whispers in the darkness below:

"Yes. I have come back sooner than I expected. I went to Birmingham yesterday morning to consult a very clever mechanist there about the new movement for the figures of time in my clock--Hah!"

"You told me you were going away, but I thought it was to Edinburgh."

"Hah!" said the former speaker, "I changed my mind about Edinburgh and went to Birmingham instead. I thought when I was speaking to you last that Edinburgh would be best, but I got the name of the best man in Birmingham and went to him instead. My friend in Birmingham not only put me right about the new movement, but when I told him I thought I was on the point of perfecting my discovery of the combination in metals he told me he would be able to find a market for me if I was sure the new compound was equal to representation. Of course, I told him the supply would be limited until I could arrange for a proper laboratory and for help. I explained that no patent could protect all the processes of manufacture and that for the present the method must be a profound secret. I also told him I proposed calling my invention Miracle Gold."

"No doubt about no patent being sufficient to protect. You were right enough there. Ho-ho-ho-ho."

"It was best to say that. Anyway, he is ready to take any quantity, if the thing is equal to representation."

"There's no doubt it will be. Ho-ho-ho-ho."

"I told him my great difficulty at present, was the colour--that it was very white--too like Australian gold--too much silver."

"Ho-ho-ho-ho, that was clever, very clever. You are the cleverest man I ever met, Mr. ----."

"Hah--stop. Isn't it best not to mention names here?"

"Well, it's always best to be on the safe side and even walls can't tell what they don't hear, can they?"

"I told him also that for the present the quantity would be small of the miracle gold, but that I hoped soon to increase the supply as soon as I got fully to work."

"That's true."

"He says he will take all I can make, no matter how much, if it is equal to representation----"

"Ho-ho-ho-ho! Equal to representation! That's splendid. I can't help laughing at that."

"No. It was clever of me. But the affair is hardly a laughing matter. May I beg of you not to laugh in that way again? I dare say the most uncomfortable place after a prison into which anyone goes is a grave, and this place looks and smells like a grave. Besides, there is fearful danger in this affair, fearful danger. Pray don't laugh."

"But you will go on with the thing now?"

"Yes, I will go on with it. But, observe, I cannot increase my risk by a grain weight. I am already risking too much. I deal, mind you, with nothing but the *alloy*."

"I don't want you to deal with anything else. You know nothing of the matter beyond the alloy. What did the Birmingham gentleman say the stuff would be worth?"

"In the pure metal state?"

"Of course. After you are done with it?"

"Hah! He will not say until he has a specimen. When can you have some ready?"

"Now. This minute. Will you take it away with you?"

"No, not now. What are you doing tonight?"

"Nothing particular."

"Can you come to my place between twelve and half past?"

"Certainly."

"Without fail?"

"I'll be there to the minute you say."

"Very well. Let it be twelve exactly. I have a most excellent reason of my own for punctuality. Bring some of the alloy with you. Knock at the door once, one knock, the door in Chetwynd Street, mind. I'll open the door for you myself. Mind, not a word to a soul, and above all don't go into the Hanover hard by. I have reasons for this--most important reasons."

"Do not fear. I shall be there punctually at twelve. I never go into public houses. I can't afford it. They are places for only talking and drinking and I can't afford either. Are you going?"

"Yes. I must run away now. The National Gallery folk are in a fog about a Zuccaro. They are not certain whether it is genuine or not. There is a break in the pedigree and they will do nothing until I have seen the picture and pronounced upon it. Good-bye. Twelve sharp."

"Good-bye. I'll not keep you waiting for me to-night."

Oscar Leigh came quickly out into Tunbridge Street and thence into London Road, and got on the top of an omnibus going north. He changed to the top of one going west when he reached Ludgate Circus.

If you have sharp eyes, and want to see with them that you are not followed, the top of an omnibus is an excellent way of getting about through London.

Leigh alighted from the second omnibus at Charing Cross, and walked from that straight to the Hanover in Chetwynd Street. The nation was not that day made richer by his opinion of the genuineness of the alleged Zuccaro, nor had he up to this moment conceived the advisability of inventing the mummified Egyptian prince, much less of buying his highness, with a view to painting the dial of his clock with the asphaltum from the coffin.

He had spent the time between his arrival at Victoria and his brandy and soda with Williams at the Hanover in going to and coming back from Tunbridge Street, and in his visit to John Timmons, marine-store dealer.

## CHAPTER XI.

### STRANGER THAN MIRACLE GOLD.

Grimsby Street, where Mrs. Grace, Edith's grandmother, had lodgings, to which Edith Grace had been driven that morning from Victoria, is one of the humble, dull, dingy, thoroughfares formed of small private houses in Chelsea. The ground here is very low and very flat. The houses have all half-sunken basements, bow windows on the first floor and two floors above. They are all painted of the same light, washed-out drab. They all have light drab Venetian blinds. All have tiny areas paved with light drab flags; all three steps rising six or eight inches each from the front gate to the front door. All have six steps descending from the flagged passage to the dark drab, blistered low house-door under the steps. The aspect of dull, respectable mediocrity of the whole monotonous street is heart-breaking. The sun, even of this cloudless June day, did not brighten it. The sun cannot make washed-out drab look pleasant. From end to end is not a tree or shrub or creeper, not even a single red brick to break the depressing uniformity; the chimney-pots are painted drab too. The area-railings are all black. All the doors are the colour of unpolished oak. The knockers flat and shapeless and bulged with blistered paint.

Mrs. Grace lived at Number 28, half-way down the street. She rented the first floor unfurnished. She had lost some money in the disaster which swallowed up her granddaughter's little all. The utmost economy now became necessary for the old woman, and she had resolved to give up the tiny room until now Edith's.

Mrs. Grace was a tall, well-made woman, of seventy years, very upright and youthful in manner for one of her years. She was of quick nature, and looked upon all matters from an extremely optimist or pessimist point of view. This disposition had little or no effect upon her spirits. It afforded her as much satisfaction to consider the direst, as the pleasantest, results. She was uniformly good-natured, and always saw the hand of beneficent Providence in calamity.

That Thursday morning when Edith alighted from the cab, Mrs. Grace was sitting in her front room window looking out at the placid, drab street. With an exclamation of surprise and dismay she ran down stairs, let the girl in, embraced and kissed her vehemently, crying, "My darling! my darling child! What has happened? Is there no such place at all as Eltham House, or has it been burned down?"

Edith burst into tears. She was not given to weeping, but the relief at finding herself at home, after the anxiety and adventures through which she had gone, broke her down, and, with her arm round the old woman's waist, she led Mrs. Grace upstairs to the sitting-room.

"Sit down, dear. Sit down and have your cry out. Take off your hat and rest yourself. Have you had your breakfast? Did you find Mrs. Leigh dead? or has there been a railway accident? Have your cry out. I am sorry I ever let you away from my sight. You are not hurt, are you? Where is your luggage? I declare that cabman has driven off with it. I must get someone to run after him. Did you take his number?"

"No, mother." Edith called her grandmother simply mother. It was shorter than grandmother, and more respectful than granny. "I have no luggage with me. I left it at Eltham House. No accident has happened. Simply I did not like the place. I could not stop there. I felt strange and lonely and afraid, and I came back. I ran away."

"And quite right too, dear. I am very, very sorry I ever let you go away from me. I am sure I do not know how I have got on since you left me. I thought of telegraphing you to come back. But it's all right now that you are here again, and I shall take good care you do not go off from me any more until some fairy prince comes for my child. We shall be able to live some way together, dear. With a little economy we need not be separated. Your room is just as you left it; nothing stirred. I hadn't the courage to go into it. Go into your own room, pet, and take off your things." She took Edith by the hand and led her to the little room which had been hers so long, and which seemed so secure after that large chamber in which she had spent so many minutes of anxiety and fear at Eltham House.

Then, in few words, she told all to the old woman, omitting the visit of Leigh to the room when he believed her to be gone. She explained her flight by saying this Mr. Leigh had wearied her with attentions. She said nothing about his having asked her to let him kiss her patriarchally. She wound up by declaring she could not endure him and his objectionable devotion, and that she had come away by the first train, having left a note to say the place did not suit her, and that her luggage was to be sent after her. Then she told of the loss of her ticket and Mr. Leigh's

opportune appearance, and last of all, of his promise or threat of calling.

The story, as it met the ears of Mrs. Grace, did not show Leigh in a very offensive light. No doubt he had been at Eltham House when Edith arrived, and that gave the girl an unpleasant shock, for which she was not prepared, and which coloured all her subsequent thoughts of him. She had been a little put out, or offended, or frightened. She had gone to her room, locked the door and slipped away back to London next morning. That was all, and the old woman made much of getting the girl home again, and dwelt little on the reason of her flight. She put down the cause of flight to an over-sensitive young girl confronted for the first time with vulgar admiration and the cold world beyond home.

Edith confessed to have eaten no breakfast, and slept nothing during the night, so Mrs. Grace insisted upon her taking food, and lying down awhile in her room. Then she came away, shutting the door softly behind her, and sat in the window-place of the sitting-room to think over the affair.

Thought with Mrs. Grace was never logical or consequential, and at the present moment the delight of regaining Edith coloured her ideas with pleasant hues. It had been sorely against her grain she allowed the girl to go from her at all. Nothing but her granddaughter's emphatic wish would have brought her to consent to it. Before they lost their money they had had enough for modest luxury in these cheap lodgings. All Edith's money had been engulfed, and some of her own. There was still enough for the existence of two. Edith was not fit for the world, and this experience afforded convincing evidence that no other experiment of the kind should be tried.

When the little man, Leigh had come to arrange about Edith, she looked on him with scant favour. He was about to take the child from her. He had told Edith he would call later to-day to ask how she had got on. She should receive him with pleasure. No doubt he had persecuted Edith a little, and the girl had been put out and frightened. But was not this very persecution the means of driving Edith back to her home? And were not his attentions not only a proof, if proofs were needed, of the girl's beauty, but also of the unadvisability of letting her stray from her side? That argument would be conclusive with Edith when they talked the matter over quietly. If a man of this man's appearance had, under the potent spell of her beauty, so far forgotten himself as to offer her marked attentions, how much more persistent and emphatic would be the homage drawn towards her from other men. Her good looks had turned the head of this Leigh until he forgot his deformities. Could she expect other men, men of fair proportions, would be more insensible or less persistent?

Mrs. Grace did not believe Edith had any insuperable objection to marriage, or the notion of a suitor. But she knew the girl's pride of family would prevent her ever attorning to the attentions of an admirer who was not a gentleman. The Graces of Gracedieu, in Derbyshire, had come over with the Norman William, and although her own husband had been only the poor cadet of that house, and her son, Edith's father, a lawyer, who died young, leaving little for his widow and orphan, Edith was as proud of her lineage as though through her veins ran "all the blood of all the Howards." Indeed Edith had somewhat strained and fantastic theories of family and breeding and blood. She had always impressed upon Edith that she was a lady by birth and breeding. Edith was disposed to assume that she was a duchess by descent. There was no haughtiness or arrogance in her grand-daughter; the girl was extremely simple, and gentle, and good-natured; but she kept aloof from the people round her, not out of disdain, but because of the feeling that she was not of them, that they would not understand her or she them, and that they by her presence would only be made unhappy in reflecting on their own humble origin.

When Edith first declared her resolution of earning her own bread, and going out as a governess or companion, Mrs. Grace had made sure this pride of family or birth would successfully bar the way to any bargain, and when the bargain was struck with Mr. Leigh, she felt confident the arrangement would not last long. The end had come sooner than she had dared to hope, and she was delighted. She was thankful to Leigh for being the cause of Edith's failure to rest from home.

Another aspect of the affair was that Edith had come away from Eltham House suddenly, without leave, and without notice. This Mr. Leigh was to call. If he chose to be disagreeable he might urge that breach of contract and something unpleasant might arise from Edith's hasty act. The best thing to do was to see the man when he came, and be polite to him. If he had been a little impudent, over attentive, that was not a very great fault, and all chance of repetition was past. He had been most useful to Edith that morning when she found she had no ticket. Of course, she should pay him the money back--that is, if she had it in the house, which she doubted--and, of course, she should thank him for his goodness to her darling daughter. No duties could be plainer than these. Edith too must apologise for her flight, and thank Mr. Leigh for his kindness to her this morning. That was obviously necessary, and then all the unpleasantness would be as though it had never taken place.

Off and on Mrs. Grace sat at the window until afternoon. At one o'clock she ate a light luncheon; having by a visit to Edith's room found that the girl slept, she let her sleep on. In health, after fatigue and excitement, no one should be waked for food. When the old woman had finished her meal, and the table was cleared by the landlady's daughter who attended upon the lodgers, Mrs. Grace took her work and resumed her place by the window.

Time slipped away, and she began to think that after all Mr. Leigh might not come, when, lifting her eyes from her work, she saw two men cross the road and approach the house. One of these was the dwarf, the other a complete stranger to her, a tall, powerful-looking young man in a frock-coat and low crowned hat. The two seemed in earnest discourse. Neither looked up. The younger man leant over the elder as if listening intently. They disappeared from view and Mrs. Grace heard them ascend the steps and knock. She hastened to Edith, whom she found just awake and told her Mr. Leigh had arrived. Then she went back to the sitting-room and, when word came up that Mr. Leigh and a friend wished to see her, sent down an invitation for the gentlemen to come up. The two were shown in.

"I do myself, Mrs. Grace, the great pleasure and honour of calling upon you to inquire after Miss Grace, and I have taken the liberty of asking my friend to keep me company," said the little man, bowing profoundly and sweeping the ground with his hat. His tones were most respectful, his manner intensely ceremonious.

Mrs. Grace, waving her hand to a couple of chairs, said: "I am glad to see you and your friend, Mr. Leigh. Will you, please, be seated."

"Mrs. Leigh, my friend, Mr. John Hanbury, whose fame as a public speaker is as wide as the ground covered by the English language."

"Very happy, indeed, to make Mr. Hanbury's acquaintance, and very much honoured by Mr. Hanbury's call," said the old lady bowing again, and then sitting down with another gesture towards the chairs.

The two men sat down. Hanbury felt uncomfortable at Leigh's bombastic introduction, but at the moment he was completely powerless. He felt indignant at this man calling him a friend, but Leigh had it in his power to make him seem ridiculous over a good part of London; there was nothing for this but to grin and bear it.

"Mr. Hanbury and I happening to have business this way, and I remembering my promise to call and enquire how Miss Grace is after her journey this morning, I thought I'd presume on your kindness and bring him with me."

Mrs. Grace said no apology was necessary, that she was glad Mr. Leigh had brought his friend.

Hanbury winced again. What had this man brought him here for? What was the meaning of his hocus-pocus talk about miracle gold. Was this poor fellow as misshapen in mind as in body? Who was this old woman? Could she be the woman he had spoken of? Nonsense. She was a lady, no doubt, not the kind of woman you would expect to find in such a street of Chelsea, but what then? What of her?

"I hope Miss Grace has taken no harm of her fright?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Leigh? I am sure I don't know what she would have done only for your opportune appearance on the scene. Here she is, to thank you in person."

The two men rose.

The door opened and Edith Grace, pale and impassive, entered the room.

Hanbury made a step forward, and cried, "Dora!"

The little man laid his hand on the young man's arm and held him back.

Hanbury looked down at the dwarf in anger and glanced quickly at the girl.

"My grand-daughter, Miss Grace--Mr. John Hanbury, whose speeches I have often asked you to read for me, Edith."

Hanbury fell back a pace and bowed mechanically like one in a dream. He looked from the dwarf to the girl and from the girl to the dwarf, but could find no word to say, had no desire to say a word. He was completely overcome by amazement. The presence of five thousand people, with eyes fixed in expectation upon him, would have acted as a powerful stimulant to composed exaltation, but the presence of this one girl half stunned him.

He was dimly conscious of sitting down and hearing a long explanation about trains and disinclination to leave home and regrets and cabs, but nothing of it conveyed a clear idea to his mind. He gathered vaguely that this girl, who was one of the Graces of Gracedieu in Derbyshire, had arrived in London that morning without ticket or money, and the dwarf happened providentially to be in the same train and paid the fare for her.

What he heard left little or no impression upon him except when she spoke. All his attention was fixed in wondering regard upon her face and form.

It was not until Leigh and he were in the street once more that he recovered from the shock and surprise.

"That is the most marvellous thing I ever saw in all my life," said he, as the two walked away.

"Yes," said Leigh, "the most marvellous."

"I can scarcely believe it even yet," said Hanbury in a tone of reverie.

"When you fainted in Welbeck Place," began the dwarf with great emphasis and deliberation.

"Ay," said Hanbury with a start and in a voice of sharp and painful wakefulness. For a while he had forgotten why he had so uncouth a companion.

"When you fainted in Welbeck Place," repeated Leigh coldly, steadily, "I went over to where you were lying, took off my hat to your young lady----"

"Eh?" interrupted Hanbury, with a grimace. "Great Heavens," he thought, "is Dora Ashton, grand-daughter of Lord Byngfield, to be called 'my young lady' by this creature? Why doesn't he call her my young woman, at once? Ugh!"

"I was saying when you interrupted me," said Leigh sternly (it was plain to Hanbury this man was not going to overlook any point of advantage in his position) "that when you were lying in a dead faint in Welbeck Place, and I went to offer help, I took off my hat to your young lady and said, 'Miss Grace, can I be of any use?' or words to that effect."

"I do not wonder." He forgot for a moment his annoyance and disgust. "It is the most astonishing likeness I ever saw in all my life. It may be possible to detect a difference between the two when they are side by side, but I could not tell one from the other when apart."

"Hah! You could not tell one from the other. I could not when I first saw your young lady----"

"May I ask you to say Miss Ashton, or if you would still further oblige me, not to speak of the lady at all."

"Oh-ho! That's the sort of thing it is, is it? Hah! Sly dog! Knowing shaver! Hot 'un!"

Hanbury's face blazed, and for a moment he seemed about to forget himself, turn on the dwarf and rend him. Making a powerful effort he controlled his rage. "You are disastrously wrong, and you give me great pain."

"Very good. I'll do you a favour and take your word for it. Hah!"

This insolence was intolerable, and yet--and yet--and--yet it must be borne with for a while.

"I was saying, when you interrupted me a second time, that I could not tell the difference between the two, when I saw Miss Ashton this afternoon. *Now* I could."

"Indeed?" said Hanbury, with frigid politeness. At first this wretched creature had been all silky fur and purring sounds; now he seemed all claws and hisses.

"Yes. Miss Ashton has more go more vitality, more vigour, more *verve*, more enterprise, more enthusiasm, more divinity."

Hanbury turned round and gazed at the hunchback with astonishment. There was the hurry of eloquence in his words, and the flash of enthusiasm in his eyes. This man was not an ordinary man, physically or intellectually. Hanbury instantly altered his mental attitude towards the dwarf. He no longer assumed the pose of a superior, the method of a master. He recognised an equal. As Leigh had named the qualities of Dora, one by one, Hanbury had felt that thrill which always goes through a man of eloquent emotions when listening to felicitous description. In the judicious and intelligent use of a term there is freemasonry among intellectual men. It is by the phrase, and not the thought, that an intellectual man recognises a fellow. Thought is common, amorphous; with words the intellectual man models it into forms of beauty.

"I do not understand you," said Hanbury. "How do you connect vigour and divinity? The great gods did nothing."

"Ay, the great gods of the Greeks did nothing. But here in the North our gods are hard-working. You, I know, are a Tory."

"Well, it is somewhat doubtful what I am."

"I am for the people."

"So am I."

"But we differ *in toto* as to the means by which the people may be helped."

"Yes, *in toto*."

"Now then, here is the position: You are a Tory and I am a Radical."



"I do not call myself a Tory. Indeed, I came into this neighbourhood to-day in the democratic interest, if I may put it in that way. But shall we get anything out of a political discussion?"

"I daresay not."

"Then shall we say good-bye to one another here? I may rely on your keeping this whole affair quiet?"

"But you have not heard my request yet. I told you I could show you something more wonderful than mystery gold. I told you I could show you a more wonderful thing than even miracle gold. I have shown that to you. Now I want my hush money."

"What is it?"

"An introduction to Miss Ashton."

"An introduction to Miss Ashton!"

"Yes. Ah, look! That is the first poster of an evening paper I have seen to-day. How dull the evening papers are, to be sure."

"When do you wish to meet Miss Ashton?"

"Now. There never was any time past or future as good as the present."

"Come with me."

## CHAPTER XII.

### AN OMEN.

Hanbury turned west and led the way. He smiled grimly but said nothing. Here was poetic justice for Dora with a vengeance. Here was Nemesis in the person of this misshapen representative of the people. Here was a bridegroom of Democracy from a Chelsea slum. She had been anxious to see the people of the slums and now one of the people was anxious to see her. Poetic justice was fully vindicated or would be when he introduced this stunted demagogue to the daughter of a hundred earls.

For a while Leigh said nothing, so that Hanbury had ample time for thought. Two years ago he had made his first appearance on a platform as a Tory Democrat. His own birth and surroundings had been of neither the very high nor the very low. His father, years dead, William Hanbury, had been a merchant in Fenchurch Street, his mother, still living, was daughter of the late Sir Ralph Preston, Baronet, and brother of the present General Sir Edward Preston. John Hanbury did not know much about his father's family. For two or three generations the Hanburys had lived as private gentlemen of modest means, until some whim took his father, and he went into business in Fenchurch Street and made money. John was the only child, and had a couple of thousand a year of his own, and the reversion of his mother's money. He was thus well off for a young man, and quite independent. He had money enough to adopt any career or pursue none.

Up to a couple of years ago he had been roving in taste. Then he made a few speeches from Tory Democratic platforms and people said he was a born orator, and born orators, by perversion of thought, are supposed to be born statesmen as well. Hence he had made up his mind to devote himself to politics. But up to this time he had few strong political views and no political faith.

He seemed to be about growing into a philosophical politician, that is, a politician useful at times to each party and abhorred by both.

In feeling and tastes John Hanbury was an aristocrat. Although his father had been in business he had never sunk to the level of a City man, whose past and present was all of the City. William Hanbury had been known before his migration into the regions of commerce, and William Hanbury's wife was a baronet's daughter, and no baronet of yesterday either, and John Hanbury had had two grandfathers who did not work, and furthermore the money which William Hanbury put into business had not, as far as could be traced, come out of business.

It was about a year after John Hanbury made his first platform speech that he became very friendly with the Ashtons. He had known Dora's father for a little while as a member of a non-political West End club. When Mr. Ashton saw that the young man had been haranguing from a

platform he took him in hand one day at luncheon at the club and pointed out that meddling in politics meant suicide to happiness. "Both my wife and my daughter are violent politicians; but I will encourage no politics while I am at home. A man's house is to cover and shield him from the storms of the elements, and the storms of parties, and I will have no wrangle under the house tree. I don't want to say anything against politicians, but I don't want to have anything to do with them."

"And what side do Mrs. Ashton and Miss Ashton hold with?"

"The wrong side, of course, sir; they are women. Let us say no more of them. I do not know what their side is called by the charlatans and jugglers of to-day. I hear a jargon going on often when it is fancied I am not attending to what is being said. With everything I hear I adopt a good and completely impartial plan. I alter all the epithets before the nouns to their direct opposite. This, sir, creates as great a turmoil and confusion in my own head as though I were an active politician; but, sir, I save my feelings and retain my self-respect by giving no heed, taking no interest, saying no word. When a man adopts politics he takes a shrew, an infernal shrew, sir, for a wife."

The Honourable Mrs. Ashton (she was daughter of Lord Byngfield) saw the summarised report of Hanbury's speech and immediately took an intense interest in the young man. From the printed reports and the verbal accounts she got of him she conceived a high expectation of the future before him, if he were taken in hand at once, for, alas! was he not on the wrong path?

Accordingly she made up her mind to lie in wait for him and catch him and convert him or rather divert him, for as yet he was not fully committed to any party. She met him in the drawing-room of a friend. She invited him to her small old house in Curzon Street, and when he came set about the important work of conversion or diversion.

Mrs. Ashton was a tall, thin woman of forty-five with very great vitality and energy. How so frail and slender a body sufficed to restrain so fiery and irrepressible a spirit was a puzzle. It seemed as though the working of the spirit would shake the poor body to pieces. It was impossible to be long near her without catching some of her enthusiasm, and at first John Hanbury, being a young man and quite unused to female propagandists, was almost carried away. But in time he recovered his breath and found himself firm on his feet and at leisure to look around him.

Then he saw Miss Ashton, Dora Ashton, and she was another affair altogether, and affected him differently. He fell in love with Dora. She certainly was the loveliest and most sprightly girl whose hand his hand had ever touched. Notwithstanding the fiery earnestness of her mother, and the statement of her father that his wife and daughter were politicians, she was no politician in a party sense. She was an advocate of progress and the poor, subjects which all parties profess to have at heart, but prominence to which justly or unjustly gives a decidedly Liberal if not Radical tinge to the banner carried by their advocates.

In time Dora began to show no objection to the company of John Hanbury and later the two became informally engaged. They were both opposed to affording the world food for gossip and they agreed to say nothing of their engagement until a very short time before their marriage. They understood one another. That was enough for them. It was certain neither family would object. No question of money was likely to arise. In fact true love would run as smooth as the Serpentine. A little savour of romance and difficulty was imported by a wholly unnecessary secrecy.

John Hanbury had not yet made any distinct profession of political faith. Dora said the man who had not settled his political creed was unfit for matrimony. This was said playfully, but the two agreed it would be advisable for John to take his place in public before he took his place as a householder. At present he lived with his widowed mother, who had for some secret reason or other as great, nay, a greater horror of politics than even Mr. Ashton himself.

Dora had long importuned John to take her through some of the poorer streets of Westminster, the Chelsea district, for instance. She did not mean slumming in the disguise of a factory girl, but just a stroll through a mean but reputable street. Under persistent pressure he consented, and out of this walk to-day had sprung the meeting with this strange being at his side and the meeting with the beautiful girl so astonishingly like Dora.

Dora had asked, insisted in her enthusiastic way, upon piercing this unknown region of Westminster in order to see some of the London poor in the less noisome of their haunts. At the shocking catastrophe which had overtaken the negro, one of the people, he had fainted and fallen, for the purposes of blighting ridicule, into the hands of this man of the people by his side. This man of the people had mistaken Dora for that girl in Grimsby Street and he had mistaken the girl in Grimsby Street for Dora. This man of the people had introduced him to that girl who was so like Dora, and now claimed to be introduced to Dora who was so like that girl. This was indeed the ideal of poetic justice! Dora had been the cause of bringing this man and him together and putting him in this man's power. Dora was an aristocratic advocate of the people. By introducing this man to Dora in Curzon Street he should silence him, thus getting back to the position in which he was before he set out that afternoon and this man should have introduced him to Miss Grace, who was Dora's double, and he should have introduced this man to Dora who

was Miss Grace's double.

So far the situation had all the completeness of a mathematic problem, of a worked-out sum in proportion, of a Roland for an Oliver, or a Chinese puzzle.

But over and above there was, for John Hanbury, a little gain, a tiny profit. Dora in her enthusiasm might have no objection to walk through the haunts of the people; how would she like the people to walk into her mother's drawing-room, particularly when the people were represented by the poor, maimed, conceited creature at his side.

John Hanbury suddenly looked down. Leigh was hobbling along laboriously at his side. It all at once struck Hanbury with remorse and pity that he had been walking at a pace in no way calculated for the comfort of his companion. In his absorption he had given no heed to the stunted legs and deformed chest at his side. He slackened his steps and said, with the first touch of consideration or kindness he had yet displayed: "I beg your pardon, Mr. Leigh. I fear I have been going too fast."

"Hah!" said the little man, "most young men go too fast."

"I assure you," said he, keeping to the literal meaning of his words, "I was quite unconscious of the rate I was walking at."

"Just so. You forgot me. You were thinking of yourself."

"I am afraid I was not thinking of you."

"Don't bother yourself about me. I am used to be forgotten unless when I can make myself felt. Now you would give a good deal to forget me altogether. Hah!"

"We have not very much farther to go. But I ought to have called a cab."

"And deprived me of the honour of walking beside you! That would have been much more unkind. But I am glad we have not much farther to walk. And you are glad we have not much farther to walk-together. Do you know why you are taking this stroll with me?"

"Oh, yes. It is part of our bargain."

"Ah, the bargain is only an accident. The reason why you are taking this stroll with me is because you do not want to cut a ridiculous figure in the papers."

"No doubt."

"Because you do not want to appear contemptible for a few hours, a few days, a few weeks. How would you like to walk from your childhood to your grave the butt and derision of all who set eyes on you?"

Hanbury did not answer the question.

"This little walk I am taking with you now is only a short stage on the long road I am always travelling between lines of people that point and laugh and jeer and grin and howl at me. I am basking in the splendours of your youth and your fame."

Hanbury did not see his way to say anything to this either.

"Have you read much fiction?" asked Leigh after a pause.

"Well, yes," with a laugh. "Government statistics and Blue Books generally." He wanted to alter the current of conversation if possible.

"I don't mean books of fiction dealing with figures of that kind, but works of fiction dealing with figures of another kind. With human figures, for instance? For instance, have you read Hugo's 'Notre Dame'?"

"Yes," with a frown.

"And Dickens's 'Old Curiosity Shop'?"

"Yes," with a shudder.

"And which do you consider the most hideous and loathsome, Quasimodo, Quilp, or Leigh?"

"Mr. Leigh, you surely are not adopting this means of punishing me for my heedlessness in hurrying just now? If so you are adopting an extremely painful way of reminding me of my rudeness."

"Painful means! Painful means! As I live under Heaven, this man is thinking of himself now! Thinking of himself still! He is thinking of the pain it gives him to remember I am a hump-backed cripple, and not of the pain it is to me to be the hump-backed cripple!--to be the owner of the accursed carrion carcase he would spurn into a sewer if he met one open *and it were dark!*"

Leigh paused and flamed and frothed.

"If you allow yourself to give way to such absurd vagaries as these, how do you expect me to fulfil the final part of our compact?"

"Quite right, Mr. Hanbury. I will moderate my raptures, sir. This is not, as you might say, either the time or place for heroics. The idiot boy is a more engaging part than the iconoclast maniac. The truth is, I have eaten nothing to-day yet, and I am a bit lightheaded. You don't use eau-de-cologne? Few men do. I do. It is very refreshing. Now let us go on. I am quite calm."

They had stopped a minute, and Leigh spilled some perfumed spirit from his small silver flask, and inhaled the spirit noisily.

"Hah! I feel all right again. Speaking of the idiot boy makes me think of asking you if, when you were at school, you had the taste for speaking?"

"Mr. Leigh," said Hanbury severely, "you allow yourself great freedom with liberties."

"Ha-ha-ha! Capital. You are right. I should not have said that. You will try to forgive me. I shall remember your words, though. They would go well in a play. But we must dismiss folly. The weather is too hot for repartee. At least, I find it too hot. Talking of heat reminds me of a furnace, and that brings me back to something I said to you about my having made a discovery or invention in chemistry, which will completely outshine mystery gold. The Italians have a saying that as a man grows old he gives up love, and devotes himself to wine. Love has never been much in my way, and now that I have passed the bridge, the *pons asinorum* over which all men who are such asses as to live long enough go when they turn thirty-five, I have no intention of taking to wine, for it does not agree with me. But I am seriously thinking of taking to gold. Gold, sir, is a thing that becomes all times of life, and glorifies age. There is a vast fortune in my discovery. Hah!"

"And what may be the nature of your discovery?"

"Do you know anything of chemistry?"

"Nothing."

"Or of metallurgy even?"

"No."

"What a pity! I cannot therefore hope to rouse in you the divine enthusiasm of a scientist. I had just come back from Stratford-at-Bow when I had the pleasure and honour of meeting you to-day. I had been down there looking after the first drawing of the retorts, and my expectations had never dared to contemplate such a result as I have reached."

"May I know what your discovery is?"

"The philosopher's stone, sir. Ha-ha ha! You will laugh at me. So will all sensible men laugh at me when I say I have discovered the philosopher's stone. The universal agent. The great solvent. The mighty elixir. But remember, sir, in the history of the world's progress it is always the sensible men who have been the fools."

"I am afraid you will not have many believers in the beginning."

"I know I shall not. But I do not want many believers. I am not like the advertising stockbrokers who are willing to make any man's fortune but their own. I shall keep my secret dark, and make my fortune in quiet, with no more noise about how I am doing it than an army contractor."

"And what do you purpose making gold out of--lead?"

"No, sir, phosphorus. Out of phosphorus."

"It is the right colour, to begin with."

"And it is in the right place."

"Where?"

"Here," tapping his brown, wrinkled forehead, "in my brain. I am going to turn the phosphorus of my brain into gold. All the things that have been made by man have been made out of the phosphorus of the brain, why not gold also?"

"Truly, why not gold also?"

"You were right when you said I should have few believers at first. In the beginning there will be little or no profit. Bah, let me not talk like a fool. Of course, you and I know that gold cannot be made until we discover the universal atom and learn how to handle it. My discovery is a

combination of substances which will defy all the known tests for gold. The dry or the wet method will be powerless confronted with it. The cupel and acid will proclaim it gold. It will scorn the advances of oxygen and remain fixed a thousand years in the snowy heart of the furnace. It will be as flexible as ribbed grass, as ductile as the web of a spider, as malleable as the air between the gold-beater's skins.

"You say it will be almost as dear as gold itself at the beginning."

"Yes, almost as dear as gold."

"How much will it cost?"

"I have not yet counted up all the cost. There are certain ingredients the cost of which it is difficult to ascertain," he said in an abstracted voice.

"This is Mrs. Ashton's house."

Leigh aroused out of the abstraction and looked up. Miss Ashton was at the open window of the drawing-room.

"I am so troubled about the calculation that I am not sure whether it will pay at all to make it. Yesterday morning I had given up all thought of my alchemy. I resolved to direct my studies towards the elixir of life. Yesterday I made up my mind the elixir was beyond me, and I resolved to go on making the gold. To day I am in doubt again. Like all alchemists, I am superstitious. I shall look for an omen to guide me."

"Miss Ashton is at the window. She recognises you. She is saluting you."

The dwarf drew a pace back from the house and swept the ground with his hat.

"Take that for a good omen," said Hanbury, as he went up to the door.

"Did I not tell you I would show you something more wonderful than mystery gold?"

"Yes."

"Did I keep my word?"

"The likeness is most astonishing. Come in."

"If the likeness is not complete it may go hard with the miracle gold."

## **CHAPTER XIII.**

### **IN CURZON STREET.**

The Honourable Mrs. Ashton's drawing-room would, under ordinary circumstances, be open to any friend or acquaintance brought there by Hanbury. He was a well-received frequenter of the house, and though the relations between him and Miss Ashton had not been announced, they were understood in the household, and any of the family who were within were always at home to him.

Of course, if Mrs. Ashton's had been an ordinary West-end drawing-room, Hanbury would not bring there a man he had picked up accidentally in the street. But Mrs. Ashton's was not by any means an ordinary West-end drawing-room. Neither good social position nor good coats were essentials in that chamber of liberty. So long as one was distinguished in arts, or science, or politics, but particularly in politics, he was welcome, and all the more if he were a violent Radical. Being merely cracked, did not exclude anyone, so long as the cracked man was clever. Mere cleverness or talent, however, would not qualify for entrance. It was necessary to be fairly respectable in manner and behaviour, and not to be infamous at all. Mrs. Ashton was an enthusiast, but she was no fool. She did not insist upon Dukes being vulgar, or Radicals being fops, but she expected Dukes to be gentlemen, and Radicals before coming to her house to lay aside all arrogance because of their humble birth or position. Mrs. Ashton had the blood of a lady, and the manners of a lady, and the habits of a lady, by reason of her birth and bringing-up. To these qualities she had the good sense to add the heart of a Christian and the good taste to reject the Christian cant. She did not employ either the curses or the slangs of any of the creeds, but contented herself with trying to live up to the principle of the great scheme of charity to be

found running through all Christ's teachings. She was an Episcopalian, because her people before her had been Episcopalian, but she had nowhere in the New Dispensation found any law enjoining her to hate Mahomedans or Buddhists, or even Christians of another sect. Indeed, although at heart a pious woman, she preferred not to speak of religious matters. But she set her face against impieties. "To put it on no higher ground," she would say, "they are bad taste, bad form. A blasphemy is not worth uttering unless there is some human being to hear it, and the only reason it is of any value then, is because it hurts or shocks the hearer, and to do anything of the kind ought not to be allowed." So that, having found out Leigh was more or less a Radical, and had streaks of cleverness in him, Hanbury was not very shy of introducing him at Curzon Street.

There was another reason why the young man experienced no doubt of Leigh's welcome. This was Thursday, late in the afternoon, and Mrs. Ashton was at home every Thursday from four to seven. In the little crowd of people who came to her informal receptions, were many of strange and interesting views and theories and faces and figures. Leigh's would, no doubt, be the most remarkable figure present that day, but the callers would be too varied and many-coloured and cosmopolitan to take a painful interest in the dwarf. In the crowd and comparative hurry of a Thursday afternoon, Leigh would have fewer chances than at ordinary times of attracting attention by solecisms of which he might be guilty.

Before knocking at the door, Hanbury turned to Leigh and said: "By the way, there are likely to be a good number of people here at this hour on Thursday."

"I know. An At home."

"Precisely. You will not, of course, say a word about what occurred earlier. I mean in that blind street."

"Welbeck Place, you mean; no, no. Why to speak, to breathe of it among a lot of people who are only your very intimate and most dear friends would be worse than publishing it in every evening newspaper. I suppose no one here will mention anything about it."

"No," answered Hanbury. "No one here," was a great improvement in synonyms for Dora upon "your young lady." This halt and miserable creature seemed capable of education. He had not only natural smartness, but docile receptivity also when he chose to exercise it. "Miss Ashton will say nothing about it," he added aloud. "And now, Mr. Leigh, most of the people you will meet here to-day are smart people, and I should like to know if I may say you are the last and the first of the alchemists, last in point of time and first in point of power? or am I to refer to you as a Radical—you will find several Radicals here?"

"Hah! Neither. Do not refer to me as either an alchemist or a Radical. You said there would be politicians?"

"Yes. Undoubtedly politicians"

"Very good. Introduce me as a Time Server. If politicians are present they will be curious to see a man of my persuasion. Sir, the dodo is as common as the English goose compared with a man of my persuasion among politicians."

"Is not the joke rather a stupid one? Rather childish? Eh? You can't expect to find that intelligent people will either laugh or wince at such a poor pleasantry? They will only yawn."

"Sir, you do *my* intelligence an injustice when you fancy I try jokes upon men of whose intelligence I am not assured. If there is a joke in what I said, I beg *your* pardon. I had no intention of making one."

"Oh, all right," said Hanbury with a reckless laugh as the door opened and the two entered the house.

While they were going up stairs, Hanbury asked in a tone of amused perplexity:

"How on earth am I to say 'Mr. Leigh, the distinguished Time Server?'"

"You have said it very well now, for a first attempt. You will say it still better after this rehearsal: practice makes perfect."

When they got into the drawing-room, Hanbury led his companion towards Mrs. Ashton, who was standing talking to a distinguished microscopist, Dr. Stein. He had of late been pursuing the unhappy microbe, and had at last pushed the beast into a corner, and when it turned horrent, at bay upon him and he had thrust it through the body with an antiseptic poisoned in an epigram, and so slain the beast summarily and for ever. The hostess had been listening to the doctor's account of the expiring groans of the terrified microbe, and had just said with an amused smile:

"And now, Dr. Stein, that the microbe has been disposed of, to what do you intend directing your attention?"

"I am not yet sure. I have not quite decided." The speaker's back was towards the door which

Mrs. Ashton faced. "I have been so long devoted to the infinitely little I think I must now attack big game. Having made an end of the microbe, I am going to look through the backward telescope of time and try to start the mastodon again. I am sick of the infinitely little----"

"Ah, Mr. Hanbury," said the hostess, seeing the young man and his small companion, and feeling that the words of the doctor must be overheard by the dwarf.

"My friend, Mr. Leigh," said Hanbury, with a nervous laugh, "who wishes to be known as a distinguished Time Server, is most anxious to be introduced to you, Mrs. Ashton. Mrs. Ashton--Mr. Leigh." The latter bowed profoundly.

"I am delighted to meet a gentleman who has the courage to describe himself as a time-server." She was in doubt as to what he intended to convey, and repeated his description of himself to show she was not afraid of bluntness, even if she did not court it in so aggressive a form.

Dr. Stein moved away and was lost to sight.

"Pardon me," said Leigh, bowing first to her and then to Hanbury, "there is no great courage on my part. It is infamous to be a time-server. I am a servant of time."

Hanbury flushed angrily and bit his lip, and secretly cursed his weakness in bringing this man to this place. Before he could control himself sufficiently for speech Leigh went on:

"I am not as great a master of phrases as Mr. Hanbury," (the young man's anger increased), "and in asking him to say time-server I made a slip of the tongue."

"Liar!" thought the other man furiously.

"I should have described myself as a servant of time; I am a clock-maker."

"The miserable quibbler!" thought Hanbury, somewhat relieved. "I dare say he considers this a telling kind of pun. I am very sorry I did not face the newspapers, rather than bring him here. I must have been mad to think of introducing him."

"And what kind of clock do you admire most, Mr. Leigh?" asked Mrs. Ashton, smiling now. She set down the little man with the short deformed body as an eccentric being, who had a taste for verbal tricks, by some supposed to be pleasantries.

"I prefer, madam, the clocks that go."

"Fast or slow?"

"Fast. It is better to beat the sun than to be beaten by the sun."

"But are not the clocks that go correctly the best of all?"

"When a clock marks twenty-five hours to the day we live twenty-five hours to the day: when it marks twenty-three we live twenty-three. There are thus two hours a day in favour of going fast."

"But," said Hanbury, who suddenly recovered his good humour or semblance of it; for Leigh was not doing or saying anything outrageous, and Dora had risen from her seat by the window and was coming towards them. "It does not make any difference whether you go fast or slow, each spindle will wear out in its allotted number of revolutions, no matter what the speed."

"No," said Leigh, his eyes flashing as he caught sight of Miss Ashton "The machinery is not so liable to rust or the oil to clog when going fast as when going slow. Fluidity of the oil ensures the minimum of friction. Besides, it is better to wear out than to rust out."

"That depends," laughed Hanbury, "on what you are or what you do. Would you like, for instance, to wear out our hangman?"

"That, in its turn, would depend to an enormous extent on the material you set him to work upon?" said Leigh with a saturnine smile.

"So it would, indeed, Mr. Leigh, but let us hope we have not in all this country enough worthy material to try the constitution of the most feeble man. Mr. Leigh, Miss Ashton, my daughter."

Dora smiled and bent graciously to him. He bowed, but not nearly so low as when Hanbury introduced him to her mother. There was no exaggeration in his bow this time. He raised his head more quickly, more firmly, and then threw it up and held it back, looking around him with hard, haughty eyes. To Hanbury's astonishment Leigh appeared quite at his ease. He was neither confused nor insolent.

As Hanbury saw Dora approach and meet Leigh, he was more struck than before with the extraordinary likeness between her and Edith Grace. Dora had just perceptibly more colour in her pale olive face, and just perceptibly more vigour in her movements, and just perceptibly more fire in her eyes; but the difference was extremely slight, and would certainly be missed by an

ordinary observer.

Was she still angry with him? She showed him no sign of resentment or forgiveness. She gave her eyes and attention to this man whom he had been forced to bring with him. This lying, malignant satyr, who hid the spirit of the Inquisition in the body of a deformed gorilla! Bah! how could Dora Ashton, whose blood went back to the blood of those who escaped the Saxon spears and shafts and blades at Hastings, look with interest and favour upon this misshapen manikin!

"Yes," went on Leigh, turning to Mrs. Ashton, "I am a servant of time. I am now engaged in making a clock which will, I think, be the most remarkable in the world."

"Have you been to Strasburg?" asked Hanbury, because he believed Leigh had not been there.

"Bah! Strasburg, no! Why should I go to Strasburg? To see other clocks is only to see how effects have been produced. With a conjuror the great difficulty is not to discover how to perform any trick, but to discover a trick that will be worth performing. If you tell any mediocre mechanist of an effect produced in mechanism, he can tell how it is done or how it could be done."

"What! Can you construct a clock like Burdeau's, I mean one that would produce the same effects?" asked Hanbury with a scarcely perceptible sneer.

"Produce the same effect! Easily. Burdeau's clock represented Louis XIV. surrounded by upper lackeys, other monarchs who did him homage. Hah! There is nothing easier. It is more fit for a puppet show to amuse the groundlings of a country fair than for a monumental work of genius like a great clock."

"Did not the machinery of Burdeau's clock go wrong upon the occasion of its public exhibition?" asked Hanbury with a polite, malicious smile.

"It did, and the figure of the Grand Monarque, who, like me, was not over tall, instead of receiving homage from the figure of William III., fell down before the effigy of William and grovelled. Bah! there was no difficulty or merit in producing that effect."

"I was thinking of some effect wrought by that public exhibition and eccentricity on the part of the clock."

"You mean getting Burdeau thrown into the Bastille by the Grand Monarque?"

"Yes. Do you think an effect of that kind could be produced in our day by a clock?"

"Upon a clock maker?"

"Suppose so."

"Hah! You would, no doubt, like *me* to try it?"

"Well, you boasted you could produce any effect."

"Hah! If they did take me and throw me into the Bastille to-day, now, at this moment, I should not mind it, nor would my clock mind it either. It is not in the power of any king or potentate of earth to divorce me from my clock!" He swelled out his chest and flung his shoulders and head back.

"What! Even if he put you in the Bastille? Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Hanbury derisively. "That is too much indeed. Why, it is not clock making, but necromancy."

The little man stepped back a pace, looked at Hanbury contemptuously from head to foot, and said:

"It is true, although you may not be able to understand it." Then turned to Mrs. Ashton. "A clock cannot be made to go for ever quite independent of man. But I think I have invented a new means of dealing with clocks; indeed, I am quite sure my plan is absolutely new. If a constitutional tyrant were to lock me up in any bastille this instant, my clock, I mean what of it is now completed and in working order, would be wound up to-night between twelve and one o'clock, just as if I were there. I admit no stranger into my workshop."

"That is very extraordinary," said Miss Ashton, speaking for the first time.

Leigh made a gesture deprecating extraordinariness.

"I am not going in for any nonsense about perpetual motion. There will be thousands of figures in my clock, thousands of automaton Figures of Time to move in one endless procession. These figures will differ from all others to be found in horloges. They will be designed wholly to please and educate the eye by their artistic virtues and graces. The mechanical movements will be wholly subject to naturalness and beauty. I have been in great difficulty to find a worthy model for my Pallas-Athena. Until to-day I was in despair."

There appeared nothing unpleasantly marked or emphatic in Leigh's manner; but Hanbury



knew he meant the model for the donor of the olive had been found in Dora. Good Heavens! this creature had dared to select as model for some imperfectly draped figure in this raree-show of charlatan mechanism the girl to whom *he*, John Hanbury, was engaged!

Mrs. Ashton understood the implication in the speech by an almost imperceptible reverence of the poor blighted deformed body to her beautiful, shapely, well-born daughter. A look of amusement and tenderness came into her thin, mobile, sympathetic face. "And you have been so fortunate as to find a model for your goddess?"

"Yes, and no. I did not find so much a model for my goddess as a goddess who had strayed down from the heights of Greek myth."

"This must be a lucky day with you, Mr. Leigh," Mrs. Ashton said pleasantly, and speaking as though his words referred to no one in whom she took interest. She was curious to see how he would extricate himself from a direct question. That would test his adroitness. "And when did you meet your divinity?"

"In the afternoon. I saw her in the afternoon." He looked angrily at Hanbury. The latter thought, "He is under obligation not to say anything of the Welbeck Place event; he, the traitorous wretch, will content himself with referring to it, so that Dora and I may know what he means. The false sneak!" He felt his face burn and blaze.

Other people came in, and Hanbury moved off a little and looked at Leigh and swayed his head slightly, beckoning him away.

Dora turned pale. She knew nothing of what had passed between the two men since she saw them last, and felt faint when she thought of John Hanbury's rage if the little man referred to their earlier meeting. Yet she could not believe he was going to speak of that. Why had John brought him here? She had no need to guess who the goddess was. She herself was the deity meant by him. That was plain enough.

"Mr. Hanbury was with me at the time," said Leigh, disregarding the signal made by the other.

Hanbury fixed his eyes on the mechanist with threatening deliberateness. Dora grew cold and paler and faint. She felt there was certain to be a scene, a most unpleasant scene. Mrs. Ashton saw nothing, understood nothing.

"Had we not better move aside, Mr. Leigh? I am afraid we are blocking the way." He thought: "This beast has saved up his poison till now. He will strike here."

"No, no," said Mrs. Ashton energetically. "I shall hear of nothing better all day than a goddess—it is not to be expected I can hear of anything better. Where did you meet this Pallas-Athena?"

"In Grimsby Street," answered Leigh with a bow to Miss Ashton and a look of malignant triumph at Hanbury.

The latter started and looked round him with as much surprise as if he suddenly found himself unexpectedly in a strange place. This man was too subtle and lithe for him. Who could have expected this wriggle?

Dora glanced up with an expression of relief. The colour came back quickly to her face, and the aspect of alarmed expectancy vanished.

Mrs. Ashton turned from one to another with quick, enquiring, puzzled eyes. She saw now there was something unusual beneath the surface in all this. "What is the mystery? You will tell me, Mr. Leigh?"

"No mystery at all," answered Leigh, in a quick, light, off-hand way. "I happened to come across Mr. Hanbury accidentally and we met the lady of whom I speak."

"Oh, then she is a lady. She is not a professional model."

"Hah! No. She is not a professional model. She is a lady, of a Derbyshire family."

"I wonder do I know her. May I hear her name?"

"Mr. Hanbury will, I have no doubt tell you," said Leigh, moving off with a smile. "He was introduced to her at the meeting, I was not. He was as much struck by the likeness as I."

"The likeness! The likeness to Pallas-Athena?" said Mrs. Ashton in perplexity.

"Yes," said the dwarf with another smile, as he made room for two men who were coming up the room to Mrs. Ashton.

## END OF VOLUME I.

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