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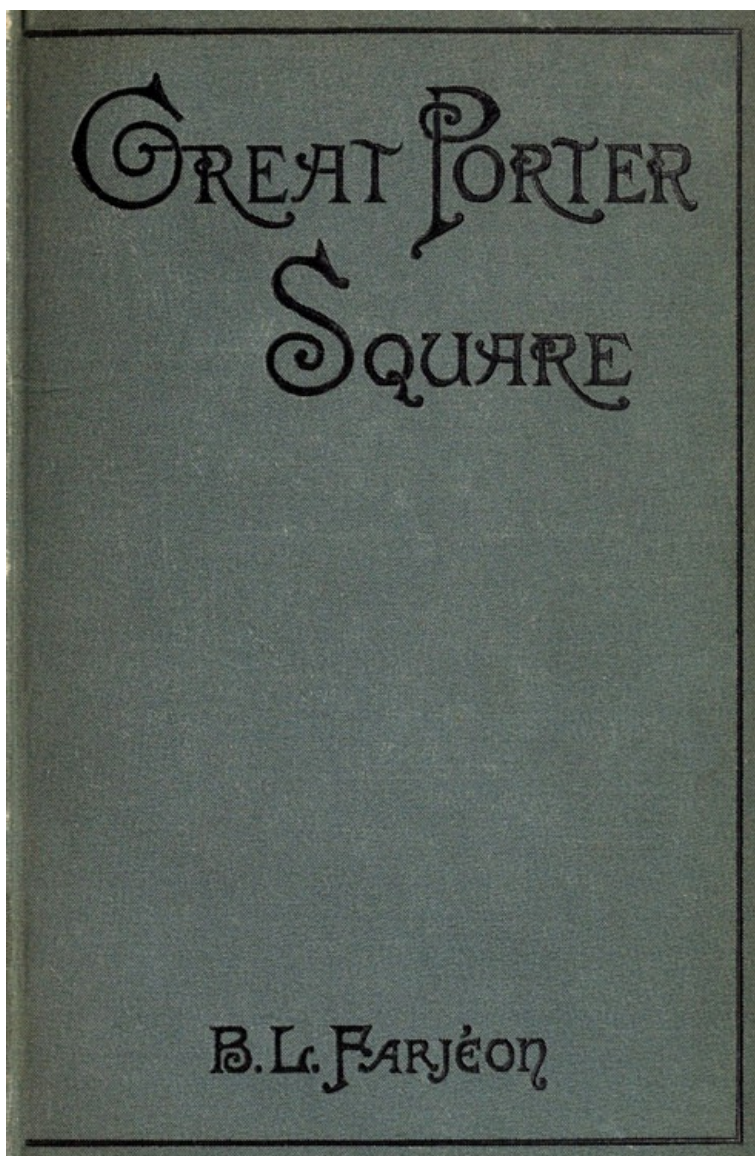
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GREAT PORTER SQUARE: A MYSTERY. V. 1



GREAT PORTER SQUARE: A MYSTERY.

BY
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Shadows," etc.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOLUME I.

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GREAT PORTER SQUARE: A MYSTERY.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES MRS. JAMES PREEDY; HINTS AT THE TROUBLE INTO WHICH SHE HAS FALLEN; AND GIVES AN INSIGHT INTO HER SOCIAL POSITION.

MRS. JAMES PREEDY, lodging-house keeper, bred and born in the vocation, and consequently familiar with all the moves of that extensive class of persons in London that has no regular home, and has to be cooked for, washed for, and generally done for, sat in the kitchen of her house, No. 118, Great Porter Square. This apartment was situated in the basement, and here Mrs. Preedy received her friends and "did" for her lodgers, in so far as the cooking for them can be said to be included in that portentous and significant term. The floor of the kitchen was oil-clothed, with, in distinguished places, strips of carpet of various patterns and colours, to give it an air. Over the mantelpiece was a square looking-glass in a mahogany frame, ranged on each side of which were faded photographs of men, women, and children, and of one gentleman in particular pretending to smoke a long pipe. This individual, whose face was square, whose aspect was frowning, and whose shirt sleeves were tucked up in an exceedingly free and easy fashion, was the pictorial embodiment of Mrs. Preedy's deceased husband. While he lived he was "a worryer, my dear," to quote Mrs. Preedy—and to do the lady justice, he looked it; but being gone to that bourne from which no lodging-house keeper ever returns, he immediately took his place in the affections of his widow as "the dear departed" and a "blessed angel." Thus do we often find tender appreciation budding into flower even at the moment the undertaker nails the lid upon the coffin, and Mr. Preedy, when the breath was out of his body, might (spiritually) have consoled himself with the reflection that he was not the only person from whose grave hitherto unknown or unrecognised virtues ascend. The weapons of the dead warrior, two long and two short pipes, were ranged crosswise on the wall with mathematical tenderness. When her day's work was over, and Mrs. Preedy, a lonely widow, sat by herself in the kitchen, she was wont to look regretfully at those pipes, wishing that he who had smoked them were alive to puff again as of yore; forgetting, in the charity of her heart, the crosses and vexations of her married life, and how often she had called her "blessed angel" a something I decline to mention for defiling the kitchen with his filthy smoke.

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The other faded photographs of men, women, and children, represented three generations of Mrs. Preedy's relations. They were not a handsome family; family portraits, as a rule, when the sun is the painter, are not remarkable for beauty, but these were a worse lot than usual. In their painful anxiety to exhibit themselves in a favourable light, Mrs. Preedy's relations had leered and stared to such a degree that it must have been no easy matter for them to get their features back into their natural shape after the photographer in the City Road was done with them. To make things worse, they were in their Sunday clothes, and if they had just been going into the penitentiary they could not have looked more unhappy and uncomfortable.

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On the mantelpiece, also, were two odd broken lustres which, in the course of their chequered career, had lost half their crystal drops; two fat vases, with a neat device of cabbage roses painted on them; an erratic clock, whose vagaries supplied a healthy irritant to its mistress; and a weather indicator, in the shape of an architectural structure representing two rural bowers, in one of which, suspended on catgut, dwelt an old wooden farmer, and in the other, also suspended on catgut, a young wooden woman. When the weather was going to be stormy, the wooden old farmer swung out, and with an assumption of preternatural wisdom stared vacantly before him; when it was going to be fine, the wooden young woman made her appearance, with a smirk and a leer indicative of weak brains. They never appeared together; when one was in the other was out; and that they were more frequently wrong than right in their vaticinations concerning the weather (being out when they ought to have been in, and in when they ought to have been out: which, in an odd way, has a political signification) did not in the slightest degree affect the wooden impostors. In this respect they were no worse than other impostors, not made of wood, who set themselves up as prophets (announcing, for instance, from time to time, the end of the world), and exhibit no sense of shame at the continual confounding of their predictions.

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The other furnishings of the room were in keeping. The kitchen range; the dresser, with its useful array of plates and dishes, and pots and pans; the sideboard, with its obstinate drawers, which, when they did allow themselves to be pulled out, gave way with a suddenness which brought confusion on the operator; the six odd chairs, one of black horsehair, bits of which peeped up, curious to see what was going on; one very sad, of green rep, representing faded gentility; two of wood and two of cane, and all of different breeds; the sofa, with a treacherous sinking in its inside, indicative of spasms and rickets; the solid, useful kitchen table, upon which many a pudding had been made, and many a slice cut from lodger's joints; the what-not of walnut wood, utterly useless, despite its pretension; the old-fashioned high-backed piano, with very little music in it, which had been taken for a debt from two old maiden sisters who had seen better days, and who had drifted, drifted, till they had drifted to Great Porter Square; the extraordinary production in water colours, which might have been a ship on fire, or a cornfield in a fit, or a pig cut open, or a castle on a sunlit mountain, or the "last-day," or a prairie of wild buffaloes,

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executed by one of Mrs. Preedy's nephews, and regarded as a triumph of art; the two coloured prints, one of the Queen, the other of Prince Albert; the six odd volumes of books, all tattered and torn, like the man in the nursery rhyme;—these were the elegant surroundings which set the stamp upon Mrs. Preedy's social standing in the neighbourhood of Great Porter Square.

There were four doors in the kitchen—one leading into the passage which communicated with the upper portion of the house, another affording an entrance into Mrs. Preedy's bedchamber, another disclosing a dark cupboard, apparently about four feet square, but which, being used as a bedroom by the maid-of-all-work, must have been slightly larger, and the last conducting to the scullery, which opened into the area, through the iron grating of which in the pavement above, human nature monotonously presented itself in a panoramic prospect of definite and indefinite human legs and ankles. Here, also, glimpses of a blissful earthly paradise were enjoyed by the various maids-of-all-work who came and went (for none stopped long at No. 118), through the medium of the baker, and the butcher, and even of the scavenger who called to collect the dust. Many a flirtation had been carried on in that dark nook. Beneath area railings, as in the fragrant air of fashionable conservatories, Love is lord of all.

Mrs. Preedy was alone. Not a soul was in the kitchen but herself. In the dark cupboard the maid-of-all-work was enjoying, apparently, a sleep as peaceful and noiseless as the sleep of a flower. It was nearly twelve o'clock at night, and not a sound was to be heard but Mrs. Preedy's heavy breathing, as, with many a sigh, she read, in the columns of a much-thumbed newspaper, an item of news in the shape of a police report, which must have possessed a singular magnetic power, inasmuch as she had read it so often that she ought to have known it by heart. Nevertheless, upon the present occasion, she did not miss a single word. Spectacles on nose, she followed the report line by line, keeping faithful mark with her forefinger until she reached the end; and then she commenced it all over again, and inflicted what was evidently a serious mortification upon herself. For it was not to be doubted, from the various shades of inquietude and distress which passed over her face as she proceeded, that the subject matter was exceedingly distasteful to her. It would have been the driest of dry work but for the glass of gin and water from which Mrs. Preedy occasionally took a sip—moistening her grief, as it were. The liquid might have been supposed to have some kind of sympathy for her, exciting her to tears, which flowed the more freely the more she sipped.

Once, treading very softly, she crept out of the room into the passage, and looked up the dark staircase. As she did so, she was seized with a fit of trembling, and was compelled to cling to the balustrade for support. She crept upstairs to the street door, at which she listened for a familiar sound. With her hand on the handle she waited until she heard the measured tread of a policeman; then she opened the door suddenly. It was a complaining, querulous door, and as she opened it a jarring sound escaped from its hinges. This sound produced an effect upon the policeman. He started back in affright, and with one leap placed himself outside the kerb of the pavement. No cause for reasonable alarm presenting itself, he looked up, and saw Mrs. Preedy standing upon the threshold.

"O, it's you, Mrs. Preedy?" he said, half-questioning.

"Yes," she replied, "it's me."

"You startled me," he said, coming close to her. "As the door opened it sounded like a smothered cry for 'Help,' and I won't deny that it startled me."

"I don't wonder at it," said Mrs. Preedy; "sometimes the least sound sends my 'eart into my mouth."

By one impulse they both looked at the house next door, No. 119 Great Porter Square. The next moment they turned their heads away from the house.

"Will you have a glass of gin?" asked Mrs. Preedy.

"I've no objections," replied the guardian of the night.

He stepped inside the passage, and waited while Mrs. Preedy went downstairs—now with a brisker step—and returned with a glass of liquor, which he emptied at a gulp. Thus refreshed, he gave the usual policeman's pull at his belt, and with a "thank 'ee," stepped outside the street door.

"A fine night," he said.

"Yes," said Mrs. Preedy.

"But dark."

"Yes," acquiesced Mrs. Preedy, with a slight shudder, "but dark. 'As anythink been discovered?" with another shrinking glance at No. 119.

"Nothing."

"'As nobody been took up?" she asked.

"No," replied the policeman. "One man come to the station last night and said he done it; but he had the delirium trimmings very bad, and we found out this morning that he was in Margate at the time. So of course it couldn't have been him."

"No," said Mrs. Preedy, "but only to think of it—though it's more than two months ago—sends the cold shivers over me."

"Well, don't you be frightened more than you can help. *I'll* look after you."

"Thank you," she said.

"Good night."

"Good night."

She closed the door and crept down to her kitchen, and sat down once more to a perusal of the newspaper.

There were other papers on the table at which she occasionally glanced, and also a quarto bill

printed in large type, with a coat of arms at the top, which caused her to shudder when her eyes lighted on it; but this one paper which she read and re-read in anguish and tribulation of soul, appeared to enchain her sole attention and sympathy. The quarto bill was carefully folded, and what was printed thereon was concealed from view; but its contents were as vivid in Mrs. Preedy's sight as they would have been if they had been printed in blood.

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The truth was, Mrs. Preedy was in trouble. A terrible misfortune had fallen upon her, and had occasioned a shock to her nervous system from which she declared she could never recover. But even this affliction might have been borne (as are many silent griefs from which, not unfrequently, the possessors contrive to extract a sweet and mournful consolation), had it not been accompanied by a trouble of a more practical nature. Mrs. Preedy's means of livelihood were threatened, and she was haunted by grim visions of the workhouse.

The whole of the upper part of her lodging-house—the dining rooms, the drawing rooms, the second and third floors, and the garrets or attics, the boards of which were very close to the roof—were ordinarily let to lodgers in various ranks and stations of life, none apparently above the grade of the middle class, and some conspicuously below it. Many strange tenants had that house accommodated. Some had come "down" in life; some had been born so low that there was no lower depth for them; some had risen from the gutters, without adding to their respectability thereby; some had floated from green lanes on the tide which is ever flowing from country to city. How beautiful is the glare of lights, seen from afar! "Come!" they seem to say; "we are waiting for you; we are shining for you. Why linger in the dark, when, with one bold plunge, you can walk through enchanted streets? See the waving of the flags! Listen to the musical murmur of delight and happiness! Come then, simple ones, and enjoy! It is the young we want, the young and beautiful, in this city of the wise, the fair, the great!" How bright, even in fragrant lanes and sweet-smelling meadows, are the dreams of the great city in the minds of the young! How bewitching the panorama of eager forms moving this way and that, and crossing each other in restless animation! Laughter, the sound of silver trumpets, the rustle of silken dresses, the merry chink of gold, all are there, waiting to be enjoyed. The low murmur of voices is like the murmur of bees laden with sweet pleasure. Distance lends enchantment, and the sound of pain, the cry of agony, the wail and murmur of those who suffer, are not heard; the rags, the cruelty, the misery, the hollow cheeks and despairing eyes, are not seen. So the ships are fully freighted, and on the bosom of the tide innocence sails to shame, and bright hope to disappointment and despair.

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But it mattered not to Mrs. Preedy what kind of lives those who lodged with her followed. In one room a comic singer in low music-halls; in another a betting man; in another a needle-woman and her child; in another a Frenchman who lay abed all day and kept out all night; in another a ballet girl, ignorant and pretty; in another the poor young "wife" of a rich old city man; and a hundred such, in infinite variety. Mrs. Preedy had but one positive test of the respectability of her lodgers—the regular payment of their rent. Never—except, indeed, during the last few weeks to one person—was a room let in her house without a deposit. When a male lodger settled his rent to the day, he was "quite a gentleman;" when a female lodger did the same, she was "quite a lady." Failing in punctuality, the man was "a low feller," and the woman "no better than she should be, my dear."

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At the present time the house was more than half empty, and Mrs. Preedy, therefore, was not in an amiable mood. Many times lately had she said to neighbour and friend that she did not know what would become of her; and more than once in the first flush of her trouble, she had been heard to declare that she did not know whether she stood on her head or her heels. If the declaration were intended to bear a literal interpretation, it was on the face of it ridiculous, for upon such a point Mrs. Preedy's knowledge must have been exact; but at an important period she had persisted in it, and, as the matter was a public one, her words had found their way into the newspapers in a manner not agreeable or complimentary to her. Indeed, in accordance with the new spirit of journalism which is now all the fashion, three or four smartly-conducted newspapers inserted personal and quizzical leading articles on the subject, and Mrs. Preedy was not without good-natured friends who, in a spirit of the greatest kindness, brought these editorial pleasantries to her notice. She read them in fear and trembling at first, then with tears and anger, and fright and indignation. She did not really understand them. All that she did understand was that the cruel editors were making fun of the misfortunes of a poor unprotected female. Curious is it to record that the departed Mr. James Preedy came in for a share of her indignation for being dead at this particular juncture. He ought to have been alive to protect her. Had the "blessed angel" been in the flesh, he would have had a warm time of it; as it was, perhaps, he was having— But theological problems had best be set aside.

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Mrs. Preedy read and read, and sipped and sipped. Long habit had endowed her with a strength of resistance to the insidious liquid, and, although her senses were occasionally clouded, she was never inebriated. She read so long and sipped so frequently, that presently her eyes began to close. She nodded and nodded, bringing her nose often in dangerous proximity with the table, but invariably, at the critical moment, a violent and spasmodic jerk upwards was the means of saving that feature from fracture, though at the imminent risk of a dislocation of the slumberer's neck.

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While she nods in happy unconsciousness, an opportunity is afforded of looking over the newspapers, especially that which so closely concerns herself, and the quarto bill, printed in large type, the contents of which she so carefully conceals from sight.

WHAT WAS PRINTED ON THE QUARTO BILL: A PROCLAMATION BY HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT.

HAVE you ever observed and studied the expressions on the faces of the people who congregate before the "Murder" proclamations pasted up in Scotland Yard, and on the dead walls of the poor neighbourhoods in England? Have you ever endeavoured, by a mental process, to discover the characters of some of these gaping men and women who read the bills and linger before them with a horrible fascination? Appropriate, indeed, that such announcements of mysterious murders should be pasted on *dead* walls! Come with me, and mingle for a few moments with this little group, gathered before a Government proclamation in Parliament-street, offering a reward for the discovery of a murderer. Here is a respectable-looking workman, with his basket of tools over his shoulder, running his eyes swiftly down the bill, and taking in its purport with rapid comprehension. He knows already about the murder, as indeed all London does, having read the particulars in the newspapers. "They've offered a reward at last," he thinks, with a scornful smile: "they ought to have done it a month ago. Too late, now. This is another added to the list. How many undiscovered murders have been committed in the last twelve months? Temple of intellect, Scotland Yard!" As he walks away to his work, he looks with a kind of contempt at the policeman sauntering lazily along. Here is a young woman, without a bonnet, reading the bill very slowly; she can read quicker if she likes, but as the words pass before her eyes, she thinks of her own life and the drunken brute of a man she is living with. She would leave him to-day, this very moment, but she is afraid. "Do!" the brute has frequently exclaimed, when she has threatened to run away from him; "and say your prayers! As sure as you stand there I'll kill yer, my beauty! I don't mind being 'ung for yer!" And in proof of his fondness for her, he gives her, for the hundredth time, a taste of his power by striking her to the earth. "Git up!" he cries, "and never cheek me agin, or it'll be worse for yer." "I wonder," the young woman is now thinking as she reads the particulars of the murder, "whether there'll ever be a bill like that out about *me*; for Jack's a cunning one!" Here is an errand boy reading the bill, with his eyes growing larger and larger. Murders will be committed in his dreams to-night. But before night comes an irresistible fascination will draw him to the neighbourhood in which the murder was committed, and he will feast his eyes upon the house. Here is an old woman spelling out the words, wagging her head the while. It is as good as a play to her. She lives in Pye Street, Westminster, and is familiar with crime in its every aspect. She is drunk—she has not been sober a day for thirty years. Well, she was born in a thief's den, and her mother died in a delirium of drink. Here is a thief, who has lived more than half his life in prison, reading the bill critically, with a professional eye. It would be a pleasure to him to detect a flaw in it. There is in his mind a certain indignation that some person unknown to himself or his friends should have achieved such notoriety. "I'd like to catch 'im," he thinks, "and pocket the shiners." He wouldn't peach on a pal, but, for such a reward, he would on one who was not "in the swim." Here is a dark-visaged man reading the bill secretly, unaware that he is casting furtive glances around to make sure that he is not being watched. There is guilt on the soul of this man; a crime undiscovered, which haunts him by day and night. He reads, and reads, and reads; and then slinks into the nearest public-house, and spends his last twopence in gin. As he raises the glass to his lips he can scarcely hold it, his hand trembles so. How sweet must life be to the man who holds it on such terms; and how terrible the fears of death! Here is another man who reads the bill with an assumption of indifference, and even compels himself to read it slowly a second time, and then walks carelessly away. He walks, with strangely steady steps, along Parliament Street, southwards, and turns to Westminster Bridge, holding all the way some strong emotion in control. Difficult as it is, he has a perfect mastery over himself, and no sound escapes him till he reaches the bridge; then he leans over, and gives vent to his emotion. It takes the form of laughter—horrible laughter—which he sends downwards into the dark waters of the Thames, hiding his face the while! What secret lies concealed in his brain? Is he mad—or worse?

Many small knots of people had lately gathered before the bills posted on London walls, of which one was in the possession of Mrs. James Preedy:



MURDER.

£100 REWARD.

WHEREAS, on the morning of Thursday, the 10th of July, the Dead Body of a MAN was found on the premises, No. 119, Great Porter Square, London, under such circumstances as prove that he was Murdered. An Inquest has been held on the Body, and the Coroner's Jury having returned a "VERDICT OF WILFUL MURDER AGAINST SOME PERSON OR PERSONS UNKNOWN," the above Reward will be paid to any Person (other than a Person belonging to a Police Force in the United Kingdom) who shall give such Information as shall lead to the Discovery and Conviction of the Murderer or Murderers; and the Secretary of State for the Home Department will advise the Grant of her Majesty's Gracious

PARDON

to any Accomplice not being the Person who actually committed the Murder who shall give such evidence as shall lead to a like result.

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CHAPTER III.

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EXTRACTED FROM THE "EVENING MOON."

THE *Evening Moon* was an enterprising little paper, which gave all the news of the day in a fashion so entertaining that it was a success from its first appearance. Between noon and night a dozen editions were published, and were hawked about the streets by regiments of ragged boys and girls (irregular infantry), whose vivacity and impudence added to the circulation, if they did not to the dignity, of the journal. Beneath the heading of the paper was a representation of the moon with the man in it looking at a spade—to which was tacked the legend: "What do you call this?" "A spade." "Then I shall call it a spade." Despite this declaration it delighted in word-painting, and its reports of police-court proceedings, highly coloured in many instances and unwarrantably but agreeably spiced with romance, were read with avidity. The *Evening Moon* of the 19th of August contained the following report of the police-court proceedings in

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THE GREAT PORTER SQUARE MYSTERY.

"The inquiry into the awful and mysterious murder in Great Porter Square was resumed this morning at the Martin Street Police Court, before the resident magistrate, Mr. Reardon. The accused person, Antony Cowlrick, who presented a woe-begone appearance, was brought up in charge of the warders. The case has been adjourned four times, and this was the fifth appearance of Antony Cowlrick in the dock. The police preserve a strict silence with regard to him—a silence against which we protest. Arrested upon suspicion, without warrant, and without, so far we can learn, a shadow of evidence against him, nothing but injustice and wrong can accrue from the course pursued by the Scotland Yard officials. Antony Cowlrick is unmistakably a poor and miserable man. All that was found upon him when he was arrested were a stale crust of bread and a piece of hard cheese, which he had thrust into his pocket as he was flying from the pursuit of an enterprising constable. His very name—the name he gave at the lock-up on the night of his arrest—may be false, and, if our information is correct, the police have been unable to discover a single person who is acquainted with, or can give any information concerning him. The rumour that Antony Cowlrick is not quite right in his mind certainly receives some confirmation from his haggard and wandering looks; a more wretched and forlorn man has seldom been seen in a magistrate's court, suggestive as such a place is of misery and degradation. He was carefully guarded, and a strict watch was kept upon his movements, the theory of the police being that he is a dangerous and cunning character, whose sullen demeanour is assumed to defeat the ends of justice. Mr. White Lush, on the part of the Treasury, conducted the inquiry. The interest taken by the public in the case is still unabated, and the court—if a close, abominably-ventilated room fourteen feet square can be so denominated—was crowded to excess.

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On the calling of the case, the magistrate inquired if the accused man was still undefended, and the police replied that no one appeared for him. The answer was scarcely given when Mr. Goldberry (of the firm of Goldberry, Entwistle, and Pugh), rose and said that he was there to represent the accused.

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Magistrate: Have you been instructed?

Mr. Goldberry: No, your worship. A couple of hours ago I endeavoured to confer with the prisoner, but the police refused me permission to see him.

Inspector Fleming explained that when Mr. Goldberry sought an interview with the prisoner, the prisoner was asked whether he wished to see him; his answer was that he wished to see no one.

Mr. Goldberry: Still, it cannot but be to the prejudice of the prisoner that he should be unrepresented, and I am here to watch the case in his interest.

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Magistrate: Perhaps you had better confer with him now.

A few minutes were allowed for this purpose, at the end of which Mr. Goldberry said, although it was impossible to obtain anything like satisfaction from the accused, that he did not object to the appearance of a solicitor on his behalf. "He seems," added Mr. Goldberry, "to be singularly unmindful as to what becomes of him."

Magistrate: The case can proceed.

Mr. White Lush: Call Mrs. Preedy.

The witness presented herself, and was sworn.

Mr. White Lush: Your name is Anna Maria Preedy?

Witness: Yes, sir.

Mr. White Lush: You are a widow?

Witness: Yes, sir, worse luck. 'Is name was James, poor dear!

Mr. White Lush: You live at No. 118, Great Porter Square?

Witness: Yes, sir.

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Mr. White Lush: How long have you occupied your house?

Witness: Four and twenty year, come Michaelmas.

Mr. White Lush: What kind of a house is yours?

Witness (with spirit): I defy you or any gentleman to say anythink agin its character.

Mr. White Lush: You keep a lodging-house?

Witness: I'm none the worse for that, I suppose?

Mr. White Lush: Answer my question. You keep a lodging-house?

Witness: I do, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Do you remember the night of the 9th of last month?

Witness: I've got reason to.

Mr. White Lush: What reason?

Witness: Two of my lodgers run away without paying their rent.

Mr. White Lush: That circumstance fixes the night in your mind?

Witness: It'd fix it in yours if you kep' a lodging-house. (Laughter.)

Mr. White Lush: No doubt. There were other circumstances, independent of the running away of your lodgers, which serve to fix that night in your mind?

Witness: There was, sir.

Mr. White Lush: The night was Wednesday?

Witness: It were, sir.

Mr. White Lush: How and at what time did you become aware that your lodgers had run away?

Witness: When the last post come in. I got a letter, and the turn it gave me——

Mr. White Lush: That is immaterial. Have you the letter with you?

Witness: The way the perlice 'as been naggin' at me for that letter——

Mr. White Lush: Have you the letter with you?

Witness: It's lost, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Let me impress upon you that this letter might be an important link in the case. It is right and proper that the police should be anxious about it. Do you swear positively that you have lost it?

Witness: I do, sir.

Mr. White Lush: How did it happen?

Witness: It were a fortnight after the body was found in No. 119. I 'ad the letter in my 'and, and was lookin' at it. I laid it down on the kitchen table, and went to answer the street door. When I come back the letter was gone.

Mr. White Lush: Was any person in the kitchen when you left it?

Witness: Not as I am aware on, sir. There was a 'igh wind on, and I left the kitchen door open, and when I come back I noticed a blaze in the fire, as though a bit of paper had been blown into it.

Mr. White Lush: Then your presumption is that the letter is burnt?

Witness: It air, sir.

Mr. White Lush: You have searched for it since?

Witness: I've 'unted 'igh and low, sir, without ever settin' eyes on it.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EXAMINATION OF MRS. PREEDY, CONTINUED FROM THE "EVENING MOON."

MR. WHITE LUSH: You are quite confident in your own mind that the letter is no longer in existence.

Witness: I can't swear to that, sir.

Mr. White Lush: You swear that you know nothing of it whatever?

Witness: Yes, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Now, what were the contents of the letter?

Witness: It were to inform me that the droring-rooms had bolted——

Magistrate: Bolted?

Witness: Run away, and wasn't coming back, and that I might 'elp myself to what was in the trunk to pay my bill.

Mr. White Lush: Did you help yourself?

Witness: The meanness! I went up to the droring-room, and opened the trunk.

Mr. White Lush: Was it locked?

Witness: It were, sir.

Mr. White Lush: How did you open it?

Witness: With a poker.

Mr. White Lush: What did you find in it?

Witness: Bricks.

Mr. White Lush: Nothing else?

Witness: Not a blessed thing.

Mr. White Lush: What occurred then?

Witness: I were overcome with a 'orrid suspicion.

Mr. White Lush: Concerning what?

Witness: My second floorer.

Magistrate: Is that a poetical image, Mr. Lush?

Mr. White Lush (smiling): I really cannot say. This is a case with very little poetry in it. (To witness): Your second floorer? Do you mean your tenant on the second floor?

Witness: That were my meaning, sir.

Mr. White Lush: And acting on your horrid suspicion, you—

Witness: Run up stairs as fast as my legs would carry me.

[35]

Mr. White Lush: What did you discover? That your second floorer had run away?

Witness (very solemnly): He 'ad, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Did you open his trunk?

Witness: I did, sir.

Magistrate: With your universal key—the poker?

Witness: Yes, sir.

Mr. White Lush: That trunk, surely, was not also full of bricks?

Witness: I am sorry to inform you, sir, it were.

Magistrate: A singular coincidence.

Mr. White Lush: The witness's two lodgers were evidently regular bricks. (Great laughter.) Were your drawing rooms and your second floorer on terms of intimacy?

Witness: Not as I was aware on, sir.

Mr. White Lush: What did you do then?

Witness: I went out to speak to a neighbour.

Mr. White Lush: To tell her of your misfortunes?

[36]

Witness: Yes, sir.

Mr. White Lush: At what time did you return to your house?

Witness: It were eleven o'clock, sir—striking as I opened the door. I stood on the steps, and counted the strokes: One—Two—Three—

Mr. White Lush: That will do. We will imagine the clock has struck. While you were out, did you observe anything unusual in the next house, No. 119?

Witness: Nothink, sir.

Mr. White Lush: You saw no strangers prowling about?

Witness: I did not, sir. Somebody pushed agin me—

Mr. White Lush: Yes?

Witness: It were Mr. Simpson, dining room, three doors off, in his usual condition. He always comes 'ome so.

Mr. White Lush: Did he speak to you?

Witness: He growled at me.

Mr. White Lush: What did you do then?

[37]

Witness: I went down to the kitchen, and fell into a doze.

Mr. White Lush: For how long did you doze?

Witness: I can't rightly say, sir. About arf-an-hour, perhaps.

Mr. White Lush: Was there a candle alight in the kitchen when you fell asleep?

Witness: Yes, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Was it a whole candle?

Witness: No, sir, it were arf burnt down.

Mr. White Lush: What kind of candles do you burn in your kitchen?

Witness: Taller dips, sir—twelves.

Mr. White Lush: For about how long will one of these tallow dips burn?

Witness: Three hours and more.

Mr. White Lush: Was the candle you left burning on your kitchen table when you fell into a doze alight when you awoke?

Witness: It were, sir, and it burnt blue.

Mr. White Lush: What do you mean by that?

Witness: I don't know, sir. It burnt blue. There was something mysterious about it.

[38]

Magistrate: Perhaps the witness smelt sulphur also.

Mr. White Lush: Did you smell sulphur?

Witness: Not as I'm aware on, sir.

Mr. White Lush: When you awoke, was it a natural awaking, or were you suddenly aroused?

Witness: I were suddenly woke, and I was all of a tremble.

Mr. White Lush: You were frightened by something?

Witness: I were, sir, and I were not.

Mr. White Lush: I do not understand you. Was there anybody or anything in the room besides yourself?

Witness: I didn't see nothink—not even a mouse.

Mr. White Lush: Then what were you frightened at?

Witness: It were a fancy, perhaps—or a dream that I couldn't remember; and all at once I 'eerd a scream.

[39]

Mr. White Lush: From what direction?

Witness: From the next house, No. 119.

Mr. White Lush: You heard a scream proceeding from 119, the house in which the murder was committed?

Witness: As near as I can remember, sir.

Mr. White Lush: That is not what I want. You possess the usual number of senses, I suppose?

Witness: I defy anybody to say anything to the contrary.

Mr. White Lush: You look like a sensible woman. (Here the witness made an elaborate curtsey to Mr. White Lush, which occasioned much laughter.) Your hearing is good?

Witness: It air, sir. Mrs. Beale was saying to me only yesterday morning, 'Mrs. Preedy,' says she—

Mr. White Lush: Never mind what Mrs. Beale was saying to you. Listen to what I am saying to you. On the occasion we are speaking of, you heard a scream?

Witness (after a long pause, during which she seemed to be mentally asking questions of herself): I think I may venture to say, sir, I did. [40]

Mr. White Lush: Ah, that is more satisfactory. Now, Mrs. Preedy, attend to me.

Witness: I'm a-doing of it, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Thank you. Did the scream proceed from a man or a woman?

Witness (with energy): I couldn't tell you, sir, if you went down on your bended knees.

Mr. White Lush: Reflect a little; take time. You have heard hundreds of men's and women's voices—

Witness: Thousands, sir.

Mr. White Lush: And a woman of your discernment must have perceived a difference between them. Women's tones are soft and dulcet; men's, gruffer and more resonant. It is important we should know whether it was a man's or a woman's voice you heard?

Witness: It ain't possible for me to say, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Is that really the only answer you can give?

Witness: I'd give you another if I could, sir. It's true I've 'eerd thousands of men's and women's voices, but I've not been in the 'abit of 'aving thousands of men and women screaming at me. [41]

Mr. White Lush: Was it a loud scream?

Witness: There was a brick wall between us, and it must 'ave been a loud scream, or I couldn't have 'eerd it.

Mr. White Lush: What followed?

Witness: Music. Almost on the top of the scream, as a body might say, I 'eerd music.

Mr. White Lush: What instrument was being played upon?

Witness: The pianner, sir. I 'eerd the pianner playing.

Mr. White Lush: That is to say you heard a man or woman playing the piano?

Witness: I wouldn't swear, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Or a child?

Witness: I wouldn't swear, sir.

Mr. White Lush: But you have sworn. You say that you heard the sound of a piano?

Witness: I did 'ear it, sir. The pianner was playing.

Mr. White Lush: A piano can't play of itself. You heard a man, or a woman, or a child, playing the piano? [42]

Witness: Wild 'orses sha'n't tear it from me, sir. It might 'ave been a spirit.

Mr. White Lush: What do you say to a cat?

Witness: No, sir, it ain't reasonable.

Mr. White Lush: You stick to the spirit, then?

Witness: It might 'ave been.

Mr. White Lush: You believe in spirits?

Witness: I do, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Out of a bottle? (Laughter.)

Magistrate: The witness has the bottle-imp in her mind, perhaps? (Renewed laughter.)

Mr. White Lush: Very likely. (To witness): Did the spirit you heard playing come out of a bottle?

Witness (with dignity): I am not in the habit of making a beast of myself.

Mr. White Lush: But a little drop now and then, eh, Mrs. Preedy?

Witness: As a medicine, sir, only as a medicine. I suffer a martyrdom from spasms. (Laughter.) [43]

Mr. White Lush: A common complaint, Mrs. Preedy. I suffer from them myself.

Witness: You look like it, sir. (Screams of laughter.)

Mr. White Lush: For how long a time did the music continue?

Witness: For five or six minutes, perhaps.

Mr. White Lush: Are you sure it did not last for a longer time—or a shorter?

Witness: No, sir, I am not sure. I was in that state that everythink seemed mixed up.

Mr. White Lush: The music might have lasted for half-an-hour?

Witness: It might, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Or for only a minute?

Witness: Yes, sir.

Mr. White Lush: When the music stopped, what occurred?

Witness: If you was to feed me on bread and water for the next twenty years I couldn't tell you.

Mr. White Lush: Why couldn't you tell me? [44]

Witness: Because I don't know whether I was standing on my 'ead or my 'eels. (Roars of laughter.)

Mr. White Lush: Nonsense, Mrs. Preedy, you do know.

Witness: Beggin' your pardon, sir, I do not know. I ought to know whether I don't know.

Mr. White Lush: Are you standing on your head or your heels at the present moment?

Witness did not reply.

Magistrate: Do you mean to tell the court seriously that you are not aware whether, at the time referred to, you were standing on your head or your heels?

Witness: I wouldn't swear to it, my lordship, one way or another.

Mr. White Lush: What did you do when the music stopped?

Witness: I flopped.

Mr. White Lush: Did you flop on your head or your heels?

Witness: I couldn't take it upon myself to say, sir.

Mr. White Lush: And this is all you know of the murder?

Witness: If you was to keep me 'ere for a month, sir, you couldn't get nothink else out of me.

Mr. White Lush: I have done with you.

Mr. Goldberry: I shall not detain you long, Mrs. Preedy. Look attentively at the prisoner. Do you know him?

Witness: No, sir.

Mr. Goldberry: Have you ever seen him in Great Porter Square?

Witness: Neither there or nowheres else. This is the first time I ever set eyes on 'im.

Mr. Goldberry: You swear that, positively.

Witness: If it were the last word I ever spoke, it's the truth.

Mr. Goldberry: That will do.

Mrs. Preedy left the witness box in a state of great agitation, amid the tittering of the spectators.

Mr. Goldberry, addressing the Bench, said that he saw in the Court three of the constables who had been instrumental in arresting the prisoner, one being the officer who had first observed the prisoner in Great Porter Square. It was well known that the prisoner had declined to put a single question to one of the witnesses called on behalf of the Treasury. He asked to be allowed to exercise the privilege of cross-examining these constables, and he promised to occupy the court but a very short time.

No objection being raised, Police-constable Richards entered the witness box.

Mr. Goldberry: Before you helped to arrest the prisoner in Great Porter Square, had you ever seen him before?

Witness: It's hard to say.

Mr. Goldberry: It is not hard to say. You would find no difficulty in replying to such a question if it were to tell against the prisoner instead of in his favour? I must have an answer. Had you ever seen him before that night?

Witness: I can't call to mind that I have.

Mr. Goldberry: Do you know anything of him, in his favour or against him, at this present moment?

Witness: I do not.

Mr. Goldberry: Call Constable Fleming. (Constable Fleming stepped into the box.) Before the night of the prisoner's arrest had you ever seen him?

Witness: I can only speak to the best of my knowledge—

Mr. Goldberry: You are not expected to speak from any other knowledge. You are aware, if that man is put on his trial, that it will be for his life. I insist upon fair play for him. Had you ever seen him before that night?

Witness: Not as far as I can remember.

Mr. Goldberry: You have taken a lesson from Mrs. Preedy. Do you know anything against him now?

Witness: No.

Mr. Goldberry: Call Constable Dick. (Constable Dick stepped into the box.) You have heard the questions I put to the last two witnesses. They are what I shall substantially put to you. Before the night of the prisoner's arrest had you ever seen him?

Witness: No.

Mr. Goldberry: Do you know anything of him at the present moment?

Witness: No.

Mr. Goldberry then addressed the bench. The inquiry had already been adjourned four times, and not a tittle of evidence had been brought forward to connect the prisoner with the dreadful crime. He was utterly unknown to the police, who had instigated the charge against him, and who, being unable to identify him, were deprived the pleasure of testifying that he belonged to the dangerous classes of society. It was partly because of this singular aspect of the case that he, Mr. Goldberry, had voluntarily come forward to defend a man who, upon the face of the evidence, was innocent of the charge so wildly brought against him. It appeared to him that liberty of the person was in danger. It was monstrous that such a power should be exercised by the police. To be poor, as the accused evidently was, was no crime; to be forlorn and wretched, as the accused appeared to be, was no crime; but the police evidently regarded these misfortunes as proofs of guilt. He applied for the prisoner's discharge.

Mr. White Lush said it was scarcely necessary to say a word in defence of the police, who, in

the exercise of their arduous duties, generally acted with fair discretion. To discharge the prisoner at this stage of the proceedings would not unlikely defeat the ends of justice. He understood that the police were on the track of some important evidence regarding the prisoner in connection with the crime, and he asked for an adjournment for a week.

The prisoner, who, during the entire proceedings, had not uttered a word, was remanded, and the case was adjourned until this day week.

CHAPTER V.

CONTAINS FURTHER EXTRACTS FROM THE "EVENING MOON" RELATING TO THE GREAT PORTER SQUARE MYSTERY.

YESTERDAY the inquiry into the Great Porter Square mystery was resumed at the Martin Street Police Court, before Mr. Reardon. The court was again crowded, and the prisoner, Antony Cowlrick, was brought in handcuffed. His appearance was, if possible, more forlorn-looking and wretched than on the previous occasions, and his face bore the marks of a scuffle. Mr. White Lush again appeared for the Treasury, and Mr. Goldberry for the prisoner. As a proof of the public feeling respecting the conduct of the police in this case we have to record that during his progress down Martin Street towards the Magistrate's Court, Mr. Goldberry, who has so generously come forward on behalf of the prisoner, was loudly cheered.

Mr. White Lush rose, and stated that he was not prepared to offer any further evidence, in consequence of the inquiries of the police not being concluded. He applied for another adjournment of a week.

A buzz of astonishment and indignation ran through the court, which was quickly suppressed.

Mr. Reardon: I was not prepared for this application. It is my duty to do everything in my power to assist the course of justice, but I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that the prisoner has now been brought before me six times, and that on the occasion of every adjournment the police have promised to produce evidence affecting the prisoner which up to the present moment is not forthcoming. If it is my duty to further the ends of justice, it is equally the duty of the police to see that it does not lag. A suspected person—suspected with cause and reason—should not be allowed the opportunity of escape; but some protection must be given to a man who is presumably innocent. Since last week I have carefully gone over and considered the evidence presented in this court with respect to this awful and mysterious murder; and I am hardly inclined to allow the accused to remain any longer in prison on this charge. What has Mr. Goldberry to say?

Mr. Goldberry: I am glad—as I am sure the public will be—to hear the expression of your worship's sentiments in the matter. It is not my wish to excite false sympathy for the prisoner, but I would draw your worship's attention, and the attention of the police, to the reasonable presumption that while they are wildly hunting for evidence against an innocent man, the criminal is being allowed every opportunity to escape the hands of justice. It would almost seem—far be it from me to assert that it is so, for I am sure it would be untrue—but it would almost seem as if they were playing into the hands of the real criminal. The only excuse that can be found for the police is, that a murder having been committed, somebody had to be arrested and charged with its committal, and, with this end in view, Cowlrick was indiscriminately taken up and so charged. Zeal is a fine quality, but, when misapplied, frequently leads to grave consequences. In my defence of the prisoner I have had great difficulties to contend with. He has not assisted me in the slightest degree. It is no breach of professional confidence to say that, in my interviews with him, he has doggedly refused to give me any information concerning himself; but as I have before asserted that poverty and wretchedness were not to be accepted as marks of guilt, so I now declare that the prisoner's strange reticence concerning himself is also no crime. Nor is eccentricity a crime. I have had no opportunity of conversing with the prisoner this morning, or of seeing him before I entered the court a few minutes since, and I have to ask the meaning of those marks upon his face—to which I direct your worship's attention—and of his being handcuffed.

The police explained that on his way to Martin Street police court the prisoner had attempted to escape, and that a struggle had taken place, during which a constable and the prisoner had received several blows.

Mr. Goldberry asked if the constable who had been struck was present, and the answer was given that he was not; he was on duty in another place.

Mr. Goldberry: I will not comment upon the occurrence; in the marks upon the prisoner's face, and in the absence of the constable who is said to have been struck, it speaks for itself. I strenuously oppose the application for a remand, and I demand the prisoner's discharge on the plain grounds that there is no evidence against him.

Mr. White Lush: In the interests of justice, I ask for a further remand.

Mr. Reardon: Am I to understand that if I remand the prisoner until this day week, you will be prepared to bring forward evidence which will justify not only his present but his past detention?

Mr. White Lush: I am informed that such evidence will be forthcoming.

Mr. Reardon: Upon that understanding the prisoner is remanded until this day week.



CHAPTER VI.

[56]

THE "EVENING MOON" SPEAKS ITS MIND.

YESTERDAY, at the Martin Street Police Court, Antony Cowlrick was brought up for the seventh time, on the charge of being concerned in the mysterious murder which took place at No. 119, Great Porter Square. The remarks we have from time to time made upon this case and upon the arrest of Antony Cowlrick have been justified by the result. The prisoner was finally discharged. All that was wanted to complete the tragical farce was a caution from the magistrate to the prisoner not to do it again.

We now intend to speak plainly; and the strong interest the case has excited will be our excuse if our comments are more lengthy than those in which we generally indulge in our editorial columns. The elements of mystery surrounding the awful murder were sufficiently complicated without the assistance of the police. Their proceedings with respect to the man calling himself Antony Cowlrick have rendered the task of bringing the murderer to justice one of enormous difficulty.

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Our business at present is not so much with the murder itself as it is with Antony Cowlrick and the police; but a brief recapitulation of the circumstances of the murder is necessary for the proper understanding of what is to follow.

On Tuesday, the 1st of July, a gentleman engaged a back room on the first floor of the house No. 119, Great Porter Square. There was a piano in the room. The landlady of that house, who has undergone more than one lengthy examination, has stated that she "reckoned him up" as a man who had just come from a voyage, and that there was something superior "in the looks of him." When she asked him for his name he said it did not matter, and he handed her four weeks' rent, telling her at the same time not to trouble herself about a receipt. This was sufficient for the landlady; she received the stranger as a tenant, and he took possession of the room.

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He led a remarkably quiet life. He did not trouble the landlady to cook a meal for him, although "attendance" was included in the sum charged for the rent of the room. He had but one visitor, a lady, who came so closely veiled that no person in the house caught a glimpse of her face. She called three times, and when the street door was opened, asked for "the gentleman on the first floor," and went up to him without waiting for an answer. This lady has not come forward, and she has not been tracked. After the 10th of July no female resembling in the slightest the vague description given of her has called at No. 119, Great Porter Square.

It happened, singularly enough, that on the 9th of July the house was almost empty. The landlady's niece was married on that day, and the landlady was at the wedding; there was to be a dance in the evening, and she did not expect to be home until very late. Invitations had not only been given to the landlady, but to three of her lodgers, two of whom were married. Another lodger, a violin player, was engaged for the music. It was a kind of happy family affair, arranged by Fate. Only the general servant and the stranger were left.

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The servant was human, and took advantage of the golden opportunity. If we had been in her place, and had "a young man," we should probably have done the same. She did not have many holidays, and knowing that her services would not be required, and that her mistress and the lodger would not be home till early in the morning, she made an appointment with her "young man," who treated her to the Alhambra. When the performances at the Alhambra were concluded, this young person and her young man indulged in supper, and, tempted to daring by the opportunity, she did not return to the house until an hour past midnight. She noticed nothing unusual when she entered; conscience-stricken at the late hour she did not light a candle, but thankful that her mistress had not returned, she crept down to her bedroom in the basement, and went to bed in the dark. She fell asleep at once, and we have the testimony of her mistress that the girl is an exceedingly heavy sleeper, and most difficult to wake. We ourselves have a servant—a most desirable creature, whom we are ready to part with on moderate terms—similarly afflicted. Thus it may be said that, for many mysterious hours, the only occupant of the house was the stranger who occupied the front drawing-room.

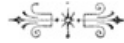
[60]

It was nearly four in the morning before the wedding guests, jaded with pleasure, found themselves in Great Porter Square. The wedding had been a jolly affair, and dancing had been prolonged beyond the anticipated hour of breaking up. Jaded as they were, the spirits of the little knot of merrymakers were not quite exhausted, and as they paused before the door of No. 119, with the morning's sweet fresh light upon them, they laughed and sang, and so inspired the musician that he took his violin from its green baize bag and struck up a jig. With their tired feet moving to the measure they entered the house, the door of which was opened by the landlady with her private key; they tripped up the steps and lingered in the passage, dancing to the music.

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Exhilarated by the occasion they wound in and out along the narrow passage, until the wife of one of the lodgers suddenly uttered a shriek which drove the colour from their flushed faces.

"My God!" shrieked the terrified woman, "we are dancing in blood!"



CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH THE "EVENING MOON" CONTINUES TO SPEAK ITS MIND.

IT was fatally true. They were dancing in blood. The woman who made the awful discovery had white satin shoes on. As she uttered the appalling words she looked down at her feet, and, with a wild shudder, sank into her husband's arms. He, overwrought with excitement, had scarcely sufficient strength to support her, and he would have allowed her to slip to the floor had he not, also, cast his eyes earthwards. Quickly he caught her to his breast, and, trembling violently, proceeded upstairs. The weight of his burden compelled him to hold on to the balustrade; but the moment he placed his hand on the polished rail, he screamed, "There's been Murder done here!" And, shaking like a leaf, he retreated in haste till he reached the street door. Flinging it open, he rushed with his wife into the Square, and stood in the light of the sunrise, a picture of terror.

The other actors in the scene had borne appropriate parts in the tragic situation. For a little while they were paralyzed, and incapable of action. The streaming in of the daylight aroused them, and they looked about timidly. On the floor, stairs, and balustrade were marks of blood not yet quite dried, and they traced the crimson stains to the end of the passage, where it dipped into the narrow staircase which led to the basement. There being no natural means of lighting the stairway, this part of the house was usually lit up by a thin, funereal jet of gas, which burnt as sadly as if its home were a tomb. At present it was in darkness, the gas being turned off.

The thought that had been put into words by the man who had rushed out of the house now took its place in the minds of those who remained within. There had been murder done. But who was murdered, and where was the murderer?

"That comes," said the violinist to the landlady, "of letting a man into the house who refuses to give his name."

The landlady wrung her hands. She saw ruin staring her in the face.

"He's off, of course," continued the violinist, "and Mary" (the name of the servant) "lies downstairs, murdered in cold blood."

A sound sleeper, indeed, must Mary have been to have slept through the music, and the dancing, and the cries of terror. The silence that reigned below was confirmation of the violinist's assumption. Of all suppositions, it was the most reasonable. Who would go downstairs to corroborate it? Not one had sufficient courage.

Meanwhile, events progressed in front of the house. A policeman, attracted by the sounds of music, was drawn thitherwards, and, seeing a man kneeling on the pavement, supporting a woman, he quickened his steps.

"What's up?" demanded the policeman.

"Murder! murder!" gasped the man.

The woman's white shoes, bedabbled in blood, met the policeman's eye.

"There! there!" cried the man, pointing to the passage.

The policeman was immediately encompassed by the other frightened faces.

"You're just in time," said the violinist. "There's been murder done."

"Who's been murdered?" asked the policeman.

"That's to be found out," was the answer. "It's a girl, we believe."

"Ah," remarked the policeman, with a certain thoughtfulness; "the last was a girl—an unfortunate girl—and *he's* not been caught."

Cautiously they re-entered the house, the policeman with his truncheon drawn, and ascended the stairs to the drawing-room. No person, dead or alive, was found.

"*It's* downstairs," said the violinist.

They crept downstairs in a body, keeping close together. There, an awful sight met their eyes. On the floor of the kitchen lay the body of the stranger who, on the 1st of July, had engaged a room on the first floor, and had paid a month's rent in advance. He had been foully murdered. The servant girl was sound asleep in her bed. It is strange, when she returned home from the Alhambra, and crept through the passage and the kitchen to bed, that she did not herself make the discovery, for the soles of her boots were stained with the evidences of the crime, and she must have passed within a foot or two of the lifeless body; but satisfactory explanations have since been given, with which and with the details of the murder, as far as they are known, the public have already been made fully acquainted through our columns.

Our business now is with Antony Cowlrick.

So profound was the impression produced by the murder that, from the day it was discovered, no person could be induced to lodge or sleep in the house in which it was committed. The tenants all left without giving notice, and the landlady, prostrated by the blow, has not dared, since that awful night, to venture inside the door. The house is avoided, shunned, and dreaded by all. Any human being bold enough to take it could have it for a term of years on a very moderate rental—for the first year, probably, for a peppercorn; but practical people as we are, with our eyes on the main chance, we are imbued with sentiments which can never be eradicated. The poorest family in London could not, at the present time, be induced to occupy the house. The stain of blood is on those floors and stairs, and *it can never be washed out!* The Spirit of Murder lurks within the fatal building, and when night falls, the phantom holds terrible and undisputed sway over mind and heart. A shapeless shadow glides from room to room—no features are visible but eyes which never close, and which shine only in the dark. And in the daylight, which in this house is robbed of its lustre, its presence is manifest in the echo of every step that falls upon the boards. Appalling spectre! whose twin brother walks ever by the side of the undiscovered murderer! Never, till justice is satisfied, shall it leave him. As he stole from the spot in which he took the life of a fellow-creature, it touched his heart with its spiritual hand, and whispered, "I am the shadow of thy crime! Thou and I shall never part!" He looks into the glass, and it peers over his shoulder; maddened, he flies away, and when he stops to rest, he feels the breath of the Invisible on his cheek. He slinks into his bed, and hiding his head in the bedclothes, lies there in mortal terror, knowing that the shadow is close beside him. It brings awful visions upon him. He looks over the bridge into the river upon which the sun is shining. How bright is the water! How clear! How pure! Surely over that white surface the shadow can have no power! But suddenly comes a change, and the river is transformed into a river of blood. An irresistible fascination draws him to the river again in the night, when the moon is shining on the waters, and, as he gazes downwards, he sees the ghastly body of his victim, its face upturned, floating on a lurid tide. He cannot avoid it; whichever way he turns it is before him. He walks through country lanes, and trembles at the fluttering of every leaf. Rain falls; it is red; and as he treads along, it oozes up and up till it reaches his eyes, and, resting there, tinges everything that meets his sight with the colour of blood. Water he cannot drink, its taste is so horrible. He must have gin, brandy—any poison that will help him to forget. Vain hope! He shall never forget! And the shadow of his crime shall never leave until he falls at the feet of outraged justice, and pays the penalty. Then, *and then only*, there may be hope for him—for God is merciful!

Among the measures adopted by the police for the discovery of the Great Porter Square murderer was that of having the house, No. 119, watched day and night by policemen in private clothes. There are not many persons in the kingdom who, in a murder case which has thrilled the public heart and filled it with horror, would accuse the police of want of zeal; but there are many who, with justice, would accuse them of want of tact.

A week after the murder was committed, Policeman X (as it is not of an individual, but of a system, we complain, we will not make this particular constable's name more prominent than it has already become)—a week then after the murder was committed, Policeman X, in private clothes, saw lurking in the vicinity of Great Porter Square, a man: as he might see to-night other men lurking in the vicinity of any and every square in London. It is a peculiarity of policemen in private clothes that they are always ready to suspect, and that in their eyes every poor-looking person with whose face they are not familiar is a disreputable character. Policeman X watched this man for a few moments, and took the opportunity of brushing past him when they were near a lamp-post. The man's face was unknown to him; it was haggard and pale, and his clothes betokened poverty. These were terrible signs, and Policeman X at once set himself the task of stealthily following the man, who walked leisurely towards the house, No. 119, in which the murder was committed. The house was deserted and untenanted, as it is at the present time. Now, would the suspected man pass the house, or would he linger near it? Much depended upon this.

The man reached the house, peered around (according to Policeman X's statement) to make sure that he was not observed, and then cast his eyes to the dark windows. He lingered, as though in indecision, for a few moments, and standing before the door, appeared to be studying the number. Then he strolled away. It cannot be said that there was anything crinating in these movements, but Policeman X, determined not to lose sight of his man, followed him at a cautious but convenient distance. The man sauntered round the Square, and presently commenced to munch some stale bread and cheese, portions of which were afterwards found upon him. He completed the circuit of the Square, and for the second time paused before No. 119. Again he studied the number on the door, and again he looked up at the dark windows. Not satisfied with his inspection in that direction, he stooped down to the grating above the area, and appeared to listen. Still not satisfied, he ascended the two steps which led to the street door, and tried the handle.

Nothing more was needed. "I have the murderer!" thought Policeman X, with a thrill of satisfaction; and without further hesitation, he walked quickly up, clapped his hand on the man's shoulder, and said—

"What are you doing here?"

The sudden appearance of a human being out of the shadows probably so startled the suspected man that he did not know what to reply. He thrust his head forward in the endeavour to distinguish the features of the questioner. The next words uttered by Policeman X had more meaning in them. With his hand still on the man's shoulder, he said, sternly—

"Come with me!"

The reply given to the invitation was the reply which the writer, or any of the readers of this

article, would have given on the impulse of the moment. It is to be borne in mind that the policeman was in private clothes, and might, as far as appearances went, himself have been a murderer in the eyes of another man dressed in private clothes, who, in his turn (for what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander) might himself have been a policeman.

"Come with me!" exclaimed Policeman X.

Antony Cowlrick—if that is his proper name, which we doubt—had as much reason to suspect Policeman X as Policeman X had to suspect Antony Cowlrick. Not only did he decline the invitation in words decidedly rude (really, Mr. Cowlrick, you should have been more courteous to this policeman in private clothes!), but he had the temerity to fling not only Policeman X's hand from his shoulder, but the policeman's entire body from his person. Not long did Policeman X lie upon the ground—for just time enough to come to the conclusion that such resistance on the part of a poor man, raggedly dressed, was strong evidence of guilt. For, if not guilty of the murder, why should the man resist? Picking himself up briskly, Policeman X sprang his rattle. [74]

The precise effect produced upon the mind of Antony Cowlrick by the sound of this rattle must be mere matter of conjecture, and we will leave its consideration to a future article; its outward and visible effect was the taking to his heels by Antony Cowlrick.

The mental condition of Antony Cowlrick at this exact moment presents an interesting study. Its variety, its colour, its turmoil of possibilities and consequences, its sequence of private and personal circumstance, are almost sufficiently tempting to induce us instantly to wander into a psychological treatise utterly unfit for the columns of our little newspaper, and conducive, therefore, to its immediate decline in popularity. We resist the temptation. We adhere to our programme; stern Reality—pictures of life as they naturally present themselves in all their beauty or deformity; the truth, THE TRUTH, in its naked sweetness or hideousness! The highest efforts of imagination cannot equal the pictures which are for ever being painted upon the canvas of Reality. [75]

Antony Cowlrick took to his heels: what more conclusive evidence than that he was the murderer did murderer ever give? He took to his heels and ran, self-convicted. The evidence was complete. After him, springing his rattle and dreaming of promotion, raced Policeman X. The magic sound caused windows to be thrown open and heads to be thrust out; caused ordinary wayfarers to stop and consider; caused idlers to stray in its direction; caused old hands with the brand of thief upon them to smile contemptuously, and young ones to slink timidly into the shadow of the wall. To the "force" it was a call to arms. It summoned from the north an angry, fierce, and blustering policeman; from the south a slow, envious, dallying policeman; from the east a nipping, sharp, and sudden policeman; from the west a brisk, alert, and eager policeman;—and all of them converging upon the hapless form of Antony Cowlrick, he was caught in the toils of Fate's compass, and lay, gasping and exhausted, beneath the blaze of five bull's-eye lamps, which glowed upon him with stern and baneful intention. [76]

Helpless and bewildered lay Antony Cowlrick upon the flagstones of Great Porter Square. Over him, in a circle, stood the five policemen. These guardians of the law were tasting one of the sweetest pleasures in existence—for to our imperfect nature, the hunting down of any living creature, whether human or animal, is a rare enjoyment.

Policeman X wipes the mud from his brow.

"Did he strike you?" asks a comrade.

"You see," answers Policeman X, pointing to his face.

Policemen are ready of belief in such matters. They see without seeing, and sometimes swear to the truth of a circumstance which is introduced to them second-hand.

"Now then," says Policeman X, of the prostrate man, caught in the toils, "will you come quietly?" [77]

Expectancy reigned in the hearts of the constables. We do not wish to be harsh in our judgment of them, when we say that, as a rule, they prefer a slight resistance on the part of a prisoner. To some extent it enhances the value of their services, and the extra exertion necessary in the conveying of their man to the lock-up, shows that they are doing something for their insufficient stipend. For our own part, we see much enjoyment in a policeman's life, and were we not tied to the editorial desk, we would joyfully exchange the quill for the rattle.

"Will you come quietly?" demands Policeman X.

Antony Cowlrick is too exhausted to reply, and accepting his silence as a challenge, his pursuers gave him no grace. They haul him to his feet, and proceed to deal with him in their usual humane fashion. This causes faint murmurs of remonstrance to proceed from him, and causes him, also, to hold his arms before his face in protection, and to ask faintly, [78]

"What have I done?"

"Ah!" say the four policemen, with a look of enquiry at him whose rattle summoned them to the battlefield.

The proud official—it is in truth a proud moment for him—utters but two words; but they are sufficient to animate the policemen's breasts with excess of ardour.

"The murderer!" he whispers.

The murderer! Had he spoken for an hour he could not have produced a more thrilling effect; and be sure that he was as conscious of the value of this dramatic point as the most skilful actor on our stage. A light was instantly thrown upon the drama of the crime, and the unfortunate man, in their eyes, was damned beyond hope of redemption. The murderer! Blood swam before their eyes. Delightful moments!

But the ears of the prisoner had caught the words.

"What!" he screamed, making a violent attempt to wrench himself from the grasp of his captors. Poor fool! He was one to five, and was soon reduced to physical submission. The rough [79]

usage he received in the course of the struggle appeared to tame him inwardly as well as outwardly; when he spoke again his voice was calmer.

"Do you accuse me of the murder of that man?" he asked, turning his face towards 119, Great Porter Square.

He was most surely condemning himself.

"You know best whether you did it," observed Policeman X.

"Yes," he replied, "I know best."

"What were you doing there?" was the next enquiry.

The man looked at them slowly, in detail, as though to fix their faces in his memory, and then, opening his lips, smiled, but did not speak. Nothing more exasperating could well have been imagined than the strange smile of this wretched man—a smile which seemed to say, "You will learn nothing from me."

It was late in the night, but a crowd had already assembled, and the whisper went round that the murderer of the man who was found so cruelly murdered in No. 119, Great Porter Square, had been caught. Short shrift would have been his, even in this law-loving city, if the excited knot of persons could have had their way; but it was the duty of the constables to protect their prisoner.

"Will you come quietly?" they asked of him.

"Why not?" he asked in return. "I shall be the gainer."

So, carefully guarded and held as in a vice, the man walked to the police-court with his captors, followed by the crowd. It was almost a gala night, and the persons who hung at the heels of the supposed murderer and his captors were vehement in speech and florid in action as they explained to every new-comer the cause of the gathering.

"What is the charge?" asked the inspector.

Who should answer but the prisoner himself? Strange fancy of his to take the words from the tongues of his accusers—to steal, as it were, the very bread from their mouths!

"Murder," he cried, with a bitter laugh.

An almost imperceptible quiver agitated the eyelids of the inspector, but it was in a quiet voice he repeated "Murder!" and held his pen suspended over the book in which the charges were set down.

"No. 119, Great Porter Square," added Policeman X, not willing to be robbed of every one of his perquisites.

The inspector's agitation was now more clearly exhibited. The murder was a notable one—all London was ringing with it. His eyes wandered slowly over the prisoner's form.

The man's clothes were ragged, mudded, and shabby, but were without a patch; his boots showed signs of travel; his face had been unshaven for days.

"Search him," said the inspector.

The man resisted, his face flushing up at the order; he was not aware that every fresh resistance to every fresh indignity was additional confirmation of guilt. The web was closing round him, and he was assisting to spin it. They found on him some stale bread and cheese.

"Take care of it," he said tauntingly.

They continued their search, and found nothing else—not a scrap of paper, not a card, not a penny piece, not a knife even. It was most perplexing and annoying.

"Your name?" asked the inspector.

The man laughed again bitterly.

"Your name," repeated the inspector.

"My name!" echoed the man, and then appeared to consider what answer it was best to give. "What do you say to Antony Cowlrick?"

"Is that the name you give?" inquired the inspector.

"Take it," said the man defiantly, "in place of a better!"

"Where do you live?"

"Under the sky."

No answers of a satisfactory nature could be obtained from him, and he was taken to his cell, and orders were given that he should be watched through the night.

As Antony Cowlrick, the man was brought before the magistrate the next morning, charged with the commission of the dreadful crime, and was formally remanded for the production of evidence.

We beg our readers not to be led away by the idea that we are writing a romance; we are stating plain facts. Without a tittle of evidence to implicate or connect him with the crime, the man Antony Cowlrick has been brought up no fewer than seven times, and has been a prey to the vulgar curiosity of eager crowds thronging to catch a glimpse of a monster whose hands were dyed with the blood of a fellow-creature. He has been treated as though he had already been found guilty—and, indeed, in the minds of thousands of persons he *was* found guilty; all that was needed was to fix the day, and prepare the scaffold. Rumours, false statements, columns of fiction, all tending to establish his guilt and to eliminate from the breasts of his fellow-men every spark of pity or mercy, have been freely and shamefully circulated. Our columns alone have not been degraded by this cruelty and this injustice; from the first we refused to believe in Antony Cowlrick's guilt, for the simple reason that nothing could be adduced against him; and the course we have pursued has been justified by the result. Antony Cowlrick is innocent. But for weeks he has been confined in prison, and treated with contumely. Yesterday he was brought before Mr. Reardon, at the Martin Street Police Court, and, on the police stating that they had no further evidence to offer, Antony Cowlrick was discharged.

We do not say that he owes his release entirely to the generous advocacy of Mr. Goldberry, but he is certainly indebted to that gentleman for an earlier release from prison than the police would have been willing to accord him. For if prisons were not filled there would be no need of constables, and the common law of self-preservation induces all men instinctively to adopt that course which will preserve and lengthen their existence. Therefore, we say again, the prisons must be filled, and in the performance of this duty the police assert the necessity of their being. [85]

Now, how stands the case at the present moment? What is the position of the Great Porter Square mystery? An innocent man has been arrested and charged with the crime; after a detention of eight weeks he has been discharged; and, during the whole of this interval, the police have been following a wrong scent. That they knew absolutely nothing of the man they falsely accused—that it is unknown where he has been lodging, and how long he has been in London—that not a friend has come forward to speak a word in his behalf, and that he himself has chosen to preserve a strange and inexplicable silence about himself—these circumstances add to the mystery. [86]

A startling coincidence presents itself; the man who was murdered is unknown; the only man whom the police have arrested for the murder is unknown. But it would be odd if, in such a city as London, with its millions of human beings and its myriad of circumstances, strange and startling coincidences did not frequently occur. [86]

There shall be no misconception of our meaning; there have been too many instances lately of wrong done to individuals by false or reckless swearing on the part of the police. The case of Frost and Smith, condemned by Mr. Justice Hawkins respectively to fifteen and twelve years' penal servitude, on the testimony of the police, for a crime they did not commit, is fresh in the memory of our readers. The men are now released, after undergoing two years' imprisonment—released, not by the efforts of the police who swore away their liberty, nor by the jury who condemned them, nor by the judge who sentenced them, but by means of an anonymous letter and the arrest of the real criminals for another crime—released really by an accident which, while it restores them to liberty, cannot remove from them the taint of the gaol. But, it may be urged, they have Her Gracious Majesty's Pardon. Sweet consolation! A pardon for a crime they did not commit! Never was a word with a gracious meaning to it more bitterly parodied than this; the use of the word "pardon" by Home Secretaries, as applied to the men Frost and Smith, is not only an unpardonable mockery, but a shameful insult. Truly, red-tapeism, like charity, is made to cover a multitude of sins, but it cannot cover this. [87]

We trust that the police have restored to Antony Cowlrick the property—the only property—they found upon his person at the time of his arrest; the pieces of stale bread and cheese. According to appearance it is all he has to fight the world with. It is worthy of note that Cowlrick made no application to the magistrate for relief.

We have opened a subscription for the unfortunate man, and have already two sovereigns in our possession, which we shall be happy to hand to this last "victim of justice," if he will call at our office.

To-morrow we shall have something more, something perhaps of the greatest interest, to say with respect to Antony Cowlrick.

CHAPTER VIII. [88]

THE "EVENING MOON" POSTPONES ITS STATEMENT RESPECTING ANTONY COWLICK.

WE hinted to our readers yesterday that we should have something of great interest to lay before them to-day with respect to Antony Cowlrick. For reasons which we shall in due time explain, we postpone the statement until we can present it in a complete and satisfactory form. We append a list of subscriptions which have been sent to us in response to our announcement that we were ready to receive contributions in aid of the unfortunate man. The signatures of some of the donors are suggestive:—"One who was Wrongfully Convicted" sends 1s. 6d.; "A Poor Widow, whose little boy, nine years of age, was lately sentenced to three months' hard labour for breaking a window," sends a penny postage stamp; "A man whose life was almost sworn away by the police" sends 6d.; "One who has been there" sends 2s.; four "Lovers of Justice" send small sums; "A Reformed Detective" sends 8d.; "A Poor Old Moke" sends 2d.; the Secretary of a "Mutual Protection Society for the Education of Burglars' Children" sends 5s.; "M.P.," who intends to ask a question when the House meets, sends £3 3s.; and sundry others. The total amount now in our hands is £23 4s. 7d., which we hold at the disposal of Antony Cowlrick, who, despite his apparent poverty, has not thought fit to call at our office to claim it. [89]



CHAPTER IX.

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IN WHICH THE "EVENING MOON" RELATES THE ADVENTURES OF ITS SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.

WE have now to place before our readers an account of our proceedings respecting Antony Cowlrick, falsely accused of the murder of a man (name unknown) at No. 119, Great Porter Square. It is lengthy, but we have resolved not to curtail it, and we shall continue it in our editions to-day and to-morrow until it is completed.

We preface our statement with an assurance that in the steps we took we were actuated no less by a feeling of pity for Antony Cowlrick and a wish to clear him completely in the eyes of the public, than by our desire to obtain information which might aid in throwing light upon the circumstances surrounding this mysterious murder. Fully conscious as we are of the requirements of that advanced journalism which purists openly censure and privately patronise, and which is an absolute necessity of the age, we have been careful to keep within the circle of our legitimate right and duty, and not to abuse the liberty of the press.

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It is not to be denied that there exists a growing desire to probe more closely the life amongst which we live and move, and to lay bare the arteries of a social system in which we one and all act our parts. Thus it is that many persons (chiefly women), who a few years ago would never have been heard of by the public, are now the theme of comment and discussion in all classes of society—that their portraits are exposed for sale in shop-windows—and that they are stared at and pointed at in the theatres and other places of public resort. The greater number of these poor creatures see no distinction between the terms notoriety and celebrity; notorious, shamefully notorious—they certainly are; worthily celebrated they can never become, let them pose as they will on the stage or in the private rooms of the photographer. These and other new aspects of society are a condition of the times. We are not now content in the columns of our newspapers to deal with public matters in the abstract; we insist upon knowing something of the character and motives of those whose good or bad fortune it is to be prominently concerned in the wonderful and varied drama of To-Day. Thus there is open to the journalist a new and interesting province for his labours, and he who does not shrink from his duty, and does his spiriting gently and with discretion, will be the most likely to be followed and appreciated by that greatest of all critics—the Public.

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Anticipating the release of Antony Cowlrick, we detailed a Special Reporter to seek an interview with him when he left the Martin Street Police Court, and to endeavour to obtain such information respecting himself as might prove interesting to our readers. The task was a delicate and difficult one, and we entrusted it to a gentleman, a member of our staff, whose generous instincts and sympathetic nature have won for him an unusual meed of respect. It has not yet become the fashion for newspaper writers in England to append their names to their contributions. The question whether the time has arrived for the introduction of this system is worthy of serious consideration. By the present system of anonymity, not only is opportunity afforded for slandering and stabbing in the dark, but undoubted injustice is inflicted upon many a conscientious and enthusiastic worker, who brings to his labours such study, education, and culture, as in any other department of life would make his name famous. Those behind the scenes are familiar with the names of journalists whose knowledge of character, quickness of comprehension, and readiness to seize the salient and most striking features in the pictures of life they are employed to portray, are little less than marvellous. Such workers as these are the true painters and historians of the day, and supply more food for the mental life of the world than the combined efforts of the labourers in every other department of art and science. But the world knows them not; they are deprived of the highest reward an art-worker can receive.

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"You are discharged," said the magistrate to Antony Cowlrick.

The gaolers fell back. Antony Cowlrick mechanically passed his hands over his wrists. There was a certain pathos in the action. The handcuffs were no longer there, but they had left upon the wrists a degradation that would not soon be forgotten.

"I ask your worship to say," said Mr. Goldberry, addressing the magistrate, "that this man, falsely accused, leaves the court without a stain upon his character."

"I cannot say that," replied the magistrate; "we know nothing of his character."

"Nothing has been proved against him," persisted Mr. Goldberry.

"Nothing has been proved in his favour," said the magistrate. "Had you proved that the accused had led a reputable and respectable life—had a reasonable explanation been given of his presence in Great Porter Square and of his motive in ascending the steps leading to the street door of the house in which the murder was committed, and trying the handle—had anything creditable as to his antecedents been established—I should not have objected to some such expression of opinion as you desire. But as the accused has chosen to surround himself with mystery, he must be content with being discharged without the solace of official sympathy. I do not approve of the action of the police in this matter; neither do I approve of the course adopted by the accused. He is discharged."

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Antony Cowlrick listened impatiently to this dialogue. For a moment or two he lingered, as though he had a desire himself to speak to the magistrate, but if he had any such intention he speedily relinquished it, and with a slight shrug of his shoulders he pushed open the door of the dock and stepped into the body of the court.

Outside the police-court, Antony Cowlrick did not pause to look around him: he scarcely seemed to be conscious of the eager faces of the people who had waited to catch a glimpse of

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him. Taking advantage of an opening in the crowd, he darted through it, and walked swiftly away. The people walked swiftly after him, some running before to look up into his face. This impelled him to walk still more swiftly, until presently he began to run as if for a wager.

These movements, especially the last, acted magnetically on the men, women, and children congregated in Martin Street. As though animated by one magical impulse they flew after him, shouting as they ran. There was here presented the singular spectacle of a man just pronounced innocent by the law being hunted down, immediately after his acquittal, by an indiscriminate crowd, without reason or motive.

He scarcely seemed to know the way he was flying. Through some of the narrow turnings intersecting Drury Lane and Covent Garden, then westward into the labyrinths of Soho, doubling back again towards Leicester Square, raced Antony Cowlrick, in his endeavour to get rid of the hunters, until those persons at a distance from Martin Street who were drawn into the hunt by the contagion of the excitement began to scream out, "Stop thief!" In an instant a chorus of voices took up the cry, and "Stop thief! stop thief!" issued from a hundred throats. When that sound reached Antony Cowlrick's ears he stopped—as suddenly as he had fled—and confronted his pursuers. He found himself surrounded by a multitude of excited faces, and within a couple of yards stood an uninformed policeman, who stepped forward to take him into custody. But Antony Cowlrick raised his arm threateningly, and the hunted man and the constable glared at each other. Serious consequences might have ensued had it not been for our Reporter, who worked his way to the front, and stood by Antony Cowlrick's side.

"There is a mistake, policeman," said our Reporter; "this man has done nothing."

The policeman immediately prepared to take our Reporter into custody for obstructing him in the exercise of his duty, but he was balked by the appearance of two other policemen who, acting under instructions, had followed the discharged prisoner, and by Mr. Goldberry, who had accompanied them without consent.

"It's all right," said the newly-arrived policeman. "Come—move along there!"

It is not to be supposed that they were animated by particularly friendly feelings towards Antony Cowlrick; but if he belonged to anybody he belonged to them, and they would not allow any interference with their property.

The crowd slowly dispersed, by no means in good humour; it really appeared as though some among them were of the opinion that Antony Cowlrick had inflicted a personal injury upon them by not having committed a theft and allowing himself to be taken into custody.

"Now, you," said one of the policemen to Antony Cowlrick, stretching towards him an ominous forefinger, "had better mind what you are about, or you'll be getting yourself into trouble."

"Perhaps you will assist me in getting into it," replied Antony Cowlrick. "You have, up till to-day, done your best, it must be admitted."

These were the first words our Reporter had heard Antony Cowlrick utter, and they produced a singular impression upon him. The manner of their utterance was that of a gentleman. There was a distinct refinement in the voice and bearing of Antony Cowlrick which strangely contrasted with his miserable appearance.

The policeman had but one answer to this retort.

"Move on!"

"When it suits me," said Antony Cowlrick. "I am one man, alone and unknown—that hurts you, probably. I am not obstructing the thoroughfare; I am not begging; I am not hawking without a licence; I am doing nothing unlawful. When it suits me to move on, I will move on. In the meantime," he exclaimed, in an authoritative tone, "move you on!"

The audacity of this order staggered the policemen, and they could find no words to reply.

Antony Cowlrick proceeded:

"If a fresh crowd gathers round us—it is beginning to do so, I perceive—it is you who are collecting it. You have no more right to order me to move on than your comrades had—you are all alike, blue coats, rattles, and truncheons—to arrest me in Great Porter Square."

The policemen looked at one another, in a state of indecision; then looked at our Reporter; then at Mr. Goldberry. They were evidently perplexed, the right being clearly on Antony Cowlrick's side. Happily for them, their eyes fell simultaneously upon the crowd of idlers surrounding them, and, without more ado, they plunged wildly in, and scattered the curiosity-mongers in all directions. Having thus vindicated the majesty of the law, they moved reluctantly away, and left the victor, Antony Cowlrick, upon the field.

It happened that among the crowd was a woman who, taken unaware by the sudden onslaught of the police, was roughly dealt with. Unable to stem the rush of the dispersion, she was knocked about, and almost thrown down. Saved by a helping hand, she escaped without injury, but she was exhausted, and sat down upon a door-step to recover herself. There was nothing especially noticeable in this incident, but it will be presently seen that it has a singular bearing upon our narrative.

A group of three persons, comprising our Reporter, Mr. Goldberry, and Antony Cowlrick, standing together in Leicester Square, and a woman sitting on a doorstep—these are the individuals in whom we are at present interested. A policeman idles to and fro, at some distance, with his eyes occasionally turned towards the group, but he does not interfere.

It was noon, and, as usual, a strange quietude reigned in Leicester Square. This is its normal condition in the day-time, and is the more remarkable because of the contiguity of the Square to the most infamous thoroughfare in London—the Haymarket—wherein vice in its most shameless and degrading aspects openly parades itself for sixteen hours out of the twenty-four.

"Can I be of any assistance to you?" asked Mr. Goldberry, of Antony Cowlrick.

"No," replied Antony Cowlrick, abruptly, and then, observing who it was that spoke, added:

"Your pardon! You are the gentleman who defended me?" Mr. Goldberry nodded. "What was your motive?"

"Compassion."

Antony Cowlrick cast his eyes upon his ragged clothes, and passed his hand over his face, upon which a two months' beard was growing.

"I look a fit object of compassion. But I am not grateful to you. I should have been discharged, some time or other, without your assistance. There was no evidence, you see; and, after all, I may be guilty of the murder."

"I do not think you are," said Mr. Goldberry.

"It is scarcely worth arguing about," remarked Antony Cowlrick. "He is not the first, and will not be the last."

"He! Who?" quickly asked Mr. Goldberry.

"The man who was murdered in Great Porter Square."

"Do you know anything of him?"

"What should I know? Some interesting particulars concerning him will no doubt one day be brought to light." Cowlrick paused a moment. "You are a lawyer, and therefore a decent member of society. You go to church, and, of course, believe in God."

"Well?"

"Well!" echoed Antony Cowlrick. "Do you think God will allow the guilty to escape, or that He needs the assistance of a lawyer to punish the man who sheds his brother's blood?"

"His brother's blood!" exclaimed Mr. Goldberry.

"Are we not all brothers!" said Antony Cowlrick with bitter emphasis. "Do we not all live in charity with one another? Enough. I have no desire to prolong this conversation; it can lead to no good result. But I felt bound to answer you civilly, as it is barely possible, when you rose in the police-court to defend me, that you were in part animated by a kindly sentiment for an unfortunate man. On the other hand, you may have been wholly impelled by a desire to advertise your name in an important case of murder. But you shall have the benefit of the doubt. Give me your card. If at any time I should need you, I will call upon or send for you."

It was with an air of patronage that this beggarly man spoke to the well-to-do lawyer; but Mr. Goldberry, with admirable equanimity, accepted the position, and handed Antony Cowlrick his card.

"Can I do nothing more for you?" he asked.

"Nothing more."

Mr. Goldberry, before he took his departure, drew our Reporter aside.

"You appear to be interested in the man?" he said.

Our Reporter enlightened him.

"I am a journalist, on the staff of the *Evening Moon*."

"And on the look-out for paragraphs. You will find Antony Cowlrick worth studying."

"You believed in his innocence when you defended him. Do you believe in it now?"

Mr. Goldberry laughed.

"I am not prepared to be interviewed. One thing is certain. There is a mystery here, and I should like to obtain a clue to it. You may be more successful than I."

"He speaks like a gentleman."

"We live in levelling times. There is no telling who is who. I have heard a gentleman speak like a costermonger."

This confidential communication between our Reporter and Mr. Goldberry escaped the ears, but not the eyes, of Antony Cowlrick, and when Mr. Goldberry left and our Reporter remained, he was the first to speak.

"Has the lawyer deputed you to watch me?"

"No," replied our Reporter. "I am a newspaper man, and should be glad if you can give me any information for my paper?"

"Information about what?"

"Yourself."

"Haven't the newspapers had enough of me? I haven't read one for many weeks, but I guess their columns must have been filled with reports of the proceedings at the Magistrate's Court."

"You guess right. The murder committed in Great Porter Square was most horrible, and the public have been much excited about it. The paper I am on, the *Evening Moon*, was the only one which from the first declared you to be innocent of the charge brought against you. Perhaps you would like to read what we have written on the subject."

Antony Cowlrick took the packet of papers which our Reporter had prepared in anticipation of the emergency.

"I have unknown friends, it seems."

"It is a question of fair play, and, being a public matter, comes within our province. See, here is yesterday's paper, stating that a subscription is opened at our office for you."

"You have taken an unwarrantable liberty in holding me forth as an object of charity."

"What has been done," said our Reporter, "has been done with good intent. There was no desire to hurt your feelings, but you appeared, and appear, to be in poverty."

"Will you lend me a sovereign?"

"Willingly. There were two at the office for you yesterday, and when I left this morning not less than ten pounds had been received for the subscription list."

"A queer world we live in, do we not, with a public that one moment is ready to tear a man to

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pieces, and the next to surfeit him with sweets? I decline to accept your money. I would not touch it, though I am really in want of a meal. I suppose, if you were to leave me this instant, or I were to refuse to hold any further converse with you, you would consider it your duty to write a flaming article about me for the next edition of your paper?"

"I should narrate what has passed, in fair and temperate language, I hope."

"I beg you," said Antony Cowlrick, earnestly, "to do me a great favour. Do not drag me before the public to-day. Nay, nor to-morrow. Give me three days' grace. It will be of service to me, and may help the cause of justice."

The last words were spoken with an air of hesitation.

"If I promise to do this—providing my Chief consents, and I think he will—you must allow me in return to become better acquainted with you."

"Pick up what scraps you can, my literary Autolykus. Examine me well. Describe my appearance, manners, and bearing. Say that I belie my looks, and that I do not speak exactly like a ruffian. In all that, shrewd as you may be, you can only see the outside of me. Understand, if you please, that I shall not help you."

"All right. Where do you intend to sleep to-night?"

"God knows! I do not."

"How are you going to live? Have you a trade?"

Antony Cowlrick held out his hands.

"Do these look like hands accustomed to hard work?"

They were dirty with prison dirt, and were as soft and pliable as the hands of a lady. At this point, as he stood with his hand in the hand of our Reporter, the woman who had been knocked about by the crowd rose from the doorstep.

Our Reporter felt a nervous twitching in the hand he held, and, looking up into the face of Antony Cowlrick, saw with surprise that it was agitated by a sudden and powerful emotion. Antony Cowlrick's eyes were fixed upon the woman, who was walking slowly away.

She was young and fair, and in her movements there was an aimlessness which did not speak well for her character. But, as Mr. Goldberry observed, we live in levelling times, and it is hard to judge accurately of a person's social position from dress and manner. The locality was against this young and pretty woman; her being young and pretty was against her; her apparent want of occupation was against her. But she spoke to no one, looked at no one.

Antony Cowlrick hastened after her. Our Reporter did not follow him. He was not acting the part of a detective. What he did was in pursuance of his duty, and it is not in his nature to give offence. Therefore he stood where Antony Cowlrick left him, and waited for events.

When Antony Cowlrick reached the woman's side, he touched her arm, and spoke to her. She did not reply, but glanced carelessly at him, and, averting her eyes with a gesture of repugnance, pursued her way. Before she had taken three steps, Antony Cowlrick was again by her side. Again he touched her arm and addressed her; and this time, instead of attempting to avoid him, she turned and looked up at him. For a moment doubt was expressed in her face—only for a moment. As though a sudden and wonderful light had entered her soul, her face became illumined with joy. She was pretty before; now she was beautiful.

Some words of delight struggled to her lips, but died in their utterance. Antony Cowlrick placed his hand on her mouth so that they should not be spoken aloud—directing his eyes at the same time towards the spot occupied by our Reporter.

The woman pressed her hand upon the man's hand, still at her lips, and kissed it passionately.

Then she and Antony Cowlrick conversed hurriedly. Evidently questions were being asked and answered—questions upon which much depended. The last question asked by Antony Cowlrick was answered by the woman with a sad shake of her head. He held her fingers in his hand, and seemed to look at them inquiringly. Did he expect to find rings there which he could convert into money? Her fingers were bare of ornament. He looked at her ears, then at the bosom of her dress. She possessed neither ear-rings nor brooch.

Under such circumstances as these, speech was not needed for the understanding of what was passing between the haggard, unshaven, poverty-stricken man and the equally poor and beautiful woman.

Antony Cowlrick did not hesitate long. A dozen strides brought him to our Reporter.

"I have found a friend," he said.

"So I perceive," replied our Reporter.

"You offered awhile ago to lend me a sovereign. I refused to accept it. Will you lend it me now?" Our Reporter gave it to him instantly, without a word.

The swift graciousness of the response appeared to touch Antony Cowlrick, and an expression of gratitude dwelt on his features.

"I thank you. My gratitude will remain ever as a debt. I appreciate your delicacy in not intruding upon my interview with my friend."

"She is not a new friend," observed our Reporter.

"No, indeed," was the reply.

"It seems to me that she might have appeared at the police-court to give evidence in your favour."

"Supposing she could say anything *in* my favour."

"It is evident that she would say nothing to harm you. Her joy at meeting you was too palpable."

"You have a trick of keen observation. Perhaps she did not know of my awkward position."

"How could she help knowing it when your name has been so prominent in the papers for

weeks?"

"My name? Ah, I forgot. But I cannot offer you a satisfactory explanation. More than ever now will unnecessary and immediate publicity be likely to injure me. You will keep your promise—for three days you will not write about me?" [114]

"I will keep my promise. At the end of three days I shall simply publish what has passed between ourselves and Mr. Goldberry."

"It seems to me to be singularly devoid of interest."

"You are mistaken. Newspaper readers peruse such details as these with eagerness. You must not forget that you are in some way, near or remote, connected with an atrocious crime."

"You foil me at every point. Good-day."

"Good-day!" exclaimed our Reporter. "Shall I not see you again?"

"You will, if you play the spy upon me."

"I shall not do that. But you promised to afford me an opportunity of becoming better acquainted with you."

"That is true. Wait a moment."

He rejoined the woman, and after exchanging a few words with her, returned to our Reporter. [115]

"You will not publish the address I am about to give you?"

"Not if you do not wish it."

"I do not wish it. We must not play with reputations—especially with the reputation of a woman. Have you pencil and paper? Thank you. Call to-night at ten o'clock at this address."

He wrote an address in our Reporter's note-book, and, directly afterwards, left Leicester Square with his newly-found friend. As he turned in the direction of Piccadilly, he hailed a cab, into which he and his companion hastily scrambled.

By ten o'clock that night our Reporter paused before the door of the house in which he expected to find Antony Cowlrick, and debated with himself whether he should inquire for the man by name. It was quite natural, he thought, that a person who had been placed in a position so unpleasant as Antony Cowlrick should wish to avoid the disagreeable curiosity of prying eyes and vulgar tongues, and that in a new lodging he should give another name than his own. The house was situated in one of the lowest neighbourhoods, where only the poorest people dwell. There were at least half-a-dozen small bells on the right hand side of the door, and our Reporter fell into deep disgrace by pulling them one after another, and bringing down persons whose faces were strange to him. [116]

He felt himself in a difficulty, when, giving a description of the man and the woman he wished to see, one lodger said, "O, it's the second-floor back;" and another said, "Oh, it's the third-floor front;" and another said, "What do yer mean by comin' 'ere at this time o' night rousing up people as want to be abed and asleep?" Now, this last rebuke was not taken in good part by our Reporter, whose knowledge of the slums of London, being somewhat extensive, had led him to the belief that householders and lodgers in these localities seldom go to bed before the public-house lights are put out. Sad, indeed, is it to reflect that the Gin-shop is the Church of the Poor, and that it is open from early morn till midnight to lead poverty and ignorance to lower and lower depths, in which it is impossible for purity and innocence to find a resting place! [117]

At length, in despair, our Reporter, having no alternative, inquired of a woman in the house whether a person of the name of Cowlrick was within. The woman looked suspiciously at our Reporter, and said she would call "her man." Her man came, and our Reporter repeated his question.

"Cowlrick!" cried the man. "Send I may live if that ain't the name of the feller as was up at the perlice court for the murder in Great Porter Square! Yer don't mean to say that it's 'im you've come to inquire for at a respectable 'ouse?" [118]

"Shut the door in his face, Jim!" called out the woman, from the top of the stairs.

No sooner said than done. The door was slammed in our Reporter's face, and he was "left out in the cold," as the saying is.

What, now, was our Reporter to do? He had no intention of giving up his search; the woof of his nature is strong and tough, and difficulties rather inspire than depress him. Within a stone's throw from a weak hand there were six public-houses; within a stone's throw from any one of these were half-a-dozen other public-houses. It was as though a huge pepper-box, filled with public-houses, had been shaken over the neighbourhood. There was a certain peculiarity in the order and arrangement of their fall. Most of them had fallen into the corners of the courts and narrow streets. There must be a Providence in this—a Providence which, watching over the welfare of brewers and distillers, has conferred upon them and upon their heirs and assigns an inalienable right in the corners of every street and lane in the restless Babylonian City.

Our Reporter made the rounds of these public-houses, ordered liquor in every one of them, and poured it on the floor—to the indignation of many toppers, who called it "sinful waste;" especially to the indignation of one blear-eyed, grey-haired, old woman, with three long strong hairs sticking out of her chin. This old creature, who looked as if she had just stepped away from the witches' cauldron in Macbeth (the brew there not being strong enough), screamed out to our Reporter, "You'll come to want! You'll come to want! For Gawd's sake, don't spill it, my dear! Give it to me—give it to me!" and struggled with him for the liquor. [119]

Within half-an-hour of midnight our Reporter found himself once more before the house in which he supposed Antony Cowlrick would sleep that night. But he was puzzled what to do. To ring the bells again was hazardous. He determined to wait until a lodger entered the house; then he himself would enter and try the chamber doors.

The minutes passed. No guardian angel of a lodger came to his aid. But all at once he felt a tug at his trousers. He looked down. It was a little girl. A very mite of a girl. [120]

"If yer please, sir——"

"Yes, little one," said our Reporter.

"Will yer pull the blue bell, and knock five times? I can't reach."



CHAPTER X.

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THE SPECIAL REPORTER OF THE "EVENING MOON" MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF A LITTLE MATCH GIRL.

PULL the blue bell, and knock five times!

The request was not to be denied. That the small party who made it could *not* "reach" was self-evident, for she was scarcely three feet and a half in height. But to say, "pull the blue bell" was one thing, and to pull the blue bell was another. Our Reporter had pulled every bell on the door, as he believed, and he looked in vain for a blue one.

"I don't see the blue bell, little girl," he said.

"Yes, yer do," replied the little girl, with audacious effrontery. "Not where yer looking! It's all by itself on the other side."

Our Reporter found the bell, "all by itself," on the left hand side of the door, where bells usually are not, and he pulled it, and knocked five times slowly.

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"That ain't right!" cried the little girl; her voice came as loud and shrill as if it proceeded from the throat of a canary. "Yer must knock like a postman, and a little 'un in—rat-tat, rat-tat, tat!"

Our Reporter obeyed, fully expecting to be assaulted for kicking up such a row so late in the night; but no one took any notice of him, and no one answered the ring and the knocks.

The little girl waited patiently, much more patiently than our Reporter, who rang and knocked again with the air of a man who was engaged in a contest and was getting the worst of it.

"Must I give it up?" he mentally asked himself, and answering immediately, "No, I will see Antony Cowlrick to-night, or I'll know the reason why." Then he looked down at the form of the little girl, and called, "Little girl!"

The little girl did not reply. She was leaning against the door-post in a state of perfect contentment. The particular house with which our Reporter might be said to be wrestling was in the shade; there was no lamp-post within twenty yards of it, and the night was dark.

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"Little girl!" repeated our Reporter, in a louder voice.

Still no reply.

He leant down, and placed his hands on her shoulders. She did not move. He stooped lower, and looked into her face. She was fast asleep.

Even in the dark he saw how much she was to be pitied. Her poor wan face was dirty, and traces of tears were on it; her hair hung in thick knots over her forehead; her hands were begrimed; her clothes were rags; on her feet were a pair of what once were dancing shoes, and had twinkled in the ballet. They were half-a-dozen sizes too large for the little feet, and were tied to her ankles with pieces of twine. Their glory was gone indeed, and, though they had once been satin, they were fit only for the rag-bag or the dust-hole.

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"Poor child!" sighed our Reporter. "It is easy to see what you are growing up into!"

He whispered in her ear, "Wake up, little one! I've knocked loud enough to raise the dead, and no one answers. Wake up!"

As she made no movement, he shook her, gently and with tenderness, whereupon she murmured some words, but so indistinctly that he did not gather their import.

"Eh?" he said, placing his ear to her lips. "What did you say?"

"Two boxes a penny," she murmured. "Please buy a box!—starving mother at 'ome!"

A woman shuffled along the street, and stopped before the house, with the supper beer in a brown jug. As she opened the door with the latch-key, she glanced at the sleeping child.

"Why, it's little Fanny!" she cried.

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"Who asked me," added our Reporter, "to pull the blue bell, and knock five times?"

"Yes," observed the woman. "Third-floor back."

"The young woman," said our Reporter, taking up the cue, and slipping sixpence into the woman's hand—(when do our poor refuse alms?)—"the young woman in the third-floor back—is she at home?"

"Goodness only knows," replied the woman, who, having accepted the money, felt that she must earn it; "she's that quiet, is Blanche, that there's no telling when she's in or when she's out."

"Let me see," said our Reporter, pretending to consider, "how long has Blanche lived in the house?"

"About three months, I should say. Pretty, ain't she?"

"Very. Young, too, to be the mother of little Fanny here."

"Lord love you!" exclaimed the woman; "little Fanny's no relation of her'n. She's a single woman is Blanche. I thought you was a friend."

"So I am. But this is the first time I've been here to see her."

"You're the first I've ever seen come after her."

"She has not many friends, then?"

"Not one that I know of."

"She has had an old friend with her to-day," said our Reporter, thinking he might by this question obtain some information of Antony Cowlrick.

"Has she? I'm glad to hear it. I've wondered a good deal about the girl, and so has all of us in the street. She don't mix with us free like. Not that she ain't affable! But she keeps herself to herself. I must go in now," said the woman, with a giggle, "or my old man'll think I've run off with somebody."

She entered the house, and our Reporter, with little Fanny asleep in his arms, followed. On the first floor the woman vanished, and he pursued his way to the third. The stairs were in utter darkness, and he had to exercise great care to save his shins and to avoid disturbing the lodgers in the house. In due time he reached the third floor, and struck a match. There were only two doors on the landing, and he saw at once which of the two led to the back room. He knocked, and received no response; and then he tried the handle of the door. It gave way, and he was in the room, in utter darkness.

"I beg your pardon," he said, addressing, as he believed, the occupant, "but as no one answered"—

He did not finish the sentence, for the stillness of the room affected him. His position was certainly a perplexing one. He listened for the breathing of some person, but heard none.

"Antony Cowlrick," he thought, "have you been playing me a trick?"

He struck another match, and lit a candle which was on a small table. Then he looked around. The room was empty.

"Now," thought our Reporter, "if this is not the room in which Antony Cowlrick led me to expect he would receive me, and the tenant proper *himself* or *herself* should suddenly appear, I shall scarcely be prepared to offer a reasonable excuse for my intrusion."

No articles of clothing were in sight to enlighten him as to the sex of the tenant of this third-floor back. There was a bed in decent order, and he laid little Fanny upon it. Having done this, he noticed that food was on the table—the remains of a loaf cut in slices, with a scraping of butter on them, a small quantity of tea screwed up in paper, and a saucer with about an ounce of brown sugar in it.

"Not exactly a Rothschild," mused our Reporter, "but quite as happy perhaps."

For our Reporter has his own views of things, and contends that more happiness is to be found among the poor than among the rich.

Continuing his investigations, our Reporter was not long before he made an important discovery. Exactly in front of the slice of bread and butter on the table was a chair, upon which the person who appeared to be invited to the frugal supper would naturally sit, and exactly behind the bread and butter was a piece of paper, set up on end, upon which was written:

"Dear little Fanny. Good-bye. If ever I am rich I will try and find you. Look on the mantelshelf."

There was a peculiarity in the writing. The letters forming the name "Fanny" were traced in large capital letters, such as a child who could not read fine writing might be able to spell; the rest was written in small hand.

Our reporter argued the matter logically thus: The little girl asleep on the bed could not read, but understood the large letters in which her name was written. The supper on the table was set out for her. Preparing to partake of it, her eyes would fall on the paper, and she would see her name upon it. Curiosity to know what else was written would impel her to seek a lodger in the house—perhaps the landlady—who would read the message aloud to her, and would look on the mantelshelf.

Why should not our Reporter himself read the message to little Fanny, and why should he not look on the mantelshelf?

He did the latter without further cogitation. Upon the mantelshelf he found two unsealed envelopes, with writing on them. Each contained money.

One was addressed "For Fanny." It contained a shilling. On the other was written: "Mrs. Rogers, landlady. If a gentleman engaged upon a newspaper calls to see Blanche and a friend whom she met in Leicester Square to-day, please give him the enclosed. Blanche is not coming back. Her rent is paid up to next Saturday. Good-bye."

He had not, then, entered the wrong apartment. This room had been occupied by Antony Cowlrick's fair friend, and the enclosure was for our Reporter.

He took it out; it was a sealed letter. He opened it, and read, as a sovereign fell to the floor:—

"SIR,—I am enabled thus soon to repay you the sovereign you so generously lent me to-day. Had it been out of my power to do so to-night you would most probably have seen me as you expected. It is better as it is, for I have nothing to communicate which I desire to make public. I shall ever retain a lively sense of your kindness, and I depend upon the fulfilment of your promise not to write about me in your paper for three days. If you do not know what else to do with the money received by your paper in response to its appeal for subscriptions on my behalf, I can tell you. Give it to the poor.—Your faithful servant,

The handwriting was that of an educated man, and the mystery surrounding Antony Cowlrick was deepened by the last proceeding.

A voice from the bed aroused our Reporter from his meditations. Little Fanny was awake, and was calling for Blanche. [132]

"Blanche is not in yet," said our Reporter. "Come and eat your supper."

The little girl struggled to her feet, and approached the table. The curiosity of our Reporter was strongly excited, and before giving Fanny the message and the shilling left for her by Blanche, he determined to question her. Thereupon the following colloquy ensued:—

Our Reporter: This *is* your supper, Fanny.

Fanny (carefully spreading the brown sugar over her bread): Yes. Blanche never forgits me.

Our Reporter: Sugar every night?

Fanny: Yes, I likes it.

Our Reporter: Blanche is not your mother?

Fanny (with her mouth full): Lor! No.

Our Reporter: Is she your aunt or your cousin?

Fanny: Lor! No. She ain't nothink to me but a—— a—— [133]

Our Reporter (prompting, seeing that Fanny was in a difficulty): Friend?

Fanny: More nor that. A brick!

Our Reporter: She is good to you?

Fanny: There ain't nobody like her.

Our Reporter: What are you?

Fanny (laughing): Wot am I? A gal.

Our Reporter: Do you go to school?

Fanny (with a cunning shake of her head): Ketch me at it!

Our Reporter: What do you do?

Fanny: I sells matches—two boxes a penny—and I falls asleep on purpose in front of the Nacheral Gallery.

Our Reporter: The National Gallery. In Trafalgar Square, where the fountains are?

Fanny: That's the place—where the little man without legs plays the accorgeon.

Our Reporter: Why do you fall asleep there?

Fanny (with a sad, wistful smile): That's mother's little game. She makes me.

Our Reporter: Mother's little game! Then you have a mother? [134]

Fanny (shuddering): Raythur.

Our Reporter: Where does she live?

Fanny: At the pub round the corner, mostly—the Good Sir Mary Tun—till they turns her out.

Our Reporter: The Good Samaritan. But why does your mother make you fall asleep on purpose in front of the National Gallery?

Fanny: Don't yer see? It's a dodge. Mother gives me twelve boxes o' matches, and I've got to sell 'em. If I don't, I gits toko! Well, I don't always sell 'em, though I try ever so 'ard. Then I falls down on the pavement up agin the wall, or I sets down on the church steps oppersite, with the boxes o' matches in my 'and, and I goes to sleep. Pretends to, yer know; I'm wide awake all the time, I am. A lady and gent comin' from the theaytre, stops and looks at me. "Poor little thing!" *she* ses. "Come along!" *he* ses. Sometimes the lady won't come along, and she bends over, and puts 'er 'and on my shoulder. "Why don't yer go 'ome?" she ses. "I can't, mem," I ses, "till I've sold my matches." Then she gives me a copper, but don't take my matches; and other gents and ladies as stops to look gives me somethink—I've 'ad as much as a shillin' give me in a lump, more nor once. When they're gone, mother comes, and wrenches my 'and open, and takes the money, and ses, "Go to sleep agin you little warmint, or I'll break every bone in yer body!" Then I shuts my eyes, and the game's played all over agin. [135]

Our Reporter: Is your mother near you all the while, Fanny, that she comes and takes the money from you?

Fanny: Lor! No! That would spoil the game. She's watchin' on the other side of Trafalgar Square. She knows 'er book, does mother! Sometimes I'm so tired that I falls asleep in real earnest, and then I ketches it—'ot!

Our Reporter: Does she beat you?

Fanny: Does she miss a chance? [136]

The child hitches her shoulder out of her ragged frock, and our Reporter sees on the poor thin back, the bladebones of which stick up like knives, the marks of welts and bruises. There is room in our literature for another kind of book on "The Mothers of England" than that written by a celebrated authoress many years ago. Fanny's poor little back is black and blue, and when our Reporter, with gentle finger, touches one of the bruises, the child quivers with pain.

Our Reporter: Altogether, Fanny, your life is not a rosy one?

Fanny: O, I 'ave lots of larks with the boys! And I've got some 'air.

Our Reporter (very much puzzled): Some what?

Fanny: Some 'air. I'll show yer.

She jumps from her chair, creeps under the bed, and emerges presently, her face flushed and excited, with something wrapped in a piece of old newspaper. She displays her treasure to our astonished Reporter. It is a chignon, apparently made of tow, which she fixes proudly on her head. The colour is many shades lighter than Fanny's own hair, which is a pretty dark brown, but [137]

that is of the smallest consequence to the child, who evidently believes that the chignon makes a woman of fashion of her.

Fanny: I wears it on Sundays, when I goes to the Embankment. Mother don't know I've got it. If she did, she'd take it from me, and wear it 'erself. I say—ain't it splendid, the Embankment?

Our Reporter: It is a fine place, Fanny. So you have larks with the boys?

Fanny: Yes. We goes to the play on the sly. 'Tain't a month ago since Bob the Swell comes and ses, "Fanny, wot do yer say to goin' and seein' 'Drink' at the Princesses? Give us a kiss, and I'll treat yer!" My! I was ready to jump out of my skin! He 'ad two other gals with 'im. He ses, ses Bob, "This is a lady's party. It's a wim of mine"—I don't know wot he means by that, but he ses—"it's a wim of mine. I wos allus a lady's man, wosn't I, Fan?" (And he is, a regular one!) "I've got three young women to my own cheek, all a-growin' and a-blowin'! Let's trot." Wot a night we 'ad! He takes us to a 'Talian ice-shop in Williers Street, and we 'as penny ices, and then we goes to the Princesses—to the best part of the theaytre, 'igh up, where you can look down on all the other people. 'Ave you seen 'Drink?' Prime—ain't it? But I shouldn't like to be one o' them gals as throws pails of water over each other. And when Coop-o falls from the scaffoldin'—ain't it nacheral! I almost cried my eyes out when he was 'aving dinner with 'is little gal. Then he gits the trembles, and goes on awful. I never seed one so bad as that! When the play's over Bob takes us to a pub'—

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Our Reporter (shocked): Fanny!

Fanny: Wot's the matter?

Our Reporter: You don't drink, I hope?

Fanny: Yes, I does—but not what Bob the Swell drinks. I likes water with raspberry jam in it, stirred up. I 'ad some white satin once, but it made me sick. That night Bob drinks beer, and the other gals too. I was genteel; I 'ad lemonade. I got a wollopin' when I got 'ome. Mother was waitin' for me outside the Good Sir Mary Tun; I tried to dodge 'er, but it was no go; she caught me and give it me. "That'll teach yer," she said, "to leave your pore mother with a throat as dry as a salt 'erring, while you go gallivantin' about with a parcel of boys!" I didn't mind; it was worth the wollopin'.

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Our Reporter: Now, let us talk about Blanche.

Fanny: Yes. 'Ow late she is to-night!

Our Reporter: Have you known her long, Fanny?

Fanny: Ever since she's bin 'ere.

Our Reporter: About three months?

Fanny: I can't count. It was a 'ot night—late, and I was cryin'; I couldn't help it—I wos 'ungry, and mother 'ad been givin' it to me. Blanche comes up, and arks a lot of questions—just the same as you've been doin'; then she brings me 'ome 'ere, and I've slept with 'er ever since.

Our Reporter: Does she work?

Fanny: I never seed 'er. She don't do nothink.

Our Reporter: And no one comes to see her?

Fanny: Not as I knows on. Look 'ere! You don't want to 'urt 'er, do you?

Our Reporter: No, Fanny. I would like to be a good friend to her, but I am afraid she has put it out of my power. You would be sorry if she went away from you?

Fanny (slowly, after a pause): I don't know what I should do if she did. Are yer makin' game of me? Who are yer?

Our Reporter: A friend of yours, Fanny, if you like. Do you see this paper? It was left for you.

Fanny: There's my name on it. I can read *that*. Wot else does it say?

Our Reporter: Listen. (He reads.) "Dear little Fanny. Good bye. If ever I am rich I will try and find you. Look on the mantelshelf." You were asleep, Fanny, and I looked on the mantel shelf. This was there for you. (He gives her the shilling.)

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Fanny (turning the shilling over and over in her hand): I don't know wot it means. Please read it agin—the fust part.

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Our Reporter (after reading the farewell again): It means, Fanny, that Blanche is gone, and that if she is fortunate she will be kind to you by-and-bye.

Fanny's head sinks on the table, and her little body is shaken with sobs. In vain does our Reporter attempt to comfort her, and at length he is compelled to leave her alone in the humble room in which poor Fanny has learnt a lesson of love which will abide with her, and, let us hope, will purify her days.



WE have but little to add to the graphic statement of our Special Reporter. He paid altogether three visits to the house in which Antony Cowlrick's female friend, Blanche, rented a room; the last visit was paid at noon of this day. His desire was to obtain some information relating to the young woman's history; he has been unsuccessful. Nothing is known of her history; she made her first appearance in the neighbourhood about three months ago, took a furnished room, lived a quiet life, and did not mix with the neighbours. She was never seen in public-houses, and had no visitors. All that is known of her relates to the little match girl, Fanny, her kindness to whom is the theme of admiration and praise. Her name was Blanche—simply Blanche; she gave and was asked for no other. The police have nothing to say against her. There are few single young women living alone in the locality in which Blanche resided against whom the tongue of scandal is not busy, generally, it must be admitted, with sufficient reason; but nothing has been elicited to the discredit of Blanche. Thus far, her record is a good one. [143]

Nothing has been seen of Antony Cowlrick; he has vanished utterly from the sight of the police, who, although he was acquitted of the charge they brought against him, had determined to keep their eye on him. He has proved himself more than their match. The description given of him by our Special Reporter is that of a man of medium height, probably five feet eight inches, with spare frame, lithe and sinewy. His hair is auburn, and appeared to grow freely. This free growth, and the circumstance of his having been unshaved for weeks, render it difficult to describe his features; all that can be said on this point is that his face was haggard and distressed, and that there dwelt upon it an expression which denoted deep trouble and perplexity. Every person who has followed this case in our columns, and who has carefully read the accounts we have presented to our readers, must feel a deep interest in the man. The impression he made upon our Special Reporter—the prompt repayment of the sovereign he borrowed—his language and manners—even the collateral evidence supplied by what is known of his friend Blanche—all tell in his favour. And stronger than every circumstance combined are the concluding words of his letter to our Special Reporter. "If you do not know what else to do with the money received by your paper in response to its appeal for subscriptions on my behalf, I can tell you—give it to the poor." There spoke a man in whose bosom beats the true pulse of a lofty humanity. Antony Cowlrick, who, without doubt, since his release, has read all that has appeared in our columns concerning him, is aware that our last edition of yesterday contained a full list of subscriptions sent to our office for him, the total amount being £68 17s. It is a sum worth having, and might be supposed to be especially acceptable to a man in Antony Cowlrick's apparently destitute condition—a man upon whose person, when he was arrested, was found some stale bread and cheese, and not a penny of money. In the face of this evidence of poverty, Antony Cowlrick has not called for the handsome sum we hold in trust for him, and has instructed us to give it to the poor. We shall do so in a week from this date, unless Antony Cowlrick presents himself at our office to receive it; or unless those who have subscribed object. We trust they will not withdraw their subscriptions, which we promise shall be faithfully and worthily applied in charity's cause. [144]

Here, then, for the present, we leave the subject which has occupied so large a portion of our space. The man murdered in the house, No. 119 Great Porter Square, lies in his grave, and his murderer is still at large. Any of our readers may have come in contact with him this very day; we ourselves may have walked elbow to elbow with him in the crowded thoroughfares; and he will, of a certainty, if he be in England, read to-night the words we are now writing. Tremble, thou unspeakable monster! Though thou escape thy doom at the bar of earthly justice, God's hand lies heavy upon thee, and shall weigh thee down until the Judgment Day, when thou and thy victim shall stand face to face before the eternal throne! [145]



CHAPTER XII.

MRS. PREEDY HAS DREADFUL DREAMS.

SO profound was the sleep of Mrs. Preedy, lodging-house keeper, whom we left slumbering in the first chapter of our story, that we have been able, without disturbing her, to make the foregoing extracts from the copies of the *Evening Moon* which lay on the table immediately beneath her nose. Deep as were her slumbers, they were not peaceful. Murder was in her brain, and it presented itself to her in a thousand hideous and grotesque shapes. Overwhelming, indeed, was her trouble. Only that morning had she said to Mrs. Beale, a bosom friend and neighbour on the other side of the Square—

"I shall never rest easy in my mind till the man's caught and hung!"

Dreams, it is said, "go by contrary." If you dream of a marriage, it means death; if you dream of [146]

death, it means marriage. Happy augury, then, that Mrs. Preedy should dream that her dead and buried husband, her "blessed angel," was alive, that he had committed the murder, and that she was putting on her best black to see him hanged. Curious to say, in her unconscious state, this otherwise distressing dream was rather enjoyable, for through the tangled threads of the crime and its punishment ran the refrain of a reproach she used to hurl at her husband, when fortune went against him, to the effect that she always knew he would come to a bad end. So altogether, it was a comfortable hanging—Mr. Preedy being dead and out of the reach of danger, and Mrs. Preedy being alive to enjoy it.

A more grotesque fancy was it to dream that the wooden old impostor in the weather indicator on her mantelshelf was the murderer. This antiquated farmer, who was about four inches in height, unhooked himself from his catgut suspender, slid down to the ground, and stood upon the floor of the kitchen, with Murder in his Liliputian carcase. With no sense of wonder did the dreamer observe the movements of this incredible dwarf-man. He looked around warily, his wooden finger at his wooden lips. All was quiet. He walked to the wall, covering about a quarter of an inch at every step, and rapped at it. A small hole appeared; he vanished through it. The opening was too small for Mrs. Preedy's body, and the current of her fancies carried her to a chair, upon which she sat and waited for the murderer's return. The opening in the wall led to the next house, No. 119, and the sleeper knew that, as she waited, the dreadful deed was being done. The wooden old impostor returned, with satisfaction in his face and blood on his fingers, which he wiped on Mrs. Preedy's apron. He slid up to his bower in the weather indicator, and re-hooked himself on to his catgut suspender, and stood "trembling in the balance," but perfectly easy in his mind, predicting foul weather.

"Ah, my man," said Mrs. Preedy, in her sleep, shaking her fist at him, "it will be foul weather for you to-morrow, when I have you taken up and hanged for it!"

Then came another fancy, that he had murdered the wooden young woman in her bower (so that she should not appear as a witness), and that it would never be fine weather any more.

These and other fancies faded and were blotted out, as though they had never been, and a dread silence fell upon the soul of the slumbering woman.

She was alone in a room, from which there was no outlet but a door which was locked on the outside. No person was within hail. She was cut off from the world, and from all chance of help. She had been asleep, dreaming of an incident in her childhood's days. A dream within a dream.

From the inner dream she was suddenly awakened. Still asleep, and nodding over the table, upon which lay the copies of the *Evening Moon*, she believed herself to be awake. What had roused her? A footfall upon the stairs in the upper part of the house.

It was a deserted house, containing no other occupant but herself. The door was locked; it was impossible to get out. The very bed in which she lay was a prison; she could not move from it. Afraid almost to breathe, she listened in fear to the sound which had fallen on her sleeping senses.

She knew exactly how the house was built—was familiar with every room and every stair. Another footfall—another—a long pause between each. The man, who was creeping down to her chamber to murder her, was descending the staircase which led from the third to the second floor. He reached it, and paused again.

There was no doubt about his intention. In her dream, it appeared as if she knew the whole history of this murderer, and that he was the terror of every householder in London. He worked in secret, and always with fatal, deadly effect. He left nothing to chance. And Mrs. Preedy was to be his next victim.

She could not avert her doom; she could only wait for it.

From the second floor to the first, step by step, she followed him in her imagination. Slow and sure was his progress. Frantic were her efforts to escape from the bed, but the sheets held her tight, like sheets of steel.

* * * * *

In reality a man *was* descending the stairs to the kitchen. There was something stealthy in his movements which curiously contrasted with a certain air of bravado, which, if it were assumed, was entirely thrown away, as no eye was on him as he crept from the top of the house to the bottom.

* * * * *

In her dream, influenced as dreams are in an excited brain by any sound, however light, Mrs. Preedy accompanied this man in his slow progress from his attic to her kitchen. He reached the landing, which led this way to the street door, and that to the room in which Mrs. Preedy lay in her nightmare of terror. Which direction would he take?

Downwards!—to the bed in which she was imprisoned. Her last moments were approaching.

She strove to think of a prayer, but her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth. Closer—closer—he came. He opened the door, and stood upon the threshold. The louder sound than the sound of his steps aroused her to full consciousness, and, opening her eyes, she confronted him with a face white with fear.



CHAPTER XIII.

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MRS. PREEDY'S YOUNG MAN LODGER.

THE door of the kitchen opened outwards into the passage, and the man, turning the handle with his right hand, stood upon the threshold with his left raised and resting, for support, upon the framework. In Mrs. Preedy's imagination, the concealed hand held the deadly weapon with which she was to be murdered. There was, however, nothing very murderous in the intruder's face, and when he advanced a step and his arms fell peaceably by his sides, Mrs. Preedy saw, with a sigh of relief, that his hands were empty. This sigh of relief was accompanied by a recognition of the man, in whom she beheld a lodger named Richard Manx, who had been her tenant for exactly three weeks, and was exactly three weeks in arrear of his rent. Mrs. Preedy called him her young man lodger.

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He was probably younger than he looked, for his complexion was dark and his black hair was thick and long. His eyes were singularly bright, and had a cat-like glare in them—so that one might be forgiven the fancy that, like a cat's, they would shine in the dark. He spoke with a slightly foreign accent, and his mode of expression may be described as various, affording no clue to his nationality.

Mrs. Preedy was re-assured. The frightful impressions produced by her dream died away, and the instincts of the professional landlady asserted themselves. "My young man lodger has come to pay his rent," was her first thought, and a gracious and stereotyped smile appeared on her lips. The sweet illusion swiftly vanished, and her second thought was, "He is drunk." This, also, did not hold its ground, and Mrs. Preedy then practically summed up the case: "He has come to beg—a candle, a piece of bread, a lump of soap—something he is in want of, and ain't got money to pay for. And his excuse is that he is a foringer, or that all the shops are shut. I don't believe he's got a penny in his pocket. You don't deceive me, young man; I wasn't born yesterday!"

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Mrs. Preedy glanced towards the clock, and her glance was arrested on its way by the weather indicator, with the old wooden farmer in full view. Grotesque and improbable as were the fancies in which he had played a tragic part, Mrs. Preedy could not resist the temptation of ascertaining with her own eyes whether the young wooden woman, whom she dreamt he had murdered, was in existence; and she rose and pushed the old farmer into his bower. Out sailed the young woman, with her vacant face and silly leer, as natural as life, and an impetus having been given to the machinery, she and her male companion who had lived under the same roof for years, and yet were absolute strangers to each other (a striking illustration of English manners), swung in and out, in and out, predicting fair weather foul weather, fair weather foul weather, with the most reckless indifference of consequences. In truth, without reference to the mendacious prophets, the weather gave every indication of being presently very foul indeed. Thunder was in the air; the wind was sobbing in the Square, and a few heavy drops of rain had fallen with thuds upon roof and pavement.

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The hands of the clock pointed to twelve.

"A nice time," thought Mrs. Preedy, "to come creeping downstairs into my kitchen! I never did like them foringers! But I'd give anything to get my 'ouse full—whether the lodgers paid or not for a week or two. Did the young man expect to find me out, or asleep? Is there anything goin' on atween 'im and Becky?"

This dark suspicion recommended itself to her mind, and she readily gave it admittance. It is to be feared that Mrs. Preedy's experiences had not led her to a charitable opinion of maids-of-all-work. Becky, as Mrs. Preedy called her servant, was a new girl, and had been in her service for nearly a fortnight. Mrs. Preedy had been agreeably disappointed in the girl, whom she did not expect to stay in the house a week. Since the murder at No. 119, she had had eight different servants, not one of whom stayed for longer than a few days—two had run away on the second day, declaring that the ghost of the murdered man had appeared to them on the first night, and that they wouldn't sleep another in such a place for "untold gold." But Becky remained.

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"Is there anything goin' on atween 'im and Becky?" was Mrs. Preedy's thought, as she looked at the clock.

Richard Manx's eyes followed hers.

"It is—a—what you call wrong," he muttered.

"Very wrong," said Mrs. Preedy, aloud, under the impression that he had unwittingly answered her thought, "and you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You may do what you like in your own country, but I don't allow such goings on in my 'ouse."

"I was—a—thinking of your watch-clock," said Richard Manx. "It is not—a—right. Five, ten, fifteen minutes are past, and I counted twelve by the church bells. Midnight, that is it—twelve of the clock."

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"It's time for all decent people to be abed and asleep," remarked Mrs. Preedy.

"In bed—ah!—but in sleep—that is not the same thing. *You* are not so."

"I've got my business to look after," retorted Mrs. Preedy. "I suppose you 'aven't come to pay your rent?"

"To pay? Ah, money! It is what you call it, tight. No, I have not come money to pay."

"And 'ow am I to pay *my* rent, I should like to know, if you don't pay yours? Can you tell me that, young man?"

"I cannot—a—tell you. I am not a weezard."

Although Mrs. Preedy had fully regained her courage she could not think of a fitting rejoinder to this remark; so for a moment she held her tongue.

She had occupied her house for thirty years, living, until a short time since, in tolerable comfort upon the difference between the rent she received from her lodgers and the rent she paid to the agent of the estate upon which Great Porter Square was situated. It was a great and wealthy estate. Mrs. Preedy had never seen her aristocratic landlord, who owned not only Great Porter Square but a hundred squares and streets in the vicinity, in addition to lovely tracts of woodland and grand mansions in the country. The income of this to-be-envied lord was said to be a sovereign a minute. London, in whose cellars and garrets hundreds of poor wretches yearly die of starvation, contains many such princes.

Richard Manx rented a room in the garret of Mrs. Preedy's house, for which he had to pay three shillings a week. It was furnished, and the rent could not be considered unreasonable. Certainly there was in the room nothing superfluous. There were a truckle bed, with a few worn-out bed clothes, a japanned chest of drawers, so rickety that it had to be propped up with bits of paper under two of its corners, a wreck of a chair, an irregular piece of looking-glass hooked on to the wall, an old fender before the tiniest fire-place that ever was seen, a bent bit of iron for a poker, an almost bottomless coal scuttle, a very small trunk containing Richard Manx's personal belongings, a ragged towel, and a lame washstand with toilet service, every piece of which was chipped and broken. In an auction the lot might have brought five shillings; no broker in his senses would have bid higher for the rubbish.

"If you 'aven't come to pay your rent," demanded Mrs. Preedy, "what 'ave you come for?"

Richard Manx craned his neck forward till his face was at least six inches in advance of his body, and replied in a hoarse whisper:

"I have—a—heard it once more again!"

The effect of these words upon Mrs. Preedy was extraordinary. No sooner had they escaped her lodger's lips than she started from her chair, upsetting her glass of gin in her excitement, and, pulling him into the room, shut the door behind him. Then she opened the door of the little cupboard in which the servant slept, and called softly:

"Becky!" and again, "Becky! Becky!"

The girl must have been a sound sleeper, for even when her mistress stepped to her bedside, and passed her hand over her face, she did not move or speak. Returning to the kitchen, Mrs. Preedy closed the door of the sleeping closet, and said to Richard Manx:

"Look 'ere, young man, I don't want none of your nonsense, and, what's more, I won't stand none!" And instantly took the heart out of her defiance by crying, in an appealing tone: "Do you want to ruin me?"

"What think you of me?" asked Richard Manx, in return. "No, I wish not to ruin. But attend. You call your mind back to—a—one week from now. It is Wednesday then—it is Wednesday now. I sit up in my garret in the moon. I think—I smoke. Upon my ear strikes a sound. I hear scratching, moving. Where? At my foot? No. In my room? No; I can nothing see. Where, after that? In this house? Who can say? In the next to this? Ah! I think of what is there done, three months that are past. My blood—that is it—turn cold. I cannot, for a some time, move. You tell me, you, that there is no—a—man, or—a—woman, or—a—child in the apartment under-beneath where I sit. I am one myself *in* that room—no wife, no—a—child. I speak myself to—I answer myself to. No—I am not—a—right. Something there is that to me speaks. The wind, the infernal—like a voice, it screams, and whistles, and what you call, sobs. That is it. Like a child, or a woman, or a man for mercy calling! Ah! it make my hair to rise. Listen you. It speaks once more again!"

It was the wind in the streets that was moaning and sobbing; and during the pause, a flash of lightning darted in, causing Richard Manx to start back with the manner of a man upon whom divine vengeance had suddenly fallen. It was followed, in a little while, by a furious bursting of thunder, which shook the house. They listened until the echoes died away, and even then the spirit of the sound remained in their ears with ominous portent.

"It is an angry night," said Richard Manx. "I will—a—continue what I was saying. It is Wednesday of a week past. I in my garret sit and I smoke. I hear the sound. It is what you call—a—secret. To myself I think there is in that house next to this the blood of a man murdered. Why shall there not be in this house, to-morrow that rises, the blood of one other man murdered. And that man! Who shall it be? Myself—I. So I rouse my courage up, and descend from my garret in the moon to the door of the street. Creeping—is that so, your word?—creeping after me a spirit comes—not for me to see, not for me to touch—but to hear with my ears. All is dark. In the passage appear you, and ask me what? I tell you, and you laugh—but not laugh well, it is like a cry—and you say, it is—a fancy; it is nothing I hear. And you, with hands so"—(clasping his hands together, somewhat tragically)—"beg of me not to any speak of what I hear. I consent; I say, I will not of it speak."

"And you 'aven't?" inquired Mrs. Preedy, anxiously.

Richard Manx laid his hand on his breast. "On my honour, no; I speak not of it. I think myself, 'The lady of the house is—a—right. I hear only—a—fancy. I will not trouble. I will let to-morrow come.' It come, and another to-morrow, and another, and still another. Nothing I hear. But to-night—again! I am smoking myself in bed. Be not afraid—I shall not put your house in a fire. It would not be bad. You are what they call insured?" Mrs. Preedy nodded. "Listen you—comes the rain. Ah—and the wind. God in heaven! that fire-flash!"

It blinded them for a moment or two. Then, after the briefest interval, pealed the thunder, with a crash which almost deafened them. Instinctively, Richard Manx drew nearer to Mrs. Preedy, and she also moved closer to him. At such times as this, when nature appears to be warring against mortals, the human craving for companionship and visible, palpable sympathy most

strongly asserts itself.

Either the breaking of the storm, or some other cause, had produced a strange effect upon Becky, whom Mrs. Preedy supposed to be sleeping in the little room adjoining the kitchen; for the girl in her night-dress was kneeling on the ground, with her head close to the door, listening, with her heart and soul in her ears, to the conversation between her mistress and the young man lodger. It would have astonished Mrs. Preedy considerably had she detected her maid-of-all-work in such a position.

The thunder and lightning continued for quite five minutes, and then they wandered into the country and awoke the echoes there, leaving the rain behind them, which poured down like a deluge over the greater part of the city.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH BECKY COMMENCES A LETTER TO A FRIEND IN THE COUNTRY.

ON the following evening, Becky, the maid-of-all-work, having received a reluctant permission from her mistress to go out until ten o'clock, wrote and posted the following letter:—

MY DARLING FRED,—I will now give you an account of all that has passed since I saw your dear face. I could not write to you before to-day, for the reason that I did not get an address until this morning, when I received your dear letter. It was short, but I was overjoyed when the man at the post office gave it to me. He looked at me suspiciously, having a doubt whether I was the person I represented myself to be. I dare say this remark makes you wonder a little; but you would wonder more if you had seen me when I asked for your letter. Now, be patient, and you will soon learn why.

Patient! Have you not been patient? What other man in the world would have borne what you have borne with such fortitude and courage? None—no, not one! But it is for my sake as well as your own, that, instead of taking your revenge upon the wretches who have persecuted you, you schooled yourself to the endurance of their cruelty, in the hope that the day would come when they would be compelled to set you free. And it came—and you are free! O, my dear! I pray day and night that all will come right in the end.

It seems as if this were going to be a long, long letter, but I cannot help it. I must wander on in my own way, and I have got more than three hours, all to myself.

What have I been doing since you went away? That is what you are asking yourself? Prepare for wonders. I would give you ten thousand guesses, and you would not come near the truth.

You shall be told without guessing. I found it very dull in the lodging you took for me; the days dragged on *so* slowly, and I thought the nights would never end.

What did I want? Something to do.

Now, with this in my mind, an inspiration fell upon me one night, and the moment it did so I could not help thinking myself a selfish, idle little woman for not having thought of it before. That sounds rather confused, but you will understand it.

So the very next morning I set about it. How, do you think? And about what?

I went to a poor little shop in a lane in Chelsea, where they sell second-hand clothes, and I bought two common frocks, and some common petticoats, and everything else—boots, cloak, hat—such a hat!—and a bunch of false hair. The clothes were very cheap. I do not know how the woman could have sold them for the money except that the poor creatures who sold them to *her* must have been so near starvation's door that they were compelled to part with them at any price.

I took them home to my lodgings, and dressed myself in them, put on my false hair, and smudged my face. I looked exactly like the part I intended to play—a servant-of-all-work, ready to go on the stage.

You are burning to know in what theatre I intended to play the part. I will tell you. Don't start. Great Porter Square.

Of all places in the world (I hear you say) the one place I should wish my little woman to avoid. Your little woman thought differently—thinks differently.

This is what I said to myself: Here is my darling working day and night to get at the heart of a great mystery in which he is involved. He endures dreadful hardships, suffers imprisonment and cruel indignities, and travels hundreds and hundreds of miles, in his endeavour to unravel the mystery which affects his peace and mine—his future and mine—his honour and mine! And here am I, with nothing to do, living close to the very spot where the fearful crime was committed, sitting down in wicked idleness, without making the slightest attempt to assist the man for whom I would cheerfully die, but for whom I would much more cheerfully live. Why should I not go and live in Great Porter Square, assuming such a disguise as would enable me to hear everything that was going on—all the tittle-tattle—all the thousand little things, and words, and circumstances which have never been brought to light—and which might lead to a clue which would help the man I would much more cheerfully live for than die for?

There was no impropriety in what I determined to do, and in what I have done. I must tell you that there is in me a more determined, earnest spirit than you ever gave me credit for. Now that I

am actively engaged in this adventure, I know that I am brave and strong and cunning, and a little bird whispers to me that I shall discover something—God alone knows what—which will be of importance to you.

Do you think I shall be debarred by fear of ghosts? I am not frightened of ghosts.

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Now you know how it is I arrived at my resolution. Do not blame me for it, and do not write to me to give it up. I do not think I could, even if you commanded me.

I did not make a move until night came. Fortunately, it was a dark night. I watched my opportunity, and when nobody was on the stairs, I glided down in my disguise, slipped open the street door, and vanished from the neighbourhood.

I had never been in Great Porter Square, but it seemed to me as if I *must* know where it was, and when I thought I was near the Square I went into a greengrocer's shop and inquired. It was quite close, the woman said, just round the corner to the left.

The Square, my dear, as you know, is a very dismal-looking place. There are very few gas lamps in it, and the inclosure in the centre, which they call a garden, containing a few melancholy trees and shrubs, does not add to its attractiveness. When I came to 119, I crossed the road and looked up at the windows. They were quite dark, and there was a bill in one, "To Let." It had a very gloomy appearance, but the other houses were little better off in that respect. There was not one which did not seem to indicate that some person was lying dead in it, and that a funeral was going to take place to-morrow.

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There were a great many rooms to let in Great Porter Square, especially in the houses near to No. 119. No. 118 appeared to be almost quite empty, for, except in a room at the very top of the house, and in the basement, there was not a light to be seen. I did not wonder at it.

Well, my dear, my walk round the Square did not help me much, so what did I do but walk back to the greengrocer's shop. You know the sort of shop. The people sell coals, wood, gingerbeer, and lemonade, the day before yesterday's bunches of flowers, and the day before yesterday's cabbages and vegetables.

"Didn't you find it?" asked the woman.

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"O, yes," I replied, "but I didn't find what I was looking for. I heard that a servant was wanted in one of the houses, and I have forgotten the number."

"There's a house in the Square," said the woman, "where they want a servant bad, but they can't get one to stop."

"What's the number?" I asked.

"No. 118," the woman answered. "Next to—but perhaps you don't know."

"Don't know what?" I inquired.

"That it's next door to the house where a murder was committed," she said.

"What is that to me?" I said. "*I* didn't do it."

The woman looked at me admiringly. "Well," she said, "you've got a nerve! And you don't look it, neither. You look delicate."

"Don't you go by looks," I said, "I'm stronger than you think."

Then I thanked her, and went to No. 118 Great Porter Square, and knocked at the door.

CHAPTER XV.

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IN WHICH BECKY CONTINUES HER LETTER AND RELATES HOW SHE OBTAINED THE SITUATION AT NO. 118.

I HAD to wait a little while before my knock was answered, and then I heard, in a woman's voice,

"Who's there?"

"A girl," I replied. "I heard you were in want of one."

"Are you alone?"

"Yes."

The street-door was thrown suddenly open, and a woman appeared on the doorstep, with a lighted candle in her hand, which the wind instantly blew out. The woman was Mrs. Preedy, lodging-house keeper, my present mistress. She tried to see my face, but the night was too dark.

"Wait a minute," she said; "stand where you are."

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Upon my word, my dear, I believe she was afraid of poor little me.

She retreated into the passage, and re-lit the candle. Shading and protecting it with her hand, she bade me walk in, but not to shut the street-door. I obeyed her, and she examined me, seeming to measure whether she was a match for me in strength.

"How did you know I wanted a servant?" she asked.

"They told me at the greengrocer's round the corner," I said.

"Where did you live last?"

I replied promptly, "I have never been in service. But I am sure I should suit you. I am strong and willing, and I don't mind what I do so long as the place is comfortable."

"It's comfortable enough," she said. "Are you a London girl?"

"No, I come from the country."

"What made you leave the country?"

I cast down my eyes. "I had a quarrel with my young man."

Just reflect for a moment, my dear, upon my boldness!

"It ain't the thing to take a girl without a character," said Mrs. Preedy.

Upon this I delivered a master-stroke.

"You can consider it in the wages," I said.

It had an effect upon the woman. "How much do you expect?" she asked.

"I'm not particular," I answered; "all I want is a comfortable home."

There were plenty more questions and answers. Mrs. Preedy must have been in a desperate plight for a domestic, or I should have stood a poor chance of being engaged; but engaged I was at £8 a year, "all found," and I commenced my new life at once by following my mistress into the kitchen, and washing up the plates and dishes, and cleaning the candlesticks. Mrs. Preedy's eye was on me.

"It's easy to see," she said, "that you've never been in service before. But I dare say you'll do. Mind! I make my girls pay for all they break!"

I can't help laughing when I think of her words. Reckoning up the things I have already let slip—(they *will* do it; I can't prevent them; really I believe they are alive)—I have arrived at the conclusion that the whole of my first month's wages will be presented to me in broken crockery. My cheerfulness over my misfortunes is a source of considerable astonishment to my mistress.

When I finished washing up the things, I was sent out to "The Green Dragon" for the supper beer, and upon my return, took possession of my very small bedroom, and, unpacking my bundle of clothes (which had already been untied and examined by Mrs. Preedy while I was fetching the supper beer—artful woman!) I went to bed. Mrs. Preedy had no need to tell me to be up early in the morning. I was awake all night, but I was not unhappy, for I thought of you and of the likelihood that I might be able to help you.

My name, my dear, is Becky.

So behold me fairly launched on my adventure. And let me entreat of you, once and for all, not to distress yourself about me. I am very comfortable, and as the house is almost empty there is not much to do. It is astonishing how easily we accustom ourselves to circumstances.

Mrs. Preedy had only one lodger when I entered her service—a bedridden old lady, Mrs. Bailey, who has not left her bed for more than three years. She lives on the first floor in a back room, and is the widow of a soldier who bequeathed to her half-a-dozen medals, and a small annuity, upon which she just manages to live. This is what the old lady herself declares; she has "barely enough—barely enough; not a penny to spare!" But Mrs. Preedy is firm in the belief—popularly shared by every householder in Great Porter Square—that the old lady is very rich, and has a hoard of gold hidden in her apartment, the exact locality being the mattress upon which she lies. As she never leaves her bed, the demonstration of this suspicion is not practicable without violence to the old lady's bones and feelings. She pays Mrs. Preedy twelve shillings a week for her room and two meals a day, and she occasionally takes a fancy to a little delicacy, which may cost her about eighteenpence more a week, so it is not difficult to calculate the amount of the annuity.

The days of Mrs. Bailey's existence should pass wearily enough in all conscience, but she appears to enjoy herself, her chief source of amusement being two birds, a linnnet which never sings a note, and a bullfinch that looks as old as Methuselah. Their cages hang on the wall at the foot of the old lady's bed. They never catch a glimpse of the sun, and their movements have scarcely in them the brisk movement of feathered things. Their hops are languid, and the bullfinch mopes dreadfully.

The old lady was an object of interest to me at once. One by one, shortly after the murder next door was committed, Mrs. Preedy's lodgers left her. Only Mrs. Bailey remained, the apparent reason being that she was helpless. She appears to have but one friend in the world (not taking her birds into account), a sister older than herself, who comes to spend an afternoon with her once in every month, who is very deaf, almost blind, and who cannot walk without the assistance of a thick stick. The old creature, whose name I do not know, takes snuff, and inspires me with a fear that she will one day suddenly fall all to pieces—in the way that I once saw harlequin in a pantomime do. I have no hope that, if such a dreadful thing happens, she will have a clown at her elbow, as the harlequin had, who in the most marvellous manner put the pieces together and brought them to life again. To see these two old ladies, as I saw them a few days ago, with the languid linnnet and the moping bullfinch, is a sight not easy to forget.

Although I have written such a long letter, I have not told you half I intended. To-morrow I will send you another, which I will write to-night, while Mrs. Preedy is asleep. If you think I have nothing to say which has the slightest bearing upon the murder, you are mistaken; but you must restrain your impatience till to-morrow.

My darling, I write in a light vein, I know, but my feeling is deep and earnest. I want to cheer you, if I can, and win a smile from you. Before we met in Leicester Square, on the day you were released, I was serious enough, and in deep trouble; but the moment we were together again, hope entered my heart, and, with that bright angel, a little of the gaiety of spirits in which you used to take delight. Hope is with me now. Receive it from me, if you are despondent. I kiss it into this letter, and send you my heart with it. No—how can I do that, when you have my heart already! And if, with that in your possession, you do not now and then see a ray of light in the midst of your anxieties, I shall call you ungrateful. Adieu, my love for a few hours.

For ever and ever your own,

BECKY.

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IN WHICH BECKY WRITES A SECOND LETTER TO HER FRIEND IN THE COUNTRY, AND GIVES A WOMAN'S REASON FOR NOT LIKING RICHARD MANX.

MY OWN DARLING,—It is nearly two o'clock in the morning. Everything is quiet in the house, and I can write in my little cupboard of a bedroom, the door of which leads into the kitchen, without fear of being disturbed.

Where did I leave off in my letter? Oh, about our old lady lodger, Mrs. Bailey, and her poor old sister.

She was the only lodger in the house when I first came, and I made myself so agreeable to the old lady that in a few days she would not be satisfied unless I waited upon her entirely. I heard her say to Mrs. Preedy, as I was in the passage outside the door—quite by accident, of course; I had my broom in my hand, you may be sure—I heard her say—

"Why didn't you send Becky up? I like Becky—I like Becky!"

I have no doubt, if she had had a parrot in the room, that it would have learned to say—

"I like Becky!—I like Becky!"

But I took no notice until Mrs. Preedy said to me—

"Becky, Mrs. Bailey's taken quite a fancy to you."

"I'm glad to hear it, mum," I replied.

You should hear me say "mum." I have made quite a study of the word.

From that time I have waited upon Mrs. Bailey pretty regularly. Mrs. Preedy has not failed to impress upon me, if anything happens to the old lady, if she is "took ill" (she has an idea that the old lady will "go off sudden") while I am in her room, that I am to run down for her "immediate."

"I should like to do what is proper by the old lady," said Mrs. Preedy.

But my idea is that she wants to be the first to see what treasure is concealed in the old lady's mattress.

One day I ventured to speak to the old lady about the murder in No. 119, and I elicited from her that two detectives had paid her a visit, to ascertain whether she had heard anything from the next house on the night the dreadful deed was committed.

"They didn't get anything out of me, Becky," said the old lady; "I didn't hear anything, Becky—eh? I told them as much as I heard—nothing—eh, Becky?"

There was something odd in the old lady's manner, and I felt convinced she knew more than she said. The old lady is spasmodic, and speaks very slowly, gasping at each word, with a long pause between.

"Of course," I said, with a knowing look, "you didn't hear anything, so you couldn't tell them anything! I should have done just the same."

"Would you, Becky? Would you—eh?"

"Certainly," I replied. "I wouldn't run the chance of being taken from my comfortable bed to appear in a police court, and catch my death of cold, and have everybody staring and pointing at me."

"You're a clever girl, Becky," said Mrs. Bailey, "a clever girl—eh? And I'm a clever old woman—eh? Very good—very good! Catch my death of cold, indeed! So I should—eh?" Then suddenly, "Becky, can you keep a secret—eh?"

"That you told me!" I said. "Nothing could tear it from me."

"I did hear something, Becky."

"Did you?" I asked, with a smile which was intended to invite complete confidence.

"Yes, Becky."

"What was it?"

"Two voices—as if there was a quarrel going on—a quarrel, Becky, eh?"

"Ah!" said I, "it is a good job you kept it to yourself. The detectives, and the magistrates, and the lawyers would have put you to no end of trouble. Were they men's voices?"

"Yes, men's voices."

"It was put in the papers," I said, "that there was a scream. Mrs. Preedy, downstairs, heard that, but she could not say whether it was from a man or a woman."

"I heard it, too, Becky. It was a man—I could swear to it. Why, if you lie on this bed, with your head to the wall, and it's quiet as it was then, you can hear almost everything that goes on in the next house. Try it, Becky."

I lay down beside her, and although no sound at that time came to my ears, it was easy to believe that she was not labouring under a delusion.

"Could you hear what the men said to each other?" I asked.

"Not when they spoke low," she replied, "only when they raised their voices, and I wasn't awake all the time. Somebody was playing on the piano, now and then—playing softly—and between whiles there was talk going on. One said, 'You won't, won't you?' And the other said, 'No—not if I die for it!' Then there was the sound of a blow—O, Becky! it made me tremble all over. And then came the scream that Mrs. Preedy heard. And almost directly afterwards, the piano played that loud that I believe you could have heard it in the next street. The music went on for a long time, and then everything was quiet. That was all."

"Did neither of the men speak after that?" I asked.

"No, or if they did, it was so low that it didn't reach me."

My dear, to hear this woman, who is very, very old, and quite close to death's door, relate the dreadful story, with scarcely a trace of feeling in her voice, and with certainly no compassion, would have shocked you—as it did me; but I suppressed my emotion.

There is something of still greater importance to be told before I bring the story of my adventure to the present day. I am on the track of a mystery which appears to me to be in some strange way connected with the crime. Heaven only knows where it will lead me, but I shall follow it up without flinching, whatever the consequences may be.

A week after I entered Mrs. Preedy's service she said to me;

"Becky, we've got another lodger."

"Goodness be praised," I cried. "The sight of so many empty rooms in the house is dreadful. And such a loss to you!"

"You may well say that Becky," said Mrs. Preedy, with a woeful sigh; "it's hard to say what things will come to if they go on much longer like this."

"I hope it's more than *one* lodger," I observed; "I hope it's a family."

"No, Becky," she replied, "it's only one—a man; he's taken the attic at three shillings a week, and between you and me and the post, I shall reckon myself lucky if I get it. I can't say I like the looks of him, but I can't afford to be too nice."

When I saw the man, who gives himself out as Richard Manx, I liked the looks of him as little as my mistress. He is dark-complexioned, and has long black hair; there is a singular and most unnatural look in his eyes—they are cat's eyes, and shift from side to side stealthily—not to be trusted, not for a moment to be trusted! He has black whiskers and a black moustache; and he has large, flat feet. The moment I saw him he inspired me with an instinctive repugnance towards him; I regarded him with an aversion which I did not trouble myself to examine and justify. I believe in first impressions.

So strong was my feeling that I said to Mrs. Preedy I hoped I should not have to wait upon him.

"He does not require waiting upon," said Mrs. Preedy, "he has taken the garret, without attendance. He says that he will not even trouble us to make his bed or sweep out his room."

"So much the better," thought I, and I did my best not to meet him. I must do him the justice to say that he appeared as anxious to avoid me as I was to avoid him; and for a fortnight we did not exchange a word.

And now, my dear, prepare for an inconsistency, and call me a bundle of contradictions.

I have made up my mind no longer to avoid Richard Manx; I have made up my mind to worm myself, if I can, in his confidence; I have made up my mind not to lose sight of him, unless, indeed, he suddenly disappears from the house and the neighbourhood, and so puts it out of my power to watch his movements.

"Why?" I hear you ask. "Have you discovered that your first impressions are wrong, and, having done an injustice to an unfortunate man, are you anxious to atone for it?" Not a bit of it! I am more than ever confirmed in my prejudices with regard to Richard Manx. I shall watch his movements, and no longer avoid him—not for his sake—for yours, for mine! An enigma, you say. Very well. Wait!

I am tired; my fingers are cramped, and my head aches a little; I must get two or three hours' rest, or I shall be fit for nothing to-morrow.

Good night, dear love. Heaven shield you and guard you, and help you.

Yours, in good and bad fortune, with steadfast love,

BECKY.



CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH BECKY, CONTINUING HER LETTER, RELATES HER IMPRESSIONS OF MRS. PREEDY'S YOUNG MAN LODGER.

MY OWN DEAR FRED,—Once more I am in my little cupboard of a bedroom, writing to you. Again it is past twelve o'clock, and Mrs. Preedy is asleep.

I will now tell you why I have altered my mind with regard to Richard Manx, and why I have determined to watch his movements. The seal to this resolution was fixed the night before last.

Mrs. Preedy was sitting up, as usual, drinking her regular allowance of gin and water. I was in my bedroom, supposed to be asleep, but really very wide awake. Peeping through a chink in my bedroom door, I saw Mrs. Preedy thus engaged, and engaged also in reading an account of the police-court proceedings in which you were so cruelly implicated. There was nothing interesting in this picture of Mrs. Preedy, and I crept into bed again. I was dozing off, when I was roused by

the sound of Mrs. Preedy leaving the kitchen, and going up-stairs to the street-door, which she opened. I ventured out into the passage, and listened. She was talking to a policeman. Presently she came down-stairs and mixed a glass of gin and water, which she took up to him. Then after a little further chat, she came down again, and resumed her melancholy occupation. After that, I fell asleep.

Changes have taken place in me, my dear. Once I was nervous; now I am bold. Once I could not sleep without a light in my room; now I can sleep in the dark. Once I was a sound sleeper, and was not easily awakened; now the slightest sound arouses me. The dropping of a pin would be almost sufficient to cause me to start up in bed.

On the occasion I refer to, it was something more than the dropping of a pin that aroused me. It was the sound of voices in the kitchen—Mrs. Preedy's voice and the voice of a man. What man? I peeped through the chink. It was Richard Manx, our new lodger. [195]

He was standing on the threshold of the kitchen door; from where I knelt I could not obtain a good view of his face, but I saw Mrs. Preedy's, and it seemed to me as if she had received a fright.

Richard Manx, in reply to an observation made by Mrs. Preedy, said her clock on the mantelpiece was wrong, and that he had heard twelve o'clock strike a quarter of an hour ago. Mrs. Preedy asked him if he had come to pay his rent. No, he said, he had not come to pay his rent. Then Mrs. Preedy very naturally inquired what he *had* come for, and Richard Manx, in a voice resembling that of a raven with a bad cold, said,

"I have—a—heard it once more again!"

My dear, the moment he uttered these strange words, Mrs. Preedy rushed at him, pulled him into the kitchen, and then flew to my bedroom door. I was in bed before she got there, and when she opened it and called my name, I was, of course, fast asleep. She made sure of this by coming into my little cupboard, and passing her hand over my face. My heart beat quickly, but she herself was too agitated to notice it. When she left my room, I thought it prudent to remain in bed for awhile, so as to avoid the risk of discovery. My mind was in a whirl. Richard Manx had heard *it* once more again! What had he heard? [196]

I rose quietly, and listened. Richard Manx was speaking of a sound in the empty house next door, No. 119. He had heard it twice—a week ago, and again on this night. He said that he was in the habit of smoking in bed, and asked if Mrs. Preedy was insured. He was interrupted by the breaking of a storm, which appeared to frighten them both very much. I will not attempt to repeat, word for word, all that passed between them. Its substance is now what I am going to relate.

Eight nights ago, Richard Manx, sitting in his attic, was startled (so he says) by the sound of a tapping or scratching in the house next door, in which the murder was committed. Being, according to his own declaration, of a nervous nature, he left his attic, and crept downstairs. In the passage below he met Mrs. Preedy, and related to her what he had heard. She endeavoured to persuade him that his fancy had been playing him tricks. [197]

"How is it possible," she asked him, "that you could have heard any sound in the next house when there's nobody there?"

A convincing question, my dear, which carries its own convincing answer.

Richard Manx wavers, and promises her not to speak to the neighbours of his distressing impression. He says he will wait "till it comes again." It comes again on this night the events of which I am describing, and in great fear (which may or may not be real) he creeps downstairs to Mrs. Preedy to inform her of it. He says the noise may not be made by a mortal; it may be made by a spirit. So much the worse. A man or a woman one can meet and hold, and ask questions of, but a spirit!—the very idea is enough to make one's hair stand on end. [198]

It did not make my hair stand on end, nor did Richard Manx's suggestion frighten me in the least. It excited me almost to fever heat, but there was no fear in my excitement. Expectation, hope, painful curiosity—these were the feelings which animated me.

What if Richard Manx were, for some reason of his own, inventing this story of strange noises in an empty house, the boards of which are stained with the blood of a murdered man? The idea did not dawn upon me; it flashed upon me in a certain expression which dwelt upon Richard Manx's face while Mrs. Preedy's back, for a moment, was turned to him.

When they were sitting opposite each other at the kitchen table, the man was timid, confiding, humble; but when Mrs. Preedy turned towards the dresser for the sugar basin, there stole into his face the expression I have referred to. What did it denote? Cunning, ferocity, triumph, duplicity. It was but for a moment; upon Mrs. Preedy confronting him again, he relapsed into humbleness and timidity. [199]

What was the meaning of this sudden change? That the man was playing a part? Clearly. Then behind his systematic acting was hidden a motive. What motive?

He had accepted Mrs. Preedy's invitation to a glass of gin and water, and had asked for sugar. It was while she was getting the sugar that he had allowed the mask to slip from his false face.

"If it gets known," she said, "I'm a ruined woman!"

"Ah," said Richard Manx, "I comprehend what you mean by ruined. A house with a shadow—a spirit ghost in it, would be—a—horrible! Listen you. This house is likewise." Mrs. Preedy shuddered. "Well," he continued, "I will say—a—nothing." He placed his hand on his heart and leered at her. "On my honour. But be you positive—what I have heard is not—a—fancy. It is veritable." [200]

He said a great deal more to the same effect, and I never saw a woman more completely prostrated.

Richard Manx speaks imperfect English, and I cannot make up my mind whether he is a

Frenchman, or a German, or an Italian, or an Impostor. I am not only suspicious of the man, I am suspicious of his broken English.

What I wanted now to ascertain was whether any person had heard the tapping or the scratching in No. 119, and the person I fixed upon to settle this point was Mrs. Bailey, our old lady lodger on the first floor. If anything was going on in the next house it could scarcely have escaped her ears.

Yesterday morning while I was tidying up her room, I broached the subject.

"I wonder," I said, "whether the next house will ever be let."

"I wouldn't take it," said Mrs. Bailey, "if they offered it to me for nothing a-year—eh?"

"It wouldn't be a pleasant place to live in certainly," I remarked. "I should be afraid of ghosts."

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"Do you believe in them, eh, Becky?"

"I've never seen one," I replied, "but I can't help believing in them—a little. There's one comfort—they don't trouble people who haven't wronged them. So *we're* all right."

"Yes, Becky, yes—they wouldn't come through brick walls to scare a poor old woman, eh?"

"No," I said, "and I've never read of a ghost speaking or making a noise of any kind. Have you?"

"Not that I can remember," replied the old lady.

"Mrs. Bailey," I said, "since the night of the murder you have not heard anything going on next door?"

"Not a sound, Becky. It's been as still as a mouse."

"As a mouse," I repeated; "ah, but mice scratch at walls sometimes."

"So they do; but there can't be any mice next door, or I should have heard them. Nothing for them to eat, Becky—eh? Mice can't eat ghosts—eh?"

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"No, indeed," I said. "I hope you are sleeping well, Mrs. Bailey."

"No, I am not, Becky. As night comes on I get a pain in my side, and it keeps me awake for hours."

"What a shame!" I exclaimed. "I'll come and rub it for you, if you like, when my work's done. Were you awake last night, Mrs. Bailey?"

"I didn't close my eyes till past two this morning; too bad, eh, Becky?"

"Indeed it is. I hope you were not disturbed."

"Only my side, Becky; nothing else."

This conversation convinced me that Richard Manx had not heard any such sound as he stated. What was his purpose in endeavouring to deceive Mrs. Preedy?

The same day I was sent out to the greengrocer's, and the woman said to me that she supposed I was not going to stop much longer in my place.

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"Why not?" I asked.

"There isn't one girl in a thousand," said the woman, "as had live willingly in a haunted house. Why, Becky, it's the talk of the neighbourhood!"

"All I can say is," I replied, "that I have heard nothing of it, and I don't think Mrs. Preedy has, either."

"Ah," remarked the woman, "they say you must go abroad if you want to hear any news about yourself."

My dear, the woman in the greengrocer's shop spoke the truth. Before the day was out, it was the talk of the neighbourhood, that both houses, Nos. 118 and 119 Great Porter Square, were haunted. When I went out last evening to write my first letter to you, I was told of it by half-a-dozen people, and the policeman himself (they are all friends of mine) made inquiries as to the time and shapes in which the ghostly visitants presented themselves. And to-day I have observed more than a dozen strangers stop before our house and point up to it, shaking their heads mysteriously.

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Mrs. Preedy opened the subject to me this evening.

"Becky," she said, "there is no end to the wickedness of people."

"That there isn't, mum," I replied, sympathetically.

"Why, Becky," she exclaimed, "have *you* heard what they are saying about the house?"

"O, yes," I said, "everybody says its haunted."

"Do *you* believe it, Becky?"

"Not me, mum!" (Observe my grammar, my dear.) "Not me! Who should know better than those that live in a house whether it's haunted or not?"

"That's it, Becky," cried Mrs. Preedy, excitedly; "that's it. Who should know better than us? And I'm sure *I've* never seen anything nor heard anything. Nor you either, Becky."

"Nor me, neither," I replied. "But the worst of it is, mum, mud sticks. Give a dog a bad name, and you may as well hang him at once."

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Now, who spread this rumour about our house being haunted? Somebody, for sure, who has a motive in giving the place a bad reputation. There is never smoke without a fire. Shall I tell you who is the cause of all this? Richard Manx.

What leads me to this conclusion? you ask. Instinct, my dear. It is an important quality in animals; why not in human beings? What possible motive *can* Richard Manx have in spreading such a report? you ask next. A just Heaven only knows, my dear. But I will find out his motive, as I am a living and loving woman.

You are not acquainted with Richard Manx, you may say. Nor am I. But is it certain that it is his true name? You are not the only person in the world who has concealed his true name. You concealed yours for an innocent reason. Richard Manx may conceal his for a guilty one. Then think of me, known simply as Becky. Why, my dearest, the world is a perfect medley! Shall I tell

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you something else about him? My dear, he paints. I hear you, in your unsophisticated innocence, exclaim, "O, he is an artist!" He is, in one sense. His canvass is the human skin. He paints his face.

What will you ask now? Of course, your question will be, "How on earth do you know that he paints his face?" My dear, here I am your superior. Trust a woman to know a natural from an artificial colour. These few last questions trouble your soul. "Does *she* paint, then?" you mutter. "No, my dear," I answer, "my complexion *is my own!*"

Twice have I seen Richard Manx to-day, and I have not avoided him. I looked at him. He looked at me.

"You are Becky," he said; and if ever a foreigner spoke like an Englishman, Richard Manx did when he said, "You are Becky."

"Yes, if you please, sir," I replied, coyly.

"You are a—what you call maid-of-all work here," he said.

Maid-of-all-work! What do real, genuine foreigners know of English maids-of-all-work? The very use of the term was, in my judgment, an argument against him. [207]

"Yes," I replied.

"And a very pretty maid-of-all-work," he said, with a smile.

"There's missus calling!" I cried, and I ran downstairs.

In that short interview I had convinced myself that he painted, and I had made up my mind that he wore a wig. Think of that, my dear! Our innocent, timid, humble young man lodger, with a false head of hair! I blush.

The meaning of all this is, that Richard Manx is no chance lodger. He came here designedly. He has not paid his rent. It is part of his design. He would be more likely to attract attention as a man with plenty of money than as a man with none. There are so many poor people in the world, and they are comparatively so unimportant? He has spread a rumour that the house he lodges in and the next house are haunted. It is part of his design. To bring the houses into disrepute will cause people to avoid them, will lessen the chance of their being occupied. The better opportunity for him to carry out, without being observed, any scheme he may have in his false and wicked mind. [208]

I have but one thing more to relate, and that will bring the history of your adventurous little woman up to the present moment of writing. It is an important incident, and has a direct bearing upon all that has gone before. At nine o'clock to-night the street door was opened and closed. My mistress and I were in the kitchen.

"It is Mr. Manx," said Mrs. Preedy.

"I didn't know he had a latch key," I observed.

"I gave him one to-day," said Mrs. Preedy. "He is looking for a situation, poor young man, and asked me for a latch key, as he might have to keep out late at night, and didn't like to disturb me."

"Very considerate of him," I said. "What kind of situation is he after? Is he anything at all?" [209]

"He is a professor of languages, Becky, and a musician besides."

"What kind of musician?" I asked, scornfully. "A trombone player?"

"I can't say, Becky."

"Does he play the cornet, or the fiddle," I continued, with a certain recklessness which overcame me for a few moments, "or the harp, or the flute, or the piano?" And as I said "or the piano?" a dish I was wiping slipped clean out of my hands, and was broken to pieces.

"What a careless girl you are, Becky!" cried my mistress. "That makes the third you have broken since you've been here."

"Never mind," I said, "I have had a legacy left me."

She stared at me, and cried "A legacy!" And, upon my word, my dear, until she repeated the words, I scarcely knew what it was I *had* said. However, I was committed to it now, and was bound to proceed.

"Yes; a legacy. That is what I really went about last night." [210]

The information so staggered her that her voice became quite deferential.

"Is it much, Becky?"

"A clear three hundred pounds," I replied, "and perhaps a little more. I shall know for a certainty in a week or two."

"You'll be giving me notice presently, I daresay, Becky, now you've come into money."

"Not unless you want to get rid of me," I replied.

"Becky," said Mrs. Preedy, graciously, "I am very satisfied with you. You can remain with me as long as you like, and when we part I hope we shall part friends."

"I hope so too, mum; and I hope you'll think none the worse of me because I've been so fortunate. I should like to hear of *your* having such a slice of luck."

"Thank you, Becky," said my mistress, meekly, "but *I* wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth."

"Ah," said I, wisely, "it isn't always the most deserving as gets the best rewarded." [211]

Do you know, my dear, so strong is the force of example and association, that I sometimes catch myself speaking exactly as if I had been born in that station of life which I am at present occupying in Mrs. Preedy's service.

Here a bell rang. "That's Mrs. Bailey's bell," I said; "shall I go up to her, or will you?"

"You go, Becky," said Mrs. Preedy; "she likes you best."

Up I went, and found Mrs. Bailey writhing in bed; she was evidently in pain.

"My side, Becky, my side!" moaned the old creature. "You promised to rub it for me?"

"Wait a minute," I said, "I'll go and fetch some liniment."

I ran downstairs, and took from my little bedroom a bottle of liniment which I had bought at the chemist's in expectation of such an emergency as this. Then I rubbed the old lady's side, and soon afforded her relief.

"What a soft hand you've got!" she said, "It's almost like a lady's hand."

I sighed. "I haven't been a common servant all my life," I said. "But never mind me. Do you feel easier?"

"I am another woman, dear," she replied. "O dear, O dear!"

And the old creature began to cry, and moan, and shake. I pitied her most truly at that moment.

"What are you crying for?" I asked.

"O dear, O dear!" she repeated. "I had a daughter once, who might have looked after me in my old days. My Lizzie! my Lizzie!" She continued to weep in the most distressing manner, calling upon her Lizzie in touching tones. I asked tenderly if her daughter was dead, and her reply was—

"God only knows!"

And then she related to me, often stopping to sob and moan in grief, a sad, sad story of a girl who had left her home, and had almost broken her parents' hearts. I cannot stop now to tell you the story as this lonely woman told it to me, for my fingers are beginning to pain me with the strain of this long letter, and I have still something more to say which more nearly concerns ourselves.

Bear in mind that from the time Richard Manx had entered the house, no other persons had entered or left it. Had the street door been opened I should for a certainty have remarked it.

Mrs. Bailey had told the whole of the sad story of her daughter's shame and desertion, and was lying in tears on her bed. I was sitting by her side, animated by genuine sympathy for the lonely old lady. Suddenly an expression of alarm appeared on her face, which gradually turned quite white.

"Becky!" she cried.

I leant over her, my heart beating quick, for she had startled me. I feared that her last hour had arrived. I was mistaken. It was fear of another kind which had aroused her from the contemplation of her special sorrow.

"Don't you hear?" she asked, presently.

"What?" I exclaimed, following her looks and words in an agony of expectation.

"The next house," she whispered, "where the man was murdered! The empty house! Something is moving there!"

I threw myself quickly on the bed, and lay by the old lady's side.

"There, Becky! Do you hear it now?"

"Hush," I whispered. "Don't speak or stir! Let us be sure."

It was not possible that both of us could be dreaming the same dream at the same moment. There *was* a sound as of some person moving in No. 119.

"Answer me in a whisper," I said, with my mouth close to Mrs. Bailey's ear. "The room in which the murder was committed is on a level with this?"

"Yes," she replied, in a whisper, as I had directed.

"Do you think the sounds are in that room?"

"I am sure of it, Becky."

I lay still for about the space of a another minute. Then I rose from the bed.

"What are you going to do, Becky?" asked Mrs. Bailey; "Don't leave me!"

"I must," I said, firmly. "For about five minutes. I will come back. I promise you faithfully I will come back. Are you afraid to be left alone?"

"Somebody—or *something*—might come into the room while you are away," said the old lady, shuddering. "If you *must* go, lock me in, and take the key with you. But don't be longer than five minutes, if you have a spark of pity for a poor, deserted old woman!"

I acted upon her suggestion. I locked her in and went— Where? Upstairs or down? Up, to Richard Manx's room.

I reached his door and listened. No sound came to my ears—no sound of a waking or sleeping inmate of the room. I retreated down half-a-dozen stairs with a heavy tread. No one appeared at the attic door to inquire the meaning of the noise. I ascended the stairs again, and, with a woman's touch, placed my hand on the handle of the door. It yielded. I looked into the room. No person was there. I ventured boldly in. The room was empty!

Assuring myself of this, I left the room as quickly as I had entered it. I did not pause at Mrs. Bailey's room on the first floor. I went down to the street door, and quietly put up the door chain. *Now*, no person could possibly enter or leave the house without my knowledge.

Then I went down to Mrs. Preedy in the kitchen, and said that Mrs. Bailey was unwell, and wished me to stop with her for a little while.

"Stop, and welcome, Becky," said Mrs. Preedy, with the sweetest smile.

What a power is money! My fanciful legacy of a paltry three hundred pounds had placed this woman and me on an equality, and she was the first to acknowledge it.

I ascended to Mrs. Bailey's room, and unlocked her door. I had really not been absent for more than five minutes, but she said it seemed like thirty. I remained with her for over an hour, during which time the muffled sounds in the next house continued. I convinced myself that they could not be heard in any other room by going out, now and again, for a few moments, and listening in other rooms on the first and second floors. At length the sound ceased, and after waiting a quarter of an hour longer without it being renewed, I bade Mrs. Bailey good night, telling her, in

a cheerful voice, that she was mistaken in supposing there were no mice in the empty house next door.

"Are you sure it is mice, Becky?" she asked, anxiously.

"Am I sure?" I repeated, laughing. "Why, you nervous old creature, what else can it be? Let us make a bargain to say nothing about it except to each other, or we shall have everybody laughing at us. And what would be worse, the detectives might appear again."

The bargain was made, and I kissed the old lady, and left her.

I went straight upstairs, cautiously, as before. Richard Manx was in his room!

I went down to the street door. The chain was up! A convincing proof that it was this very Richard Manx, our young man lodger—the man who paints and wears a wig, and who is flat-footed—whose movements I had heard through the wall which divides Mrs. Bailey's room from the room in which the murder was committed.

I am too tired to write a minute longer. This is the longest letter I have ever written. Good night, dear love. God bless and guard you!

Your ever devoted,
BECKY.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

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THE "EVENING MOON" RE-OPENS THE SUBJECT OF THE GREAT PORTER SQUARE MURDER, AND RELATES A ROMANTIC STORY CONCERNING THE MURDERED MAN AND HIS WIDOW.

A few hours before Becky wrote this last letter to the man she loved, the *Evening Moon* presented its readers with a Supplement entirely devoted to particulars relating to the murder in No. 119, Great Porter Square. The Supplement was distinguished by a number of sensational headings which the street news-vendors industriously circulated with the full force of their lungs:

THE MURDER IN GREAT PORTER SQUARE.

A ROMANCE IN REAL LIFE.

A HUNDRED THOUSAND POUNDS.

WEALTH, BEAUTY, AND LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

After a lapse of several weeks, we re-open the subject of the murder in Great Porter Square. Although the murderer is still at large, the affair has advanced another and most important stage, and one element of mystery in connection with it is satisfactorily cleared up. We are about to disclose the name of the murdered man, and at the same time to lay before our readers certain interesting information relating to him which without doubt will be eagerly read. For this information we are again indebted to the Special Reporter, whose graphic account of the trial and of his subsequent adventures in relation to Antony Cowlrick, the person accused of the murder, has been circulated far and wide.

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Until now, the murder in Great Porter Square has been distinguished by two unsatisfactory features. The first and most important is that the murderer was undiscovered. Unhappily no light has been thrown upon this part of the affair. The second, and most interesting feature, was that the man who was murdered was unknown. We do not remember a parallel case. But the murdered man is now identified, and his widow is lamenting his cruel and untimely death. Before our readers reach the end of our article, which, for the purpose of better description, we throw into narrative form, they will indeed admit that truth is stranger than fiction.

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There lived in the West of London, near to one of our most fashionable parks, a gentleman of the name of Holdfast. He was a widower, having lost his wife a year before the commencement of our narrative. He had but one child, a son named Frederick, who was at Oxford, with a liberal allowance. The son is described as a young gentleman with engaging manners, and of a lively disposition; it was whispered also, that he was given to dissipation, and had made his father's purse suffer to a woeful extent. There is nothing extraordinary in this. What are rich fathers good for in this world if they send their sons to college and keep their pockets buttoned? Money lenders *must* live, and they take especial good care to thrive and grow fat. Young gentlemen *must* see life, and they take especial good care to drink deep of the intoxicating cup, and to sow a plentiful crop of wild oats. It is an old story, and our readers will have no difficulty in supplying certain accessories in the shape of pretty women, late suppers, horse racing, gambling, kite

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flying, post obits, and the thousand and one other commonplace but important elements in the younger days of manhood in the life of an only son.

The death of Mr. Holdfast's wife was a severe blow to him; his son was left to him, truly; but what comfort to the bereaved father could a son have been who was endowed with vicious tastes, and whose career of dissipation was capped by a depraved association with degraded women—especially with one with whom he formed a close connection, which would have broken his father's heart, had that father himself not been of a self-sustaining, proud, and high-minded disposition. The news of his son's disgraceful connection, although it did not break the father's heart, was the means of effecting a breach between the father and son which was destined never to be healed. Before, however, this severance took place, an important change occurred in Mr. Holdfast's household. Mr. Holdfast married again, a very lovely woman, whose name, before she became Mrs. Holdfast, was Lydia Wilson. [223]

The lady was young, and an orphan. Her relatives were far away in the country, and she was alone in London. Her entire wealth amounted to about five hundred pounds in United States bonds. It was while she was on a visit to the City, with the intention of converting these bonds into English money, that she and Mr. Holdfast first met. The Royal Exchange does not suggest itself as the most likely place in the world in which a gentleman of Mr. Holdfast's age and character would fall in love at first sight. It happened, however. He saw the young lady looking about her, perplexed and bewildered by the bustling throng of clerks, brokers, and speculators; it was the busiest time of the day, and it could not escape Mr. Holdfast's notice, his attention having been first arrested by the loveliness of her face and figure, that she was utterly unused to the busy scene in which she found herself. The young lady made an attempt to cross the road between the Mansion House and the Royal Exchange; she became confused amid the bewildering tangle of vehicles, and was in danger of being run over, when Mr. Holdfast hastened to her rescue. The road safely crossed, she looked into Mr. Holdfast's face and thanked him. So there, in the midst of the world's busiest mart, the story of a romance was commenced which might serve novelists with a tempting theme. For the particulars of the story we are now relating we are indebted to the lady herself, still young and beautiful, but plunged into the deepest grief by the murder of her husband. It is difficult for us to appropriately describe her modesty and innocent confidence in the interview between her and our Reporter. It is not that she is beautiful, and one of England's fairest daughters, but it is that truth dwells in her face and eyes. Her voice is peculiarly soft and sweet, and to doubt her when she speaks is an impossibility. [224]

Nothing was more natural than that Mr. Holdfast, having thus far assisted the young lady, should inquire if he could be of any further use to her. Miss Lydia Wilson really was in quest of a broker, to whom she had been recommended to negotiate the sale of her bonds, but in her confusion and terror she had forgotten both name and address. Ascertaining the nature of her mission, Mr. Holdfast offered to introduce her to a respectable firm; she accepted his offer, and they walked together to the broker's office. On the way they conversed, and Mr. Holdfast learnt, among other particulars, that the young lady was an orphan, and that these bonds represented all that she had in the world to depend upon. In the broker's office the young lady produced her securities and gave them to the principal of the firm. He sent out at once to ascertain the exact price of the market; the clerk departed, with the bonds in his possession, and was absent longer than he was expected to be. At length he returned, and requested a private interview with his employer. The interview took place, and the broker presently returned, and inquired of Miss Wilson how she became possessed of the bonds. [225]

The lady replied haughtily that she was not in a broker's office to be catechised by a stranger about her private affairs; and upon that Mr. Holdfast also spoke warmly in the lady's behalf. The broker rejoined that Miss Lydia Wilson was as much a stranger to him as he was to her. Again, Mr. Holdfast, seeing that the lovely woman who had been thrown upon his protection was agitated by the broker's manner, interposed. [226]

"You forget," he said, "that it was I who introduced this lady to your firm. Is not my introduction a sufficient guarantee?"

"Amplly sufficient," said the broker. "But business is business; such securities as these cannot easily be disposed of."

"Why?" inquired Mr. Holdfast. [227]

"Because," said the broker, "they are forgeries."

"Then I am ruined!" cried the young lady.

"No," said Mr. Holdfast. "If the bonds *are* forgeries, you shall not be the loser—that is, if you will confer upon me the honour of accepting me as your banker."

The young lady could not continue so delicate a conversation in the presence of a man who seemed to doubt her. She rose to leave the broker's office, and when she and Mr. Holdfast were again in the open air, he said:

"Allow me to know more of you. I shall undoubtedly be able to assist you. You cannot conceal from me that the unexpected discovery of this forgery is likely to deeply embarrass you. Do not consider me impertinent when I hazard the guess that you had an immediate use for some part of the money you expected to receive from the sale of these securities."

"You guess rightly," said the young lady; "I wished to discharge a few trifling debts." Her lips trembled, and her eyes were filled with tears. [228]

"And—asking you to pardon my presumption—your purse is not too heavily weighted."

"I have just," said the young lady, producing her purse, and opening it, "three shillings and sixpence to live upon."

Now, although this was a serious declaration, the young lady, when she made it, spoke almost merrily. Her lips no longer trembled, her eyes were bright again. These sudden changes of

humour, from sorrow to gaiety, from pensiveness to light-heartedness, are not her least charming attributes. Small wonder that Mr. Holdfast was captivated by them and by her beauty!

"What a child you are!" he exclaimed. "Three shillings and sixpence is not sufficient to keep you for half a day."

"Is it not?" asked the young lady, with delightful simplicity. "What a pity it is that we cannot live like fairies."

"My dear young lady," remarked Mr. Holdfast, taking her hand in his, "you sadly need a protector. Have you really any objection to letting me hear the story of these bonds?" [229]

She related it to him without hesitation. It was simple enough. Some years ago, being already motherless, her father died, and left her in the care of his sister, a married woman with a family. The orphan girl had a guardian who, singular to say, she never saw. He lived in London, she in the country. The guardian, she understood from her father's last words, held in trust for her a sum of money, represented by bonds, which she would receive when she became twenty-one years of age. In the meantime she was to live with her aunt, who was to be paid from the money due from time to time for interest on the bonds. The payment for her board and lodging was forwarded regularly by the young lady's guardian, and she looked forward impatiently to the time when she would become her own mistress. She was unhappy in the house of her aunt, who treated her more like a dependent than a relative and a lady. [230]

"I think," said Mrs. Holdfast to our Reporter, "that she was disappointed the money had not been left to her instead of me, and that she would have been glad if I had died, so that she might obtain possession of it as next of kin. It would not have benefited her, the bonds being of no value, for it was hardly likely she would have met with such a friend as Mr. Holdfast proved to me—the best, the most generous of men! And I have lost him! I have lost him!"

Bursts of grief such as this were frequent during the interview, which we are throwing into the form of a narrative, with no more licence, we hope, than we are entitled to use.

The story went on to its natural end. The young lady's position in the house to which her father confided her became almost unendurable, but she was compelled to suffer in silence. A small allowance for pocket money was sent to her by her guardian, and the best part of this she saved to defray the expenses to London and to enable her to live for a while; for she was resolved to leave her aunt on the very day she reached the age of twenty-one. [231]

"Do I look older?" she asked of our Reporter.

He replied, with truth and gallantry, that he would have scarcely taken her for that.

"You flatter me," she said, with a sad smile; "I feel as if I were fifty. This dreadful blow has made an old woman of me!"

To conclude the story she related to Mr. Holdfast, the day before she was twenty-one she received a packet from her guardian in London, and a letter saying that he was going abroad, to America she believed, perhaps never to return, and that he completed the trust imposed upon him by her father by sending her her little fortune. It was contained in the packet, and consisted of the United States bonds which had that day been declared to be forgeries. The departure of her guardian did not cause her to waver in her determination to leave her aunt's home the moment she was entitled to do so. Her life had been completely wretched and unhappy, and her only desire was to place a long distance between herself and her cruel relative, so that the woman could not harass her. The day arrived, and with a light heart, with her fortune in her pocket, Lydia Wilson, without even wishing her aunt good-bye or giving the slightest clue as to the direction of her flight, left her home, and took a railway ticket to London. "Not all the way to London first," said the young lady; "I broke the journey half-way, so that if my aunt followed me, she would have the greater difficulty in discovering me." The young lady arrived in London, and took a modest lodging in what she believed to be a respectable part of the City. When she met Mr. Holdfast, she had been in London five weeks, and the little money she had saved was gone, with the exception of three shillings and sixpence. Then she fell back upon the bonds, and considered herself as rich as a princess. [232]

"But even this money," said Mr. Holdfast to her, "would not last for ever." [233]

"O, yes, it would," insisted the young lady; "I would have made it last for ever!"

What was to be done with so impracticable and charming a creature, with a young lady, utterly alone and without resources, and whose tastes, as she herself admits, were always of an expensive kind?

Mr. Holdfast saw the danger which beset her, and determined to shield her from harm. To have warned her of the pitfalls and traps with which such a city as London is dotted would have been next to useless. To such an innocent mind as hers, the warning itself would have seemed like a trap to snare the woman it was intended to save.

"Have you any objection," said Mr. Holdfast, when the young lady's story was finished, "to my endeavouring to find the guardian who has wronged you? America is now a near land, and I could enlist the services of men who would not fail to track the scoundrel." [234]

But to this proposition the young lady would not consent. The bonds might have been given to her guardian by her dead father. In that case, the honour of a beloved parent might be called into question. Anything in preference to that; poverty, privation, perhaps an early death! Mr. Holdfast was touched to his inmost soul by the pathos of this situation.

"I will keep the bonds," he said, "and shall insist upon your accepting the offer of my friendship."

"Promise me, then," said the young lady, conquered by his earnestness and undoubted honesty of intention, "that you will take no steps to compromise the honoured name of my dear father. Promise me that you will not show the bonds to strangers."

"No eye but mine shall see them," said Mr. Holdfast, opening his safe and depositing the prized

securities in a secret drawer. "And now," he continued, "you bank with me, and you draw from me fifty pounds, represented by eight five-pound notes and ten sovereigns in gold. Here they are. Count them. No? Very well. Count them when you get home, and take great care of them. You little know the roguery of human nature. There's not a day that you cannot read in the London papers accounts of ladies having their pockets picked and their purses stolen. Let me see your purse. Why, it is a fairy purse! You cannot get half of this money into it. My dear young lady, we *cannot* live like the fairies. Human creatures are bound to be, to some small extent, practical. Take my purse—it is utterly unfit for your delicate hands, but it will answer its present purpose. See. I pack the money safely in it; take it home and put it in a place of safety."

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"How can I repay you?" asked the young lady, impressed no less by this gentleman's generosity than by his wonderful kindness of manner.

"By saying we are friends," he replied, "and by promising to come to see me soon again."

"Of course, I must do that," she said, gaily, "to see that my banker does not run away."

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The next thing he asked for was her address, but she was not inclined, at first, to give it to him; he appreciated the reason for her disinclination, and said that he had no intention of calling upon her, and that he wanted the address to use only in the event of its being necessary to write to her.

"I can trust you," she said, and complied with his wish.

To his surprise and gratification the young lady, of her own accord, paid him a visit on the following day. She entered his office with a smiling face, causing, no doubt, quite a flutter in the hearts of Mr. Holdfast's clerks and bookkeepers. It is not often so fair a vision is seen in a London's merchant's place of business.

From the young lady's appearance Mr. Holdfast was led to believe that she had news of a joyful nature to communicate, and he was therefore very much astonished when she said, in the pleasantest manner:

"I have lost your purse."

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"With the money in it?" he inquired, his tone expressing his astonishment.

"Yes, I am sorry to say," she replied, laughing at his consternation, "with the money in it. I did not like to come back yesterday, for fear you would scold me."

"You lost it yesterday, then?"

"Yes, within an hour of my leaving your office."

"How on earth did it happen?"

"In the simplest manner possible. You were quite right, Mr. Holdfast, in saying that I did not know the roguery of human nature. I was standing at a cake shop, looking in at the window—I am so fond of cakes!—and two little girls and a woman were standing by my side. The children were talking—they would like this cake, they would like that—and such a many round O's fell from their lips that I could not help being amused. Poor little things! They looked very hungry, and I quite pitied them. Some one tapped my left shoulder, and I turned round to see who it was—when, would you believe it?—your purse, which was in my right hand, was snatched from me like lightning. And the extraordinary part of the affair is, that I saw no one behind me, nor any person except the woman and two children within yards of me!"

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She related the particulars of the robbery as though it had not happened to her and did not affect her, but some stranger who had plenty of money, and would not feel the loss.

"What did you do?" asked Mr. Holdfast.

"I laughed. I couldn't help it—it was so clever! Of course I looked about me, but that did not bring back your purse. Then I took the poor children into the cake shop, and treated them to cakes, and had some myself, and gave them what money remained of my three shillings and sixpence, and sent them home quite happy."

"And left yourself without a penny?" said Mr. Holdfast, almost overcome with delight, as he afterwards told her, at her childish innocence, simplicity and kindness.

"Yes," she replied, overjoyed that he did not scold her, "I left myself without a penny."

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"You will have to buy me another purse," he said.

The young lady exhibited her own little fairy porte-monnaie, and turned it out—there was not a sixpence in it. "You must give me some money to do it with," she said.

"You are not fit to be trusted with money," he said; "I really am puzzled what to do with you."

Upon this she burst into tears; her helpless position, and his goodness and tenderness, overcame her.

"If you cry like that," he said softly, "I shall never forgive myself."

Her depression vanished; her sunny look returned; and they conversed together thereafter as though they had known each other for years—as though he had been her father's friend, and had nursed her on his knee when she was a child. Needless to say, he made matters right with this simple, innocent, confiding young lady, and that from that time there existed between them a bond which was destined to ripen into the closest and most binding tie which man and woman can contract. At first she looked upon him as her second father, but insensibly there dawned upon her soul a love as sweet and strong as if he had been a twenty years younger man than he was. When he asked her to be his wife, telling her that he most truly loved her, that he would devote himself to her and make her the happiest woman in the world, she raised a thousand objections.

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"One objection would be sufficient," he said, sadly, "if you cannot forget it. My age."

She declared, indeed, that that was not an obstacle—that she looked up to him as she could to no other man—that he was the noblest being who had ever crossed her path of life, and that she could never, never forget him. Mr. Holdfast urged her then to explain to him in plain terms the

precise nature of her objections.

"I can make you happy," he said.

"You could make any woman happy," she replied.

"And I should be the happiest man—you would make me so."

"I would try," she replied, softly.

"Then tell me why you raise cruel obstacles in the way of our happiness. I will marry you by force if you are not candid with me."

"You know nothing of my family," she said; "my parents are dead, and the few relatives I have I would not allow to darken the threshold of your door."

"Nor shall they. You shall be the mistress and the master of my house, and I will be your slave."

"For shame to talk in that way to a foolish girl like me—to a girl who is almost nameless, and who has not a shilling to her fortune!"

"Have I not more than enough? Do you wish to make me believe that you do not understand my character?"

"No; I do understand it, and if you were poor like me, or I were rich like you— But even then there would be an obstacle hard to surmount. Your son is but a few years older than myself—he might be my brother. I should be ashamed to look him in the face. He would say I married you for your money. Before the wedding day, were he to say a word to me, were he to give one look, to touch my pride, I would run away, and you would never, never find me. Ah! let us say good-bye—let us shake hands and part! It is best so. Then I shall never have anything to reproach myself with. Then I should not be made to suffer from the remarks of envious people that I tricked you into a marriage with a penniless, friendless girl!"

"As God is my judge," he cried, "you shall be my wife, and no other man's! I will not let you escape me! And to make matters sure, we will give neither my son—who would bring my name to shame—nor envious people the power to say a word to hurt your feelings. We will be married privately, by the registrar. Leave all to me. I look upon you as my wife from this day. Place your hand in mine, and say you will marry me, or I will never more believe in woman's truth."

His impetuosity carried the day—he spoke with the fire of a young man of twenty-five. She placed her hand in his, and said,

"I am yours."

Three weeks afterwards, Lydia Wilson became Mr. Holdfast's wife, and his son Frederick was in ignorance that he had married again. The date of the marriage was exactly two years to the day before the fatal night upon which Mr. Holdfast was found murdered in No. 119 Great Porter Square.



CHAPTER XIX.

THE "EVENING MOON" CONTINUES ITS ACCOUNT OF THE TRAGEDY, AND DESCRIBES THE SHAMEFUL PART ENACTED BY MR. FREDERICK HOLDFAST IN HIS FATHER'S HOUSE.

WHEN a man of Mr. Holdfast's age and wealth marries, for love, a lady thirty years younger than himself, his friends generally regard him with pity, and predict that the day must arrive when he will awake from his infatuated dream. "Warm-blooded May and cold-blooded December," say Mrs. Grundy and her family; "what can be expected?" They are much more uncharitable towards the lady, if she happen to be poor, as in such cases she is almost certain to be. It is not possible for her to awake from her dream, for she is judged as having been very wide awake, and as having entrapped the poor man with wiles most artfully designed and carried out, fooling the doting old lover to the top of his bent, her eyes and heart set upon nothing but his money.

The judgment is too often correct. Beauty sacrificing itself at the altar of Mammon is no new subject for writer or painter whose satires are drawn from truth and nature. But an arrow tipped with these feathers of false feeling, and aimed at Mr. Holdfast and his lovely bride, would have fallen short of its mark. Their match, despite the disparity of age, was in the best sense of the word a love-match. On Mr. Holdfast's side there could be no doubt of it; and as little doubt could there be of a creature so guileless as Lydia Wilson, who had been brought up in the most delightful ignorance of the value of money.

"We loved each other to the last," says the innocent and much-wronged widow. "To have saved my dear husband's life I would have sacrificed my own—willingly, joyfully have sacrificed it!"

By what strange roads, then, had so fair a commencement been conducted to so foul and tragic an end?

Reference has already been made to Mr. Holdfast's son Frederick, and the sketch we have

given of his character will be a sufficient indication of the kind of man he was. We speak of him in the past tense, for he is dead.

Shortly after Mr. Holdfast's second marriage, he communicated to his son the news of his having chosen a beautiful and amiable woman as a companion. In his letter the father expressed a hope that his son, who had already done so much to wound a father's heart, would not add to his misconduct by behaving other than dutifully and respectfully to his second mother. The son wrote back that he had no second mother, and would acknowledge none; but that he would soon be in London to embrace his father and shake hands with his father's wife. Attention is directed to the terms of this expression of feeling. His father he would embrace, his father's wife he would shake hands with. To one he would exhibit affection, to the other coldness. There was here at once struck the keynote to many strange family events (in one of which the affections were made to play a monstrous part), leading, there is reason to believe, to the untimely death of a father who sinned only on the side of indulgence and love.

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"I had, from the first," said the widow of the murdered man, "a mysterious foreboding about Frederick Holdfast. Do not ask me to account for it, for it is out of my power. I am a creature of feeling and fancy, but I am seldom wrong. I sometimes shudder when I pass a stranger in the street, and I know—something whispers within me—that that stranger has committed a crime, or is about to commit a crime. I sometimes feel glad when I meet a person for the first time, as I have met you"—(she was addressing our Reporter)—"and then I know that that person is an honourable man, and that I can confide in him. I had a foreboding for ill when I first heard the name of Mr. Frederick Holdfast. I shuddered and turned as cold as ice; and that was even before I knew that his father and he were not upon friendly terms. I tried to shake off the feeling, asking myself how was it possible there could be any real wickedness in the son of a man so noble as my dear lost husband? Alas! I have lived to discover that my foreboding of evil was but too true!"

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Mr. Frederick Holdfast came to London, and made the acquaintance of his stepmother. He had rooms in his father's house, but his habits were very irregular. He seldom dined with his father and his father's wife, as he insisted upon calling her: he would not accompany them to ball or party—for, from the date of his second marriage, Mr. Holdfast led a new and happier life. He gave balls and parties at home, of which his wife was the queen of beauty; he went into society; the gloom which had been habitual with him departed from his heart. But the son would not share this happiness; he was the thorn in the side of the newly-married couple. We continue the narrative in the widow's words.

"I did everything in my power," she said, with touching plaintiveness, "to reconcile father and son. I made excuses for Frederick. I said, 'Perhaps Frederick is in debt; it troubles him; you are rich.' There was no occasion for me to say another word to such a generous gentleman as my husband. The very next day he told me that he had had a serious conversation with Frederick, who had confessed to him that he was deeply in debt. How much? Thousands. He showed me a list, but I scarcely looked at it. 'Shall I pay these debts?' my husband asked. 'Of course,' I replied; 'pay them immediately, and fill Frederick's pockets with money.' 'I have done that very thing,' said Mr. Holdfast, 'a dozen times already, and he has always promised me he would reform.' 'Never mind,' I said, 'perhaps he will keep his word this time. Pay his debts once more, and let us all live happily together.' That was my only wish—that we should all be friends, and that Frederick should have no excuse to reproach me for having married his father. The debts were paid, and Mr. Holdfast brought his son to me, and said to him 'Frederick, you have to thank this angel'—(pray, pray do not think I am saying a word that is not true! My husband was only too kind to me, and loved me so much that he would often pay me extravagant compliments)—'You have to thank this angel,' said Mr. Holdfast to his son, 'for what has been done this day. You can now hold up your head with honour. Let bye-gones be bye-gones. Kiss Mrs. Holdfast, and promise to turn over a new leaf.' I held out my cheek to him, and he looked at me coldly and turned away. I was scarlet with shame. Was it not enough to rouse a woman's animosity?—such treatment! But it did not rouse mine—no; I still hoped that things would come right. Mr. Holdfast did not relate to me the particulars of the interview between himself and his son, and I did not inquire. Why should I pry into a young man's secrets? And what right had I to do anything but try and make peace between my husband and my husband's son? Frederick had been wild, but so have plenty of other college men. Many of them have turned out well afterwards; I have heard of some who were very bad young men, and afterwards became Judges and Members of Parliament. Why should not Frederick do the same—why should he not reform, and become a Judge or a Member of Parliament? My great wish was that Mr. Holdfast should keep his son with him, and that Frederick should marry some good girl, and settle down. I had tried to bring it about. I had given parties, and had invited pretty girls; but Frederick seldom made his appearance at my assemblies, and when he did, stopped only for a few minutes. On the very evening of the day upon which my husband, at my intercession, paid Frederick's debts, I had a ball at my house. Is it wrong to be fond of parties and dancing? If it is, you will blame me very much, for I am very fond of dancing. With a good partner I could waltz all night, and not feel tired. Mr. Holdfast did not dance, but he had no objection to my enjoying myself in this way. On the contrary, he encouraged it. He would sit down to his whist, and when the ball was over I would tell him all the foolish things my partners had said to me. Well, on this night we were to have a grand ball, and I very much wished Frederick to be present, for I wanted to introduce him to some pretty girls I had invited. But in the morning he had insulted me, and had refused to kiss me as a sign of reconciliation. Upon thinking it over I said to myself that perhaps he did not think it proper to kiss me, because I was young and—well, not exactly bad-looking. I was always trying to make excuses for him in my mind. Though there could really be no harm in kissing one's mother—do you believe there is?—even if your mother *is* younger than yourself! If *I* were a young man, *I* should have no objection! So I determined to ask Frederick to come to my ball, and bind him to it.

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He was to dine with us, and, for a wonder, he did not disappoint us. Over dinner I said, 'Frederick, I should like you very, very particularly to come to my ball to-night.' Contrary to his usual custom of pleading an excuse of another engagement—it was generally to meet some friend at his club—he said, quite readily, 'I will come.' I was surprised. 'You have promised before,' I said, 'but you have almost always disappointed me. I shall take your promise now as a gentleman's promise, and shall expect you to keep it. And you must not only come; you must stop and dance.' He replied, without the slightest hesitation, 'I will come, and I will stop and dance.' 'Now,' I said, so glad at his amiability, 'I will make it hard for you to forget. Here is my programme. You may dance two dances with me. I am sure you would not keep a lady waiting. Behave to me as you would to any other lady in society.' I gave him my card, and he wrote upon it, and handed it back to me. I did not look to see the dances he had engaged; I was too pleased at my success. His father, also, was very much pleased, and our dinner on this evening was the pleasantest we had ever enjoyed together. Three hours later, my guests began to arrive. While I was dressing, one of my maids brought in the loveliest bouquet I had ever seen. From Mr. Holdfast? No. From his son, Frederick. Was not that a sign of perfect reconciliation, and had I not every reason to be happy? O, if I had known! I would have cast the flowers to the ground, and have trodden them under my feet! But we can never tell, can we, what is going to happen to us? I dressed, and went down to the ball room. I wore a pale blue silk, with flounces of lace, caught up here and there with forget-me-nots, and I had pearls in my hair. Mr. Holdfast said I looked bewitching. I was in the best of spirits, and felt sure that this was going to be one of the happiest evenings in my life. How shall I tell you what happened? I am ashamed and horrified when I think of it! But it was not my fault, and I did everything I could to lead Frederick away from his dreadful, sinful infatuation."

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Our Reporter himself takes up the narrative, and relates what followed in his own words. The beautiful widow was overcome by shame at the revelation she had to make, and it was only by considerate and skilful persuasion that our representative was able to elicit from her the full particulars of what she rightly called a dreadful, sinful infatuation.

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The ball was a perfect success; there were many beautiful women among the guests, but the most beautiful of all was the hostess herself. A gentleman asked her to dance, and she handed him her card.

"How annoying!" he exclaimed. "You are engaged for every waltz."

"No," she replied, "only for two."

"But look," said the gentleman.

She glanced at her card, and found that Frederick had placed his name against every one of the six waltzes comprised in the programme.

"The foolish fellow!" she cried, "I promised him two, and he has appropriated six!"

"In that case," observed the gentleman, "as you are much too precious to be monopolised, I may take the liberty of erasing Mr. Frederick Holdfast's name from one waltz at least, and writing my own in its place."

"Yes," said Mrs. Holdfast, "I will promise you one."

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Just as the gentleman had made the alteration in the card Frederick came up, and protested against being deprived of the waltz.

"You made me promise to stop and dance," he said, "and I will dance with no other lady in the room but you."

"Why," said Mrs. Holdfast, "there are fifty pretty girls here, who will be delighted to dance with you."

"I have no eyes for any lady but yourself," he said, offering her his arm. "You wear the crown of beauty."

Surprised as she was at this sudden change in him, it was so much better than the systematically cold manner in which he had hitherto treated her, that she humoured him and was quite disposed to yield to his caprices. He told her during the evening that he was jealous of any person dancing with her but himself; he paid her a thousand compliments; he was most devoted in his attentions.

"Frederick is a changed man," she said to her husband, when he came from the whist to inquire how she was enjoying herself; "he has been the most attentive of cavaliers."

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Mr. Holdfast expressed his satisfaction to his son.

"You have commenced your new leaf well, Frederick," he said; "I hope you will go on as you have begun."

"I intend to do so, sir," replied Frederick.

Had Mr. Holdfast understood the exact meaning of these words, his advice to his son would have been of a precisely opposite nature, and on that very night the severance of father and son would have been complete.

The evening progressed; music, pretty women, gallant men, brilliant lights, flowers, a sumptuous supper, a fascinating and charming hostess, formed the sum of general happiness. The ball was spoken of as the most successful of the season. In an interval between the dances Mrs. Holdfast found herself alone with Frederick in a conservatory. She had a difficulty in fastening one of the buttons of her glove. Frederick offered his assistance; she held out her white arm; his fingers trembled as he clumsily essayed to fasten the button.

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"You seem agitated," she said to him, with a smile.

"I have behaved to you like a brute," he muttered.

"Don't think of the past," she said sweetly, "we commence from this night."

"It will be the commencement of heaven or hell to me!" he said, in a voice almost indistinct, with contrition as she supposed. "My father was right in calling you an angel. When I reflect upon

my conduct this morning I can't help thinking I must have been mad. To refuse to kiss a beautiful woman like you! Let me kiss you now, in token of my repentance."

She offered him her cheek, and he seized her in his arms, and kissed her lips.

"I love you! I love you!" he whispered, and before she could release herself he had kissed her a dozen times. "That will make amends for my rudeness this morning," he said, as he rushed from her presence. [259]

She scarcely knew what to think; she was bewildered by his strange behaviour, but she was too pure-minded to put any but an innocent construction upon it. Poor lady! she had had no experience of that kind of man in whose eyes a woman's good name is a thing to trifle with and destroy, and who afterwards exults in the misery he has brought upon an unsuspecting, confiding heart. She lived to learn the bitter lesson. Too soon did she learn it! Too soon did the horrible truth force itself upon her soul that her husband's son loved her, or professed to love her—and that he was using all his artifices to prevail upon her to accept him as her secret lover. At first she refused to credit it; she had read of such things, but had never believed they could exist. To the pure all things are pure, and so for a time she cast away the suspicion which intruded itself that the heart of this young man could harbour such treachery towards a father too ready to forgive the errors which stain a man's name with dishonour. Her position was most perplexing. [260] Instead of absenting himself from home, Frederick was unremitting in his attendance upon her. When he came down to breakfast in the morning he kissed her, but never before his father. When he went out of the house he kissed her—but his father never saw the embrace. In private, when no one else was by, he called her "Lydia," or "dear Lydia"; when his father or strangers were present, he addressed her as Mrs. Holdfast. He was so subtle in his devices that he wove around her and himself a chain of secrecy which caused her the greatest misery. She was no match for him. He was a man of the world; she, a young and innocent girl brought, for the first time, face to face with deliberate villainy. Her position was rendered the more embarrassing by the pleasure which Frederick's outward conduct afforded her husband. He expressed his pleasure to her frequently. "Our union," he said to her, "has brought happiness to me in more ways than one. Frederick has reformed; he is all I wish him to be; and I owe it to you that I can look forward now with satisfaction to his future." How could she undeceive the fond father? She contemplated with shudders the effect of the revelation it was in her power to make. Could she not in some way avoid the exposure? Could she not bring the son to a true sense of his shameful and unmanly conduct? She would try—she would try; innocence and a good intent would give her strength and courage. She was not aware of the difficulty of the task she had set herself. [261]

In its execution private interviews between Frederick and herself were necessary, and she had to solicit them. The eagerness with which he acceded to her request to speak with him in the absence of her husband should have been a warning to her—but she saw nothing but the possible success of a worthy design which was to save her husband from bitter grief. She spoke to Frederick seriously; she endeavoured to show him not only the wickedness but the folly of his passion for her; she told him that she loved his father, and that if he did not conquer his mad infatuation for her, an exposure must ensue which would cover him with shame. And the result of her endeavour to bring the young man to reason was a declaration on his part, repeated again and again, that he loved her more than ever. He had the cunning to hint to her that she was already compromised, and that she could not defend herself successfully against an imputation of guilt. Appearances were all against her; the very interviews which she herself had planned and solicited were proofs against her. These infamous arguments convinced her of the hopelessness of her task, and with grief she relinquished it. She had no alternative but to appeal for protection to her husband. We doubt whether in the annals of social life a more delicate and painful situation could be found. [262]

She faced her duty bravely. She had full confidence in the honour and justice of her husband, and her confidence was not misplaced. Suffering most deeply himself, he pitied her for the suffering she experienced in being the innocent cause of what could not fail to be a life-long separation between himself and his son. "You have done your duty," he said, "and I will do mine. I am not only your husband and lover; I am your protector." He called his son to him and they were closeted together for hours. What passed between them, the wife never knew. Upon that subject husband and wife maintained perfect silence. At the end of the interview Frederick Holdfast left his father's house, never to return. The echo of the banished son's footsteps still lingered in Lydia Holdfast's ears when her husband called her into his study. His pale face showed traces of deep suffering. Upon the writing table was a small Bible, with silver clasps. [263]

"Lydia," said Mr. Holdfast, "this Bible was given to me by my first wife. Two children she bore me—first, the man who has but now left my house, and will not enter it again; then a girl, who died before she could prattle. It were better that my son had so died, but it was otherwise willed. In this Bible I wrote the record of my first marriage—my own name, the maiden name of my wife, the church in which we were married, and the date. It is here; and beneath it the record of my marriage with you. Upon a separate page I wrote the date of the birth of my son Frederick; beneath it, that of my second child, Alice, dead. That page is no longer in the sacred Book. I have torn it out and destroyed it; and as from this Bible I tore the record of my son's birth, so from my life I have torn and destroyed his existence. He lives no longer for me. I have now no child; I have only you!" He paused awhile, and continued. "It is I, it seems," he said, pathetically, "who have to turn over a new leaf. With the exception of yourself—my first consideration—there is but one engrossing subject in my mind; the honour of my name. I must watch carefully that it is not dragged in the mud. From such a man as my son has grown into—heaven knows by what means, for neither from myself nor from his mother can he have inherited his base qualities—I am not safe for a moment. Between to-day and the past, let there be a door fast closed, which neither you nor I will ever attempt to open." [264] [265]

Then this man, whose nature must have been very noble, kissed his young wife, and asked that she would not disturb him for the remainder of the day. "Only one person," he said, "is to be admitted to see me—my lawyer." In the course of the afternoon that gentleman presented himself, and did not leave until late in the night. His business is explained by the date of a codicil to Mr. Holdfast's will, whereby the son is disinherited, and Mr. Holdfast's entire fortune—amounting to not less than one hundred thousand pounds—is left unreservedly to his wife.

To avoid the tittle-tattle of the world, and the scandal which any open admission of social disturbances would be sure to give rise to, Mr. Holdfast insisted that his wife should mingle freely in the gaieties of society. She would have preferred to have devoted herself to her husband, and to have endeavoured, by wifely care and affection, to soften the blow which had fallen upon him. But he would not allow her to sacrifice herself. "My best happiness," he said, "is to know that you are enjoying yourself." Therefore she went more frequently into society, and fêted its members in her own house with princely liberality. When people asked after Mr. Holdfast's son, the answer—dictated by the father himself—was that he had gone abroad on a tour. It appeared, indeed, that the compact between father and son was that the young man should leave England. In this respect he kept his word. He went to America, and his father soon received news of him. His career in the States was disgraceful and dissipated; he seemed to have lost all control over himself, and his only desire appeared to be to vex his father's heart, and dishonour his father's name. Events so shaped themselves that the father's presence was necessary in America to personally explain to the heads of firms with whom he had for years transacted an extensive business, the character of the son who, by misrepresentations, was compromising his credit. When he communicated to his wife his intention of leaving her for a short time, she begged him not to go, or, if it were imperative that the journey should be undertaken, to allow her to accompany him. To this request he would not consent; he would not subject her to the discomfort of the voyage; and he pointed out to her that her presence might be a hindrance instead of a help to him.

"Not only," he said, "must I set myself right with my agents in America, but I must see my son. I will make one last appeal to him—I will speak to him in the name of his dead mother! It is my duty, and I will perform it. The wretched man, hearing of my arrival, may fly from the cities in which it is necessary that I shall present myself. I must follow him until we are once more face to face. Cannot you see that I must be alone, and entirely free, to bring my mission to a successful issue."

Mournfully, she was compelled to confess that he was right, and that it was imperative his movements should not be hampered. She bade him an affectionate farewell, little dreaming, as he drove away from the house, that she had received his last kiss.

He wrote regularly—from Queenstown, from ship-board, from New York. His letters were filled with expressions of affection; of his business he merely said, from time to time, that matters were not so serious as they were represented to be. As he had suspected, his son flew before him, and, resolute in his intention of having a last interview with him, he followed the young man from city to city, from State to State. Weeks, months were occupied in this pursuit, and it happened, on more than one occasion, that Mrs. Holdfast was a considerable time without a letter from her husband. She wrote to him again and again, entreating him to give up the pursuit and come home, but strong as was his affection for her, she could not shake his resolve. In one of his letters he hinted that his son was not alone—that he was in company with a woman of more than doubtful character; in another that this woman, having deserted the misguided young man, had appealed to Mr. Holdfast himself for assistance to enable her to return to England. "I did not refuse her," he wrote; "I was only too happy to break the connection between her and Frederick. I supplied her with money, and by the time you receive this she is most probably in her native land." Actions such as this denoted the kindness of his heart, and there is no doubt, had his son thrown himself at his father's feet, and, admitting the errors of the past, promised amendment in the future, that Mr. Holdfast would have helped him to commence a new and better career. Mr. Holdfast spoke of this in his letters. "There are other lands than England and America," he said, "where a man may build up a name that shall be honoured, and live a life of usefulness and happiness. In one of the Australian colonies, or in New Zealand, he may work out his repentance, under conditions which offer almost a certainty of a bright and honourable future."

This was the father's aim—a wise and merciful design, altogether too good in its intentions for the man it was to benefit.

At length a letter arrived conveying the intelligence that Mr. Holdfast had tracked his son to Minnesota, one of the Western States of America, and was journeying onward in pursuit of him. This letter was not in Mr. Holdfast's writing; it was written by a stranger, at his dictation, and a satisfactory explanation of this circumstance was given. "Although I am wearied in spirit," it said, "and sometimes feel that but for you I would give up the world and its trials with thankfulness, I am not really ill. My right hand has been wounded by the shutting of the door of a railroad car, and I am unable to use it. For this reason you must not feel uneasy if you do not hear from me for some time. I do not care to entrust, even to a stranger, the particulars of my private troubles. Good bye, and God bless you! Be happy!" These tender words were the last she ever received from him. When she read them she was oppressed by an ominous foreboding, and a voice within her whispered: "You will never see him more!" But for one thrilling circumstance, nothing in the world could have prevented her from taking instant passage to America to nurse and comfort her dear husband. She was about to become a mother. Now, indeed, she could not risk the perils of the voyage and the feverish travelling in the States. Another and a dearer life claimed her care and love.

Within a week of the receipt of this last letter she learnt, from a newspaper forwarded to her from a small town in Minnesota, that her husband's quest was over. On the banks of the laughing

waters of Minne-haha the dead body of a stranger was found. He had not met his death by drowning; from marks upon the body it was certain that he had been killed—most likely in a drunken brawl. A gentleman travelling through the district identified the body as that of Frederick Holdfast, with whom he was well acquainted in Oxford. The occurrence excited no comment, and simply supplied the text for an ordinary newspaper paragraph. The body was buried, and in that distant part of the world the man was soon forgotten. Thus was ended the shameful life of Frederick Holdfast, a young man to whom fortune held out a liberal hand, and whose career was marred by a lack of moral control.

Shocked as Mrs. Holdfast was by the tragic news, she could not but feel happy in the thought of the calmer future which lay before her. "My husband will soon be home!" she thought, and her heart beat with glad anticipation.

END OF VOLUME I.

Transcriber's note

Punctuation errors have been corrected silently. Also the following corrections have been made, on page

- 12 "could'nt" changed to "couldn't" (So of course it couldn't have been)
- 19 "facination" changed to "fascination" (with a horrible fascination)
- 187 "And" changed to "and" (raised their voices, and I wasn't awake)
- 211 "writhin" changed to "writhing" (Mrs. Bailey writhing in bed)
- 247 "But" changed to "but" (feeling and fancy, but I am seldom wrong)
- 257 "herelf" changed to "herself" (how she was enjoying herself;)
- 257 "have" added (his advice to his son would have been).

Otherwise the original has been preserved, including inconsistent spelling and hyphenation.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GREAT PORTER SQUARE: A MYSTERY. V. 1

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