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BY

E. NESBIT,

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CONTENTS.

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SOMETHING WRONG.

HURST OF HURSTCOTE.

We were at Eton together, and afterwards at Christ Church, and I always got on very well with him; but somehow he was a man about whom none of the other men cared very much. There was always something strange and secret about him; even at Eton he liked grubbing among books and trying chemical experiments better than cricket or the boats. That sort of thing would make any boy unpopular. At Oxford, it wasn't merely his studious ways and his love of science that went against him; it was a certain habit he had of gazing at us through narrowing lids, as though he were looking at

us more from the outside than any human being has a right to look at any other, and a bored air of belonging to another and a higher race, whenever we talked the ordinary chatter about athletics and the Schools.

A wild paper on "Black Magic," which he read to the Essay Society, filled to overflowing the cup of his College's contempt for him. I suppose no man was ever so much disliked for so little cause.

When we went down I noticed—for I knew his people at home—that the sentiment of dislike which he excited in most men was curiously in contrast to the emotions which he inspired in women. They all liked him, listened to him with rapt attention, talked of him with undisguised enthusiasm. I watched their strange infatuation with calmness for several years, but the day came when he me Kate Danvers, and then I was not calm any more. She behaved like all the rest of the women, and to her, quite suddenly, Hurst

threw the handkerchief. He was not Hurst of Hurstcote then, but his family was good, and his means not despicable, so he and she were conditionally engaged. People said it was a poor match for the beauty of the county; and her people, I know, hoped she would think better of it. As for me—well, this is not the story of my life, but of his. I need only say that I thought him a lucky man.

I went to town to complete the studies that were to make me M.D.; Hurst went abroad, to Paris or Leipzig or somewhere, to study hypnotism and prepare notes for his book on "Black Magic." This came out in the autumn, and had a strange and brilliant success. Hurst became famous, famous as men do become nowadays. His writings were asked for by all the big periodicals. His future seemed assured. In the spring they were married; I was not present at the wedding. The practice my father had

bought for me in London claimed all my time, I said.

It was more than a year after their marriage that I had a letter from Hurst.

"Congratulate me, old man! Crowds of uncles and cousins have died, and I am Hurst of Hurstcote, which God wot I never thought to be. The place is all to pieces, but we can't live anywhere else. If you can get away about September, come down and see us. We shall be installed. I have everything now that I ever longed for—Hurstcote—cradle of our race—and all that, the only woman in the world for my wife, and—— But that's enough for any man, surely.

"JOHN HURST OF HURSTCOTE."

Of course I knew Hurstcote. Who does not? Hurstcote, which seventy years ago was one of the most perfect, as well as the finest,

brick Tudor mansions in England. The Hurst who lived there seventy years ago noticed one day that his chimneys smoked, and called in a Hastings architect. "Your chimneys," said the local man, "are beyond me, but with the timbers and lead of your castle I can build you a snug little house in the corner of your park, much more suitable for a residence than this old brick building." So they gutted Hurstcote, and built the new house, and faced it with stucco. All of which things you will find written in the Guide to Sussex. Hurstcote, when I had seen it, had been the merest shell. How would Hurst make it habitable? Even if he had inherited much money with the castle, and intended to restore the building, that would be a work of years, not months. What would he do?

In September I went to see.

Hurst met me at Pevensey Station.

"Let's walk up," he said; "there's a cart

to bring your traps. Eh, but it's good to see you again, Bernard!"

It was good to see him again. And to see him so changed. And so changed for good, too. He was much stouter, and no longer wore the untidy ill-fitting clothes of the old days. He was rather smartly got up in grey stockings and knee-breeches, and wore a velvet shooting-jacket. But the most noteworthy change was in his face; it bore no more the eager, inquiring, half-scornful, half-tolerant look that had won him such ill-will at Oxford. His face now was the face of a man completely at peace with himself and with the world.

"How well you look!" I said, as we walked along the level winding road through the still marshes.

"How much better, you mean!" he laughed. "I know it. Bernard, you'll hardly believe it, but I'm on the way to be a popular man!"

He had not lost his old knack of reading one's thoughts.

"Don't trouble yourself to find the polite answer to that," he hastened to add. "No one knows as well as I how unpopular I was; and no one knows so well why," he added, in a very low voice. "However," he went on gaily, "unpopularity is a thing of the past. The folk hereabout call on us, and condole with us on our hutch. A thing of the past, as I said—but what a past it was, eh! You're the only man who ever liked me. You don't know what that's been to me many a dark day and night. When the others were—you know—it was like a hand holding mine, to think of you. I've always thought I was sure of one soul in the world to stand by me."

"Yes," I said—"yes."

He flung his arm over my shoulder with a frank, boyish gesture of affection, quite foreign to his nature as I had known it.

"And I know why you didn't come to our wedding," he went on; "but that's all right now, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said again, for indeed it was. There are brown eyes in the world, after all, as well as blue, and one pair of brown that meant heaven to me as the blue had never done.

"That's well," Hurst answered, and we walked on in satisfied silence, till we passed across the furze-crowned ridge, and went down the hill to Hurstcote. It lies in the hollow, ringed round by its moat, its dark red walls showing the sky behind them. There was no welcoming sparkle of early litten candle, only the pale amber of the September evening shining through the gaunt unglazed windows.

Three planks and a rough handrail had replaced the old drawbridge. We passed across the moat, and Hurst pulled a knotted rope that hung beside the great iron-bound

door. A bell clanged loudly inside. In the moment we spent there, waiting, Hurst pushed back a briar that was trailing across the arch, and let it fall outside the handrail.

"Nature is too much with us here," he said, laughing. "The clematis spends its time tripping one up, or clawing at one's hair, and we are always expecting the ivy to force itself through the window and make an uninvited third at our dinner-table."

Then the great door of Hurstcote Castle swung back, and there stood Kate, a thousand times sweeter and more beautiful than ever. I looked at her with momentary terror and dazzlement. She was indeed much more beautiful than any woman with brown eyes could be. My heart almost stopped beating.

'With life or death in the balance: Right!'

To be beautiful is not the same thing as to be dear, thank God. I went forward and took her hand with a free heart.

It was a pleasant fortnight I spent with them. They had had one tower completely repaired, and in its queer eight-sided rooms we lived, when we were not out among the marshes, or by the blue sea at Pevensey.

Mrs. Hurst had made the rooms quaintly charming by a medley of Liberty stuffs and Wardour Street furniture. The grassy space within the castle walls, with its underground passages, its crumbling heaps of masonry, overgrown with lush creepers, was better than any garden. There we met the fresh morning; there we lounged through lazy noons; there the grey evenings found us.

I have never seen any two married people so utterly, so undisguisedly in love as these were. I, the third, had no embarrassment in so being—for their love had in it a completeness, a childish abandonment, to which the presence of a third—a friend—was no burden. A happiness, reflected from theirs, shone on me. The days went by, dreamlike, and

brought the eve of my return to London, and to the commonplaces of life.

We were sitting in the courtyard; Hurst had gone to the village to post some letters. A big moon was just showing over the battlements, when Mrs. Hurst shivered.

"It's late," she said, "and cold; the summer is gone. Let us go in." So we went in to the little warm room, where a wood fire flickered on a brick hearth, and a shaded lamp was already glowing softly. Here we sat on the cushioned seat in the open window, and looked out through the lozenge panes at the gold moon, and ah! the light of her making ghosts in the white mist that rose thick and heavy from the moat.

"I am so sorry you are going," she said presently; "but you will come and skate on the moat with us at Christmas, won't you? We mean to have a mediæval Christmas. You don't know what that is? Neither do

I; but John does. He is very, very wise."

"Yes," I answered, "he used to know many things that most men don't even dream of as possible to know."

She was silent a minute, and then shivered again. I picked up the shawl she had thrown down when we came in, and put it round her.

"Thank you! I think—don't you?—that there are some things one is not meant to know, and some one is meant *not* to know. You see the distinction?"

"I suppose so—yes."

"Did it never frighten you in the old days," she went on, "to see that John would never —was always——"

"But he has given all that up now?"

"Oh yes, ever since our honeymoon. Do you know, he used to mesmerise me. It was horrible. And that book of his——"

"I didn't know you believed in Black Magic."

"Oh, I don't—not the least bit. I never was at all superstitious, you know. But those things always frighten me just as much as if I believed in them. And besides — I think they are wicked; but John—— Ah, there he is! Let's go and meet him."

His dark figure was outlined against the sky behind the hill. She wrapped the soft shawl more closely around her, and we went out in the moonlight to meet her husband.

The next morning when I entered the room I found that it lacked its chief ornament. The sparkling white and silver breakfast accessories were there, but for the deft white hands and kindly welcoming blue eyes of my hostess I looked in vain. At ten minutes past nine Hurst came in looking horribly worried, and more like his

old self than I had ever expected to see him.

"I say, old man," he said hurriedly, "are you really set on going back to town to-day —because Kate's awfully queer? I can't think what's wrong. I want you to see her after breakfast."

I reflected a minute. "I can stay if I send a wire," I said.

"I wish you would, then," Hurst said, wringing my hand and turning away; "she's been off her head most of the night, talking the most astounding nonsense. You must see her after breakfast. Will you pour out the coffee?"

"I'll see her now, if you like," I said, and he led me up the winding stair to the room at the top of the tower.

I found her quite sensible, but very feverish. I wrote a prescription, and rode Hurst's mare over to Eastbourne to get it made up. When I got back she was worse. It seemed to be a

sort of aggravated marsh fever. I reproached myself with having let her sit by the open window the night before. But I remembered with some satisfaction that I had told Hurst that the place was not quite healthy. I only wished I had insisted on it more strongly.

For the first day or two I thought it was merely a touch of marsh fever, that would pass off with no more worse consequence than a little weakness; but on the third day I perceived that she would die.

Hurst met me as I came from her bedside, stood aside on the narrow landing for me to pass, and followed me down into the little sitting-room, which, deprived for three days of her presence, already bore the air of a room long deserted. He came in after me and shut the door.

"You're wrong," he said abruptly, reading my thoughts as usual; "she won't die—she can't die."

"She will," I bluntly answered, for I am no believer in that worst refinement of torture known as 'breaking bad news gently.' "Send for any other man you choose. I'll consult with the whole College of Physicians if you like. But nothing short of a miracle can save her."

"And you don't believe in miracles," he answered quietly. "I do, you see."

"My dear old fellow, don't buoy yourself up with false hopes. I know my trade; I wish I could believe I didn't! Go back to her now; you have not very long to be together."

I wrung his hand; he returned the pressure, but said almost cheerfully—

"You know your trade, old man, but there are some things you don't know. Mine, for instance—I mean my wife's constitution. Now I know that thoroughly. And you mark my words—she won't die. You might as well say *I* was not long for this world."

"*You*," I said with a touch of annoyance; "you're good for another thirty or forty years."

"Exactly so," he rejoined quickly, "and so is she. Her life's as good as mine; you'll see—she won't die."

At dusk on the next day she died. He was with her; he had not left her since he had told me that she would not die. He was sitting by her holding her hand. She had been unconscious for some time, when suddenly she dragged her hand from his, raised herself in bed, and cried out in a tone of acutest anguish—

"John! John! Let me go! For Heaven's sake let me go!"

Then she fell back dead.

He would not understand — would not believe; he still sat by her, holding her hand, and calling on her by every name that love could teach him. I began to fear for his brain. He would not leave her, so by-and-by

I brought him a cup of coffee in which I had mixed a strong opiate. In about an hour I went back and found him fast asleep with his face on the pillow close by the face of his dead wife. The gardener and I carried him down to my bedroom, and I sent for a woman from the village. He slept for twelve hours. When he awoke his first words were—

"She is not dead! I must go to her!"

I hoped that the sight of her—pale, and beautiful, and still—with the white asters about her, and her cold hands crossed on her breast, would convince him; but no. He looked at her and said—

"Bernard, you're no fool; you know as well as I do that this is not death. Why treat it so? It is some form of catalepsy. If she should awake and find herself like this the shock might destroy her reason."

And, to the horror of the woman from the village, he flung the asters on to the floor,

covered the body with blankets, and sent for hot-water bottles.

I was now quite convinced that his brain was affected, and I saw plainly enough that he would never consent to take the necessary steps for the funeral.

I began to wonder whether I had not better send for another doctor, for I felt that I did not care to try the opiate again on my own responsibility, and something must be done about the funeral.

I spent a day in considering the matter—a day passed by John Hurst beside his wife's body. Then I made up my mind to try all my powers to bring him to reason, and to this end I went once more into the chamber of death. I found Hurst talking wildly, in low whispers. He seemed to be talking to some one who was not there. He did not know me, and suffered himself to be led away. He was, in fact, in the first stage of brain fever. I actually blessed his illness,

because it opened a way out of the dilemma in which I found myself. I wired for a trained nurse from town, and for the local undertaker. In a week she was buried, and John Hurst still lay unconscious and unheeding; but I did not look forward to his first renewal of consciousness.

Yet his first conscious words were not the inquiry I dreaded. He only asked whether he had been ill long, and what had been the matter. When I had told him, he just nodded and went off to sleep again.

A few evenings later I found him excited and feverish, but quite himself, mentally. I said as much to him in answer to a question which he put to me—

"There's no brain disturbance now? I'm not mad or anything?"

"No, no, my dear fellow. Everything is as it should be."

"Then," he answered slowly, "I must get up and go to her."

My worst fears were realized.

In moments of intense mental strain the truth sometimes overpowers all one's better resolves. It sounds brutal, horrible. I don't know what I meant to say; what I said was—

"You can't; she's buried."

He sprang up in bed, and I caught him by the shoulders.

"Then it's true!" he cried, "and I'm not mad. Oh, great God in heaven, let me go to her; let me go! It's true! It's true!"

I held him fast, and spoke.

"I am strong—you know that. You are weak and ill; you are quite in my power—we're old friends, and there's nothing I wouldn't do to serve you. Tell me what you mean; I will do anything you wish." This I said to soothe him.

"Let me go to her," he said again.

"Tell me all about it," I repeated. "You are too ill to go to her. I will go, if you

can collect yourself and tell me why. You could not walk five yards."

He looked at me doubtfully.

"You'll help me? You won't say I'm mad, and have me shut up? You'll help me?"

"Yes, yes—I swear it!" All the time I was wondering what I should do to keep him from his mad purpose.

He lay back on his pillows, white and ghastly; his thin features and sunken eyes showed hawklike above the rough growth of his four weeks' beard. I took his hand. His pulse was rapid, and his lean fingers clenched themselves round mine.

"Look here," he said, "I don't know—— There aren't any words to tell you how true it is. I am not mad, I am not wandering. I am as sane as you are. Now listen, and if you've a human heart in you, you'll help me. When I married her I gave up hypnotism and all the old studies; she hated the

whole business. But before I gave it up I hypnotised her, and when she was completely under my control I forbade her soul to leave its body till my time came to die."

I breathed more freely. Now I understood why he had said, "She *cannot* die."

"My dear old man," I said gently, "dismiss these fancies, and face your grief boldly. You can't control the great facts of life and death by hypnotism. She is dead; she is dead, and her body lies in its place. But her soul is with God who gave it."

"No!" he cried, with such strength as the fever had left him. "No! no! Ever since I have been ill I have seen her, every day, every night, and always wringing her hands and moaning, 'Let me go, John—let me go.'"

"Those were her last words, indeed," I said; "it is natural that they should haunt you. See, you bade her soul not leave her body. It has left it, for she is dead."

His answer came almost in a whisper, borne on the wings of a long breathless pause.

"*She is dead, but her soul has not left her body.*"

I held his hand more closely, still debating what I should do.

"She comes to me," he went on; "she comes to me continually. She does not reproach, but she implores, 'Let me go, John—let me go!' And I have no more power now; I cannot let her go, I cannot reach her. I can do nothing, nothing. Ah!" he cried, with a sudden sharp change of voice that thrilled through me to the ends of my fingers and feet: "Ah, Kate, my life, I will come to you! No, no, you shan't be left alone among the dead. I am coming, my sweet."

He reached his arms out towards the door with a look of longing and love, so really, so patently addressed to a sentient presence,

that I turned sharply to see if, in truth, perhaps—— Nothing—of course—nothing.

"She is dead," I repeated stupidly. "I was obliged to bury her."

A shudder ran through him.

"I must go and see for myself," he said.

Then I knew—all in a minute—what to do.

"I will go," I said. "I will open her coffin, and if she is not—is not as other dead folk, I will bring her body back to this house."

"Will you go now?" he asked, with set lips.

It was nigh on midnight. I looked into his eyes.

"Yes, now," I said; "but you must swear to lie still till I return."

"I swear it." I saw I could trust him, and I went to wake the nurse. He called weakly after me, "There's a lanthorn in the tool-shed—and, Bernard——"

"Yes, my poor old chap."

"There's a screwdriver in the sideboard drawer."

I think until he said that I really meant to go. I am not accustomed to lie, even to mad people, and I think I meant it till then.

He leaned on his elbow, and looked at me with wide open eyes.

"Think," he said, "what she must feel. Out of the body, and yet tied to it, all alone among the dead. Oh, make haste, make haste; for if I am not mad, and I have really fettered her soul, there is but one way!"

"And that is?"

"I must die too. Her soul can leave her body when I die."

I called the nurse, and left him. I went out, and across the wold to the church, but I did not go in. I carried the screwdriver and the lanthorn, lest he should send the nurse to see if I had taken them. I leaned

on the churchyard wall, and thought of her. I had loved the woman, and I remembered it in that hour.

As soon as I dared I went back to him—remember I believed him mad—and told the lie that I thought would give him most ease.

"Well?" he said eagerly, as I entered.

I signed to the nurse to leave us.

"There is no hope," I said. "You will not see your wife again till you meet her in heaven."

I laid down the screwdriver and the lanthorn, and sat down by him.

"You have seen her?"

"Yes."

"And there's no doubt?"

"There is no doubt."

"Then I *am* mad; but you're a good fellow, Bernard, and I'll never forget it in this world or the next."

He seemed calmer, and fell asleep with my

hand in his. His last word was a "Thank you," that cut me like a knife.

When I went into his room next morning he was gone. But on his pillow a letter lay, painfully scrawled in pencil, and addressed to me.

"You lied. Perhaps you meant kindly. You didn't understand. She is not dead. She has been with me again. Though her soul may not leave her body, thank God it can still speak to mine. That vault—it is worse than a mere churchyard grave. Good-bye."

I ran all the way to the church, and entered by the open door. The air was chill and dank after the crisp October sunlight. The stone that closed the vault of the Hursts of Hurstcote had been raised, and was lying beside the dark gaping hole in the chancel floor. The nurse, who had followed me, came in before I could shake off the horror that held me moveless. We both went down into the vault. Weak, exhausted by illness

and sorrow, John Hurst had yet found strength to follow his love to the grave. I tell you he had crossed that wold alone, in the grey of the chill dawn; alone he had raised the stone and had gone down to her. He had opened her coffin, and he lay on the floor of the vault with his wife's body in his arms.

He had been dead some hours.

* * * * *

The brown eyes filled with tears when I told my wife this story.

"You were quite right, he was mad," she said. "Poor things! poor lovers!"

But sometimes when I wake in the grey morning, and, between waking and sleeping, think of all those things that I must shut out from my sleeping and my waking thoughts, I wonder was I right or was he? Was he mad, or was I idiotically incredulous? For—and it is this thing that haunts me—when I found them dead together in the

vault, she had been buried five weeks. But the body that lay in John Hurst's arms, among the mouldering coffins of the Hursts of Hurstcote, was perfect and beautiful as when first he clasped her in his arms, a bride.

THE BLUE ROSE.

"YES, your grandfather he was one o' the old sort—honest as the day, as the sayin' is, an' well brought up, if he wasn't always easy to live with—an' that set on the truth, an' that pertickler—well, if it 'adn't a' bin for 'im bein' that pertickler, you gells would a' 'ad a red-'aired woman to your granny instead o' me."

A smile went round the tea-table; Mrs. Minver's grandchildren nodded, and looked at me—you know the look when there is a story in the air, and you are expected to ask for it. But I was too shy. It was my first visit to Myrtle Cottage. Lottie Minver and I were

both serving our time with Miss Ellends (*Modes et Robes*), and I was only sixteen then.

"A red-'aired woman," Mrs. Minver went on, "an' that would a' been a pity on all accounts, for 'e was a fine man as ever I see, an' me bein' no slip of a chit—'is sons all measured over their six foot—an' all bin measured too——"

She sighed, and looked out through the open door at the narrow strip of back garden, where scarlet runners and stocks and reluctant sunflowers had been coaxed to grow. We were having tea in the kitchen. The table was covered with brown oilcloth. The cups were white, with mauve spots. We had cresses for tea, and winkles, because it was Sunday.

"A fine man 'e was, to be sure," she went on. "That's 'is portrait as 'angs to the right o' the parlour chimley-piece, just over the crockery lamb yer Aunt

Eliza give me the very last fair-day afore the Lord took 'er. A fine figure of a man he was, my dears, an' much sought after, but mighty pertickler. An' so 'e married me."

Mrs. Minver smoothed her black alpaca apron complacently.

"What was it about the red-haired young lady?" I asked.

"Ah! that's a tale, an' it just shows 'ow careful a gell should be when she's courtin'."

This sounded interesting.

"Do tell us the tale," I urged.

"Oh, it's nothin' much to tell," said Mrs. Minver; but she settled herself against the cushions of her Windsor chair and stroked her left mitten with her right hand in a way that promised.

"Come, granny, tell Lily about the blue roses."

"'Old yer tongue, then, till I can get a

word in hedgeways! Blue roses, indeed! Spoilin' a story afore it's begun! Well, you must know, young lady, as I was brought up in the country — a reg'lar Kentish apple I was, my man useter say. Our home was in Kent, down among the cherry orchards. We 'ad a nice little orchard oursel's, an' our house, it was a wooden 'ouse, all built o' boards like, not bricks like you see 'em 'ere. An' there was a big pear tree, as went all up one side of the house—one branch right and one left—even like, for all the world like a ladder. We useter pick the pears outer our bedroom winder, me and my cousin Hetty did. Jargonels they was, an' a sight sweeter than any as goes to market nowadays.

"Our garden it wasn't much of a one for size, but for flowers—there! it was a perfect moral—cram full it was—all sorts—pinks an' pansies an' lilies, roses, jassermine, an

sweet willies, an' wallflowers, an' daffies, and spring flowers, which is my favourites outer all the flowers."

"What are spring flowers?"

"They're a reg'lar old-fashioned flower—gells used allus to have 'em in their gardens long afore you was thought of, nor me neither. Like wallflowers they be, summat, only pink an' yeller,' an' only one on a stalk, an' soft like velvet, an' smelling like honey, they did. I haven't seen none o' them since I come to live in Bermondsey.

"Well, our little wooden 'ouse, it stood on the hill, an' as you come up, whether 'twas by the road, as was white an' windin', or whether 'twas by the shorter way through the medders an' the hop-garden, the first you see of our 'ouse was the white rose tree. It clomb all over the side of the 'ouse—not the side where the pear tree was, but the other—there was no windows that side the house—and the rose clomb all

along—and blow! it did blow, that rose did. Pearl-white the roses was, or what you might call blush-pink, and hundreds of 'em. It was quite a picter. Well, one fine summer every rose as come on that tree wasn't white nor blush-pink, any more, but *blue*—a darkish blue at the edges and paler to the middles. Not pretty? Well, p'raps not; but I tell you there never was such a fuss made over any rose as you'd call pretty as there was over that blue rose. Parson, he was always comin' down to see it, an' bringin' his friends, from London sometimes; an' the gentry they drove in their carriages to see our blue rose; an' the tradesmen an' grocers they come in their carts from far an' near, for they said, 'Well, it was a novelty.'

"An' they said it would surely take the prize at the Flower Show. But it was Hetty's rose bush. Father'd give it her when first she come to live with us. She come quite

little, and she cried at the strange place, an' all she took to was the white roses. So father he give her the bush—an' next year father 'e died—about cherry time it was.

"So when they said that about the prize, Hetty said she didn't care about prizes an' Flower Shows an' things. It was quite enough to 'ave such a rose tree for 'er very own.

"The next year the roses come blue again, an' every one come more 'n ever to look, an' the grocers an' people with carts they come from far an' near, for they said it was a novelty.

"But mother, she was rather quiet-like, an' she didn't say much about the roses; an' one day when she an' me was makin' up the bread—just our two selves, in the back kitchen—she says to me—

"'Addie,' she says (my name's Adelaide), 'about them blue roses, now. If it wasn't

that I don't like to think o' a child o' mine bein' up to such tricks, I should say as you or Hetty had been a' borrowed o' my blue-bag.'

"'Your blue-bag, mother!' says I. Hard work I had to keep my face, for Hetty she was a-makin' faces at me through the winder.

"'Yes, my blue-bag,' mother says, lookin' at me very straight.

"'Why, aunt,' says Hetty through the window, 'if it was the blue-bag, how would all the roses be the same? An' wouldn't it all wash off in the rain? An' you know it's always brighter after a shower,' she says. 'Besides, would we do such a silly thing if we could, an' keep it up so, an' all? We might do it onst or twice,' says she.

"'There's summat in all that,' says my mother, going on with the bread. 'I misdoubt me it's age turns the roses blue, like it turns folks' hair white. The rose was allus a

pearly white or what you might call a blush-pink afore.'

"An' the grocers an' people with carts they come from far an' near to see the rose tree, for it was a novelty, ye see.

"Says I to Hetty that night after I'd said my prayers an' read my chapter—for I was allus properly brought up—'Hetty,' I says, 'fancy mother saying that about the blue-bag!'

"'Yes, fancy!' says Hetty, laughin'—an' she snuffs out the candle with 'er fingers an' jumps into bed. 'I ain't agoin' to 'ave my blue roses run down neither. Why, I'm agoin' to take the prize at the Flower Show—I am, with my wonderful blue roses!'

"An' sure enough she told parson the very next day as she would try for the prize at the Flower Show.

"It was just about that time she took up with George Winstead. Yes, 'im as come to be your gran'father instead, an' is lyin' in his

grave at Long Malling this twenty good years. Well, they kep' company together, an' every one was willin', for he was a godly young man, an' taught in Sunday School, an' had good hopes of his uncle's business, which it was a corn chandler's in Medstone, an' she was a well-lookin' girl enough for all her red hair, which was made fun of then, though I hear it's all the rage nowadays. I never see a girl so took up with a chap as she was with him. She give up curlin' 'er 'air acause he liked it plain, and she took to readin' the Bible and sayin' her prayers (like I'd allus done, and she'd allus laugh at me afore for it). Why, I've seen her kneel there over 'alf an hour, and then get outer bed again when she thought I was asleep and kneel down on the bare boards by the winder an' cry an' pray an' say, 'George, George,' an' pray again, not out loud, but so as I could 'ear 'er. Not

proper prayers she didn't say like people gets taught, but things outer 'er own 'ead, an' the same things over an' over, till I useter say—

"'Come along ter bed, Hetty, do, for gracious' sakes. You'll catch your death o' cold on them boards, an' I'm a-droppin' with sleep.'

"Well, as Flower Show day come nearer an' nearer, she grew stupider an' stupider, an' more an' more given to prayin', an' used to be all for goin' off by herself an' leavin' everything to me—even to makin' our dresses for the Flower Show an' lookin' after them roses what was to take the prize. I did it all, a' course—I was allus called a good-natured gell—an' the dresses they looked lovely, an' the roses was bluer than ever, instead o' being a pearly white or a blush-pink, like they should ha' been by rights. An' Hetty she prayed an' cried o' nights till I wonder I ever got a wink o' sleep, an' of a day she'd laugh

till she nearly cried again. Well, flower-show day come, an' we 'ad our new sprigged prints—gowns was wore short in the waist then—an' Hetty she looked like a ghost in hers, but they did say mine became me wonderful.

"It was a beautiful day, I remember, very sunny an' bright, an' you was glad to walk the shady side o' the way that day, I can tell you. Very hot it was in the big barn where the Flower Show was. 'Twas all done up fine with flags an' wreaths an' all sorts, an' it was that hot the flowers was most wilted afore it come time for the prizes. An' every one was wipin' their faces with their 'andkerchers, an' saying there hadn't been such a day this twenty year.

"When it come time for the prizes we was all settin' on forms packed close like herr'ns. Mother was there, of course, an' George an' his friends, an' Hetty sat nexter me, an' George—that's your gran'father—was settin'

the other side of her. An' she kep' edgin' away from him an' getten' close to me, an' crushin' my new print, not to mention 'er own, an' she kep' on 'oldin' my 'and that tight I didn't know 'ow to bear myself, an' I never see a bonnet with pink ribbons look worse on any young woman than it did on her. Mine always suited me. I 'ad it done up with blue the year I was married.

"Presently it come to roses. The barn was full—all the gentry an' the parson an' his friends an' the grocers an' people with carts 'ad come from far an' near.

"Well, the gentleman what was giving out who had got prizes, he takes up the bunch o' blue roses (I'd done 'em up nicely with a white ribbon, for Hetty was in one of her queer fits an' wouldn't touch 'em), an' he says—

"'Hetty Martin——'

"Hetty jumped on her feet. I *felt* what

she was agoin' to do, an' I tried to hold her down, but no. She shook her arm clear o' me, an' she called out in a kind o' sharp shrieky voice as you could a' heard a mile off—

"'Don't you go for to give *me* no prizes,' she says. 'It's all a lie—them roses is made up blue. Aunt she just hit it—it *was* the blue-bag. I never meant to tell, but I can't abear it. I made 'em up blue—an' I done it myself, an' I don't care who knows it. There!'

"Yes, my dears—well may you look! She spoke up like that—she did indeed—afore all that barnful! I never see such a gell. Why, I wouldn't never even a' thought o' such a thing, let 'lone doin' it. Disgraceful, I call it—a gell puttin' 'erself forward afore folks like that!

"You could a' heard a pin drop, as the sayin' is, the place was that quiet, for full 'arf a minute. My 'eart was in my mouth,

and for that 'arf minute I didn't know what she'd say next.

"The silly gell! Why, two whole summers we'd blued them roses, an' no one never know'd, an' no one wouldn't never a' known. We useter do it of a mornin' early afore mother come down. Hetty an' me we useter creep down in our stocking-feet, so's not to make a clutter, an' afore we raked out the fire or opened the house we'd run round to the rose tree an' look if there was any more buds out; an' Hetty 'ud say, 'Here's another, Addie,' an' I'd say, 'All right, Hetty, we'll 'ave 'im,' an' I'd rub the blue-bag round it once or twice, an' when it rained the blue soaked in more, an' the wet would seem to take it right into the roses' hearts. An' as the rose opened it would be all blue—from us having blued the edges. An' to think we might a' gone on an' on, an' took all the prizes at the Flower Shows! I hate a fool.

"Well, that day in the barn it lasted —that kinder quiet like as if we was in church—it lasted for full 'arf a minute, an' it seemed like twenty—an' then there came a buzz, buzz, like a whole bench o' bees when a boy throws an apple at 'em; an' Hetty she says, '*Oh!*' quite soft and frightened-like — as well she might be—an' then, afore any one could say a word to 'er, she was off, through the big barn door, like a rabbit with the dogs arter it.

"The old gentleman what give the prizes, he said he'd know'd it all along—but 'e 'adn't, for he'd drove over in his own carriage to see our blue roses, and called them 'curious nateral pheno—' suthin' or other."

"And Hetty didn't tell of *you*, Mrs. Minver?"

"Oh no, my dear! With all her faults, Hetty was never *that* sort o' girl."

"And Mr. George?"

"Oh! he come up that arternoon—I see him from our window by the pear tree—and Hetty she says—

"'I'm agoin' inter the orchard,' she says; 'if 'e wants me—but I don't think 'e will want me,' says she.

"He did want her though, an' he says to me—

"'You come along, Addie, an' hear what I've got to say.'

"We went out inter the cherry orchard—all the cherries was gathered, though—an' Hetty was there, walkin' up and down like a ferret as wants to get out of its hutch an' can't. An' George he says—

"'Lookee here, Hetty,' he says, 'I don't wish no ill-feelin', but you'll see it's best for us to part. I'm sure, if you set any store by me, you wouldn't wish me to keep company with a gell as could act a livin' lie, as parson

says. An' I'm sure the Lord wouldn't grant a blessin', an' I wish you well an' good-bye.'

"I never see a gell look so plain—for a rather good-looking gell—as Hetty did then, for her eyes was all red and swelled up with crying, an' she twisted her nose and mouth up, like as if she was agoin' to begin again.

"'Good-bye, George,' says she. 'No, I wouldn't wish it, George,' she says, 'not if you don't, dear George.'

"An' with that she walked away very quiet, an' George, he stood quite still, not looking at anythin' for a minute or two, an' then he give a sorter shrug an' a sorter sigh, an' he went off by the lower gate without as much as a 'Good-day to you.'

"When tea-time come, mother she says—

"'Enough said about a bit o' gell's non-

sense;' an' she ups the stairs to Hetty, and she says at the door—

"'Come down to tea, my gell.'

"An' Hetty she says—

"'Don't want no tea, aunt.'

"An' mother she goes in, an' there's Hetty lyin' face down on the bed, an' mother she says—

"'Come, child, it's no use a-grislin' over spilt milk; an' arter all—

"A fault 'at's owned
Is 'arf atoned."

Come along down, an' let's say no more about it.'

"But Hetty she says (I was atop o' the stairs, an' I heard her)—

"'It ain't no use, aunt,' she says, 'an' you've been's good's a mother to me, an' I thanks you an' I loves you—that I do. But nothin's no good now. You let me be, there's a dear auntie.'

"An' mother she left her, just a sayin'—

"'Don't you take on 'bout George, now. He'll come round.'

"An' next mornin' when I woke up Hetty was gone, and we never seed her again."

"Gone? Where to?" I asked.

"To Medstone first, an' then to London; an' mother couldn't never 'ear what come of her—but I did 'ear she come to no good."

"And George?"

"Well, George he took on for a bit, an' didn't take to his victuals as a young man should; but I allus spoke him civil, an' when we was alone I said, 'Pore George!' an' 'Wasn't it hard when you was fond of a person to have 'em own up a liar quite shameless afore parson an' all!' An' he said, 'Yes, 'twas cruel hard.' An' next year we was married, George an' me."

"And I suppose you never told him you had helped to blue the roses?"

"My dear! Now, how could I? an' him that pertickler!'

NOT EXCEEDING £5.

"BUT surely they left some address?"

"Not as I knows on."

"How long have they been gone?"

"I dunno at all, I'm shaw!"

The caretaker at No. 19, Westphalia Terrace, leaned on the broom which she had brought up to help her to answer the door, and looked at me with disfavour.

"Do you think the landlord knows?"

No answer. The caretaker shivered in her frowsy red shawl and list slippers, and remarked to the world in general that "when doors was kep' open there was a orful draught."

I took out half a crown.

"Look here!" I said, "this coin shall be yours if you'll tell me how long you've been here—who the landlord is—and anything you may have heard from the tradespeople about the family."

"I never gossip with tradesfolk, nor nobody," was her inspiriting reply; but she gave me the address of a firm in Gray's Inn and shut the door with all possible speed, leaving me on the dusty doorstep, which was still marked by the feet of the men who had carried out the furniture. They must have moved on a wet day.

Imagine the situation. A young man goes away to Switzerland to the bedside of a dying uncle, and comes back on the wings of the wind to lay his newly acquired fortune at the feet of the dearest girl in the world, and finds her gone —hopelessly, utterly gone—her house desolate, no flowers in the windows, no furni-

ture in the place, "To Let" staring from every window, and only a woollen-swathed caretaker—a vicious variety of charwoman-kind—on whom to pour out his wrath and his questions. I had only known Clara three months. I knew not a single one of her friends—I knew she had some few relations —her mother's family—and I did not even know their name. The Vanes knew no one in Kensington, and they only knew me through our cat having fortunately been killed by their dog. Mr. Vane had called to apologize, and had asked me to call, and I had seen Clara, and made my mind up. One good look at her was enough to convince any man of sense that she was the only girl in the world. But I was poor then, and poverty is proud. The Vanes' house, dress, and mode of life betokened wealth. I could not tell her I loved her, and now——

The east wind blew cheerlessly up the

street, driving a horrid army of rubbish and torn paper before it. The charwoman opened the door again and put out her curl-papered head to say—

"There was a funeral afore the sale: perhaps they'd tell you at the undertaker's."

A funeral! I hailed a passing hansom and drove straight to Gray's Inn.

"Yes; Mr. Vane unfortunately died at one of our houses—19, Westphalia Terrace. Left no estate: had systematically overshot his income. Sorry I can't give you any further information."

So a dapper clerk, who seemed absorbed in papers when I was shown in, but whom I saw at the window as I went away through South Square, paring his nails and whistling to the sparrows.

Not a clue. The tradesmen knew nothing, the vicar knew nothing, the police, of course, knew nothing and did nothing but pocket my

money and take down things in notebooks with blunt pencils.

Advertisement failed absolutely. And so Clara Vane was lost to me—passed out of my life completely—leaving me with a really respectable fortune, which it was entirely out of the question for me to enjoy. I never wavered in the least in my intention to marry her if she would have me, and I simply waited until I should see her again.

It will have been inferred that I did see her again. I did, but not for three years. Three long years. I won't go so far as to say that an hour never passed in which I did not think of her, but I'll swear that two never did. And I loved her more than ever. I used to think sometimes in the evenings of her pretty grey eyes and her short, dark, curly hair, and that dear voice of hers, till I could not stand it any longer, and then I used to rush out of my lodgings in Regent's

Park and tear over to Kensington, and walk up and down outside 19, Westphalia Terrace, till I might fairly have been described as known to the police.

Well, after three years of this life—I had my own work to do and my other life to live, but that has nothing to do with this story—after three years business took me to Tunbridge.

I went by an express train. I bought the papers and got a comfortable corner in a first-class carriage, where I let the papers lie on my knee and dreamed my usual dreams—Clara, Clara, Clara.

The stations raced by. Chislehurst, Orpington. I looked idly out at the station-gardens, all roses and pinks and honeysuckle, the havens wherein porters seek refuge from the grime of railway life.

As we swept into Halstead Station I looked out, with a torpid curiosity as to the gardens there, and saw Clara! She was

standing on the up platform, a bunch of red and pink roses in her hand. She had on a grey dress with black ribbons and a large grey hat with black feathers, and she had just the same sweet, dear little face and curling hair.

Whizz!—zz!—whirr! The train had shot past the station, the carriage windows rattled, the train vibrated and pulsated with the increasing speed, and every pulse and every vibration was carrying me away from my heart's heart. I leaned out of the window, dazed and stupid with delight at the mere sight of her. I could still just see her grey gown and bright flowers, then some one on the platform stepped between her and me, and my senses returned to me. In a flash I saw that if I went on to Sevenoaks and got a train back, she, who was obviously waiting for the next up train, would have left the station long before I reached it. Probably she was only spending the day

at Halstead, and any search for her there would be vain.

If I failed to grasp this chance, another three years—priceless years of youth!—might go before I saw her again. All this flashed through my mind in the space it took me to get from the window to the electric communication with the guard.

I broke the glass, pulled out the handle. The train slackened, and, as it stopped, the guard put his head in at my carriage window.

His eye glanced round the carriage. I won't say he was disappointed not to see a corpse or some signs of a struggle, but the man was human.

"Why, you're all right," he said; "blest if I didn't think you was dead when I heard that bell! It's a wonder it's connected. Just my luck, too, and us ten minutes behind already! What did yer do it for, eh?" He

opened the door and put his head in with sudden ferocity.

"I stopped the train because I'm going to get out," I said firmly.

"Nothing wrong?"

"No; but I'm going to get out."

He planted himself heavily in the doorway.

"No, you don't," he said.

I was desperate. We were three hundred yards or more from the station. The up train was signalled. Another minute of this folly would lose me Clara.

I took out a five-pound note, laid it on the seat, and advanced towards him.

A Herculean push, I calculated, would hurl the guard from the train, and I should flee back along the line.

To my astonishment his face had changed.

"And what about my trouble, sir?" he asked politely, gazing at the note—"stopping the train and liable, sir, to get into trouble with the Company?"

I jumped out of the carriage; he made way for me deferentially. Our hands touched. Great is the currency, and it will prevail. The next minute I was speeding back along the down line towards Halstead station. The line is laid on exceedingly rough gravel, and running was not easy. Nor am I, at any time, a practised runner. My breath came fast and with difficulty; my knees ached furiously; but I ran on. I could hear distinctly the rumble of the train in the tunnel behind me. The up train! I was, I reflected, running a race with the main line up: the prize—Clara.

If the main line up won, it would bear her away on its bosom: if I won, should I? I pressed my failing legs forward—fought for freer breath—got it in a rapture of relief which by experts is called, I believe, the second wind—and the main line up and I came in neck and neck. But of course I landed on the down platform. I flew up

the steps and over the bridge—I reached the up-platform breathless, hatless, but radiant.

Clara was just getting into a first-class carriage.

I stumbled in after her and sank panting in the corner. She, seated at the far window, did not turn her eyes on me till the slow throb of the train betokened departure. Then she looked at her fellow-traveller and blanched. We were alone in the carriage, and I fear I had a lunatic air. Then she recognized me. Her face flushed, and she said—

"Oh—*you?*" with a delightful lightening of eyes and brow and a dimpling at the corner of the mouth.

"I had," I exclaimed pantingly—"to run —to catch—the train!"

"I suppose so," she said, leaning back in her corner and smiling. "It wasn't very wise to give yourself so little time to do it

in. Where have you sprung from? Have you friends down here?"

"I have sprung," I said, beginning to recover myself, "from the main line down, and am subject to a penalty not exceeding five pounds for availing myself of the electric communication and stopping that train."

"Do you mean that you were in that train that went through just now?" said Clara, looking interested.

"Yes; and I stopped it. The guard was not at first satisfied with my reasons, though they were of the best."

"Why did you stop it? What were your reasons—if one may ask?"

"You may ask, though the guard did not. I stopped the train because I have been looking for you for three years, and I saw you on that platform. I would have stopped a tiger, or the march of civilization, on the same grounds."

She gave me a hurried glance and dropped her long lashes.

I mopped my forehead furtively before proceeding.

"I have been looking for you for three years," I said, "to ask you to marry me. Dearest! — I never have even thought of marrying any one else, and I have been looking for you all this time." My flippancy, born of nervousness, was deserting me. I leaned forward earnestly. "Oh, how good it is to see your dear face again!" I said. "This pays for all. It is——"

"Stop!" she interrupted, still looking down. "I suppose you don't know I was married three years ago to General Peglar!"

Married! I sank back, sick at heart. The train stopped, and a copy of the *Financial News* got in, with a gentleman completely buried it it.

But, buried as he was, he was a check on conversation.

That was an awful journey—I sat up very straight and asked questions about roses and the people who lived at Halstead, and the prospect of the hops, and many other things about which I did not want to hear, and Mrs. Peglar answered me. And the *Financial News* and its occupant sat opposite to me.

Clara grew more and more silent—I more and more morose. At Charing Cross, as I handed her out, she said in a voice that was not very steady—

"Won't you come and see me sometimes? I live at the Red House, Halstead."

"No," I said, "that would be too much. I hope I shall never see you again."

She bowed her head. We stood facing each other on the platform, and I dare say the porters found us amusing.

"Good-bye," I said, my sharp disappoint-

ment lending a vinegary flavour to my voice. "Your mother, I trust, is well?"

She did not answer, and I blundered on—

"I regret to see that you are in slight mourning. Not, I trust——"

"No, no, no!" she cried vehemently. "Mamma, at least, is left to me. *She* doesn't hate me because I tried to do the best for her when she was left penniless. *She* knows I thought I *ought* to marry General Peglar. *She* knows how I cried and cried, and wondered why you — where you——"

Clara stopped short.

"Good-bye," she said, and walked down the platform. "I'm not in mourning for my darling mamma, thank God! It's for General Peglar, of course."

"What! Is he dead?"

She stopped and looked at me.

"He died of apoplexy the day we were

married," she said. "Hush! he was very good to me."

We went down into Charing Cross Gardens, where the children and the sparrows play, and sat there in the sunshine, hand in hand.

TIM.

TIM was very unhappy. He was a "trained dawg" by trade, and he loathed his profession. His home was at the heels of the master, and he hated his home. His associates were the two love-birds, the brown rat, and the four white mice. These, though manifestly inferior creatures, lived in a cage and were never kicked. Tim despised his associates when he was not envying them. For they were all happy—the mice in the daily spasm of joyful surprise at not being killed by the cat; and the cat in her consciousness of a triumph over the old Adam, entailing social equality with a "trained dawg." The rat, whose hopeful spirit nothing could subdue,

was happy in his dreams of freedom; and as for the love-birds, they used to sit side by side on their little red perch, and say to each other, "What does it matter where we are, as long as we are together?"

But Tim was wretched. Even his love for the tabby-cat was bitterness, for her spirit was broken by long years spent under the master's hand, and she no longer felt degradation in a mouse's touch. Tim felt it keenly.

The happy family travelled all over the country to fairs and merry-makings, and Tim got to know the roads better than the master himself. And everywhere the same humiliating show.

His flesh used to creep when the mice ran over his back; and when the rat, dressed as a baby, was laid across his front paws as he sat up, he used to shiver with disgust.

When the love-birds passed him side by side in their smart chariot, drawn by the

rat in red harness, and driven by the mouse in sky-blue livery, Tim used to turn his head away.

He could have eaten the whole equipage at one mouthful.

The happy family, the master, the cage, the trestles and board fared on and on, in snow or shine on their round of monotonous changes—across the moors in biting wind and sleet; through still meadow-lands where the grass was knee-deep, and the buttercups and May bushes bloomed; and through towns—hateful places, where the stones were hot, and no one ever thought of giving a poor dog a drink of water.

Through all, Tim followed closely at the master's heels.

It was early in the summer that the tabby-cat died.

The happy family had spent the night at the sign of the Rising Sun. The master had breakfasted, but the rest of the family had

not. A new mouse had been bought the night before, and when the cat saw it through the cage-bars, the passions of her race stirred suddenly under the old tabby skin—the green eyes dilated.

Tim whined, foreseeing trouble.

The master took out the creatures and set them on the table—a rough table, scored deeply by the pocket-knives of generations of travellers who had eaten their bread and bacon on it.

The family were alone in the room, lined with benches, where, though it was June, a wood fire smouldered in an iron basket projecting from the wall. The sun shone through the latticed windows, and through the leaves of the rank currant-bushes outside a chequered light fell on the brick floor. The landlord was asleep in the bar. From the field opposite the house came the voices of the women-folk who were busy hanging linen on the hedge.

The master, having had as much beer as he could drink, took out his happy family and set them on the table. The white mice ran up and down perfunctorily; the rat, with wide eyes, nourished his old hope; the tabby sat at the end of the table a little apart; and the love-birds told each other the old tale yet once again: "What does it matter where we go if we are together?"

To be taken out of the cage meant nothing to them, nothing more than it meant every day; but to the new mouse it meant freedom, hope, life, happiness.

One little frantic scamper-rush across the beer-stained table, a light leap to the sanded floor! then a stronger rush, a heavier leap, a pitiful little cry! Then silence. The tabby-cat had killed the new mouse.

The master rose.

"You cursed beast!" he cried. Then he kicked the tabby-cat into one corner of the kitchen, and then from that into another,

with cries and curses, till the women of the house came in shrieking, and picked up the poor furry body, covered with sand and blood. The tabby-cat died that night, and Tim whined till the master kicked him into silence; and next day when the performance came off on the village-green, he missed his tip three times, and went beaten and dinnerless therefore.

The next town they stayed at was the town where the master had bought Tim, who had been taken struggling and whining from the chubby arms of a little girl in a blue check pinafore. A dog licence cost seven and sixpence, and the master offered ten shillings for the pup; so the mother sold it, and gave the child a farthing sugar-stick to console her. To this town the happy family now came. There was a new kitten, but it knew no tricks and had to be drugged before the performances. Then the mice ran over it, and the audience applauded its self-restraint.

Tim's heart was heavy. It was a hot day, and the board had been set up on a sandy space where thistles and dry prickly grasses grew. He had had no water since morning. When he looked up at the board and saw the drugged kitten in the place of the old tabby, he whined, with the usual result. To make things worse, there was a large and tolerably liberal crowd so that one had to go through all one's performances three times.

Tabby being dead, Tim's part in the programme was a hard one.

He had to march, to present arms, to die for the Queen, to sing, to dance, to jump through a hoop, and pick out certain words from among a dirty pile of wooden squares with the letters of the alphabet on them. He could spell his own name, and Tabby's. When he had spelt hers he threw up his head, howled, and was kicked. Some one in the crowd cried "Shame!" "Shame it is, indeed, sir," said the master, "to see a

dawg so wrong-'eaded as 'im an' greedy. 'E's 'ad a bloomin' sight better dinner'n me, as 'tis, and now 'e's all for eatin' 'is feller-creatures on the board. Clever? Oh yes, but bad-'earted! It's to save them pore little 'armless dears as I 'ave to kick the dawg."

The crowd, moved by his eloquence, fumbled in its pockets, and Tim took round the hat—a strong little hat that he wore on his own head and carried on his own paws; when many coppers fell in, as now, the little paws got very tired. As Tim made the weary round of the audience, his head hung lower than it should have done over the copper store. A kind little hand patted his head, and a kind little voice said—

"Poor doggie! poor Tim!"

That was the first kind word, the first kind touch, since he had been taken from the protecting folds of the blue pinafore: the master had only kicked him. He looked up. It was the same hand, the same voice—only

now the hands held crutches and the round face had grown pale and thin.

But it was the child who had cried when he was taken from her, four years before. Tim recognized her, with leaps of heart, and dared not even wag his tail, lest he should drop his hat with the money. But when the master lay steeped in beer that night, Tim stealthily left his side, and on soft-cushioned feet ran through the sleeping town, and lay down under the doorstep of the house where the lame child lived.

The master, rubbing a beery eye in the morning sunlight, missed the dog from his side, and the first outpourings of his wounded spirit may not here be set down.

Later, over a morning pot, he told his sorrows to a friendly bargee.

"But I mighter know'd it. Fust that blamed old cat, wot was worth a fipunnote enny day; and then Tim, wot 'asn't is ekal nor yet his price. I mighter know'd it. It

warn't for nothing I killed a spider on my 'at o' Chuseday, an' see the noo moon thro' a winder; blamed if I know wot winders was made for 'cept to get honest men into trouble."

"Nor me, neither," answered the bargee, who leaned on the table with his pewter between his elbows; "it was only last moon as I see through the swing door yonder—an' next day '*e* sent down word she was ter be painted insidenout, not namin' no colour, d'ye see? So I gets a lotter green paint and I paints her from stem ter stern, an' I tell yer she looked A 1. Then '*e* comes along, and 'e says, 'Wot yer painter all one colour for?' An' I says, says I, "Cause I thought she'd look fust-rate,' I says, 'and I thinks so still.' An' 'e says, '*Dew* yer? Then yer can just pay for the paint yerself.' An' I 'ad to, too. An' wot could a' made 'im like that if it warn't that blamed moon?"

"Blow the moon, says I," returned the

master, sadly, "but green paint ain't to be compared with losin' a train-dawg an' a tabby, though old;" and having called for another pint, he slouched out to look for Tim. He looked, naturally, in all the public-houses, but as Tim was not there, the master did not find him. Towards evening he bought another pup—a mongrel poodle this time—and took it away to beat into the shape of a "train-dawg."

Tim knew perfectly well when the master left the town. As long as the happy family remained, Tim lay still under the stone; not even thirst could bring him out. But when the master had at last gone, cursing, and it was dark, Tim crept out, stretched himself, ran round the town, had a drink and a snack in the gutter, and at last returning to the doorstep, lay down—on it this time—and slept.

It was there that the lame child found him when she opened the door. He leaped

at her with a rush that almost overset her. She sat down on the doorstep and took him in her arms, and the two cried together in the joy of that reunion.

Letty lived alone. Her mother, who had been used sometimes to creep under the one veil of illusion we leave to poor folk, had died drunk. Drunk, she had knocked Letty down and lamed her for life. Letty admitted extenuating circumstances: the charing-and-washing was a laborious calling, and ill-paid.

She herself had a light, cool hand and a "knack," as she called it, with coloured wools and a bone hook. She used to make babies' socks and mats and little shawls, and sell them in the streets.

To sit on the doorstep in the sun, daintily passing the bright wool through her fingers and seeing her work grow under her hands—that had been her great happiness. Her great trouble had been to carry her work

through the town in a basket slung round her neck. Now Tim was with her always, doubling the happiness and halving the cares. She could have made money easily by Tim's tricks, but she divined his hatred of them, and never once asked him to do so much as beg; and so his life was unbrokenly happy—one long, lovely dream of petting and play; a gracious quiet, and rest from the old fear of the master's hand. That was Tim's taste of heaven.

Walks they had, too, without the basket, when first Tim went to live in the poor room that they called home. But by-and-by he grew to understand that there were to be no more walks except on business. That was in August.

In September a neighbour undertook the sale of the woolly goods in the basket. Letty lay at home and made them.

Before Christmas the little slim fingers grew too weak to hold the red, and blue, and

orange skeins—no more work was done. The neighbours took it in turns to help and look after Letty, who lay in bed all the time. She seemed very tired, Tim thought, but never too tired to stroke his smooth white head when he snuggled down beside her, to kiss him, and talk to him, or to hold him in her arms while he slept.

But there came a hard day, when she would not answer his whine of joy as he leaped on the ragged quilt—would not move her hand to stroke him.

Tim had crept under the bed when the doctor came. He hated all men, for the master's sake. He had heard a whispering, and then the doctor and the two neighbours had gone out of the room.

When the door closed behind them, Tim came out, shook himself, and leaped on the bed. Letty never moved. He whined and thrust his cold nose against her neck, under her ear. She did not take him in her arms.

He scratched at the bed-clothes, and still she did not move.

Oh, what was it? What had he done? Why was she angry with him? Was it—could it be—that she was vexed because he had neglected his tricks? How selfish he had been! He jumped off the bed, and began to go through the old tricks, slowly and carefully, marching, presenting arms, dying for the Queen. Then he danced, and then turned somersaults. Still she lay there, and *would* not notice him—*would* not speak to him. He could not do his other tricks. He had not the properties. How could he pick out his name and Tabby's when there were no wooden slabs? He jumped on the bed again to tell her so. Still she lay there quite still. His poor stupid head full of his one idea, he got down on to the floor again, and slowly went once more through the whole performance. He had often had to do it twice for the master. Surely *she* would look

now—would stroke him, and let him go to sleep with his face against her neck!

But that could never be again, because Letty was dead.

When a sour woman, sent at the expense of the parish, came in an hour later, she found Tim still standing at attention beside the bed where the dead child lay. She drove him out.

"Shoo! Get out, you brute. I never could abide dogs."

Tim hid himself again under the steps. When the woman was gone, he tried to get indoors again, but the door was locked. He crept back to the dusty refuge under the steps. He would wait, and, sooner or later, they would let him in, and perhaps she would have forgiven him by that time. He shivered as he sat there. He was always warm in her arms.

Then, one bitter day, some men carried something out of the house and put it in a

long carriage, and Tim perceiving at once that *she* was in that long carriage, followed it through the streets. A sharp wind drove the rain in his eyes as he went.

* * * * *

The master had come back to the town where he had lost Tim. The recollection did not endear the place to him; but he had seen two magpies that morning, and he knew that meant luck of some kind. And luck he had, as he told a friend afterwards, "the blamedest luck ever you see."

Walking into the town through its fringe of sordid yellow houses, with the cage on his back, his new pup at his heels, the master, foot-sore and profane, became aware of a pauper funeral, and following it—apparently the only mourner—Tim.

"I went along arter 'im pretty sharp, I tell ye; and I didn't take my hi off the bloomin' brute, not me! But there was the buryin' to be done afore I could get

anigh him. When the parson and folks 'ad gone off, 'e was left all alone. 'E didn't see me; he was a-whinin' and tearing' up the groun' with 'is paws, and kickin' up the devil's own delight, an' when I went to collar 'old on 'im, 'e turned an' bit me. To the bone 'e did, the ungrateful little beggar. But I gave 'im wot for, I tell ye: an' I fetched 'im 'ome at the end of a string. He don't never run away from me no more."

* * * * *

The happy family look on Tim as a desperate villain who abandoned duty at the call of pleasure. The brown rat alone, in whom the voice of hope is not dead even yet, sympathizes with him. But what is sympathy from a person you despise? One day, when the master was asleep in a dry ditch after a heavier beer than usual, the brown rat, peeping through the cage-bars with wistful admiration, asked—

"Why don't you run away again?"

"I can't! I am always chained," said Tim; "and besides, why should I? I've nowhere to run to!"

But the question stirred him, and he whined, till the master had to rouse himself and kick him into silence.

THE LINGUIST.

"HERE he is!" I said, as I heard the cab-wheels at the door. "Poor devil, I wonder how he will like Collingwood College!"

The French master shrugged his shoulders. "As the rest of us. It is not there the question. How will *we* like *him?*"

We were sitting in the dog-hutch—or masters' study—our only refuge from our flock; a dark, unwholesome, underground room that smelt ever of tea-leaves and black-beetles. The French master had his thumb in a yellow-covered novel as usual. As usual, too, the German master was busy with grammar and dictionary. The candles in

their bent japanned candlesticks lighted the room ill; but one hardly desired a light that should show more of it.

"The new master, sir," said the overgrown boy in buttons who opened the door and looked after the master's wife's pony. Then *he* came in. He was tall, very tall; he had a fair round face, and chubby hands, and a pair of very round innocent-looking blue eyes. Altogether, he was so like a large-sized child that his perfect self-possession came as a shock to one.

"First-rate, thank you," he said in answer to the "How-d'ye-do" with which I greeted him. "What a rummy little den you've got here! D'ye know, it is just a chance that I'm here as English master; I was nearly taking a berth as French master at Blackheath."

The French master looked up from his novel and said something courteous in his own tongue. The new man answered him.

I don't pretend to know anything about French, so I will only say that they didn't seem to be talking the same language. Then our German master roused himself: "You speak also German?" he asked.

"Sir," answered the junior master, "I speak all modern languages except Russian, which is not a civilized tongue. I am a linguist; that is my strong point." He laughed, and gaily dashed into a German phrase.

Our German master humoured him, and our French master found him more amusing than Catulle Mendès. He sat there beaming in the dim candlelight, and speaking first in French and then in German. His plunges into these tongues had a boldness about them that was almost convincing. Yet when he had gone to the Dutch cheese and small-beer provided as a restorative after his journey, and we were left alone, our French master spoke. "I have never heard," he said, "since

I teach the French, an accent so infame nor a construction so detestable."

"He thinks," said the German master, rubbing his head with his hands, "that he speaks German. O thou dear God! German!"

I found out next what his Latin was like, and when the lambs had been loosed from class, and were shrieking and shouting and fighting under the thin trees in the sodden playground, I thought it my duty to point out to him the false quantities he had made in my hearing.

"Did I?" he said cheerfully. "I dare say. No doubt my Latin is a little rusty. You see, it's modern languages that I'm great at. I wish we had a Spaniard here, or an Italian, now. There's nothing like keeping it up colloquially, eh?"

There was something about the boy—he could not have been more than twenty—which attracted me. It was partly his frank-

ness; a tolerably rare and much misprized quality. Before he had been at Collingwood College a week he had told us all about himself. The college is in one of London's dreariest northern suburbs. It stands, stately in its stucco, in a waste of yellow brick and iron railings, and shelters under its roof the young of the grocer, the tailor, and the licensed victualler. The principal is vulgar and greedy; the pupils, poor lads, are what their birth and breeding make them. The masters are generally decent fellows, often University men who are glad enough to get anything to do, even at Collingwood College, rather than starve or be longer a burden on the slender purse that has been strained to give them their education. The Linguist was not one of these.

"I've taken up teaching," he said, "just to show them what I'm made of. My uncle —he's my guardian, you know—he's an

awfully good fellow, but narrow—wants me to go in for farming, and because I wouldn't do that he cut off my allowance. How can I go in for farming? I want to travel, to translate, and to prepare for a great work, the work of my life—'Comparative Philology.' I'll tell you about it as we go down to Ludovici's;" and he took my arm and walked me off in the direction of a certain café where we masters were accustomed to supplement the Dutch cheese of Collingwood College. He talked about his book all the way there, and when we had ordered our supper-dish he talked Italian to the Management. The Management, being Italian, was quick-witted and good-natured, and Monsieur and Madame helped out the Linguist by smile and gesture.

"A most delightful chat," he said, plunging the spoon into the maccaroni. "What a gift it is though, isn't it? I wish you could talk Italian, old fellow. Eh?"

It was impossible to laugh at him, and to pity him was obviously unreasonable, for he was very happy. I never knew so inveterately hopeful a man. He had a thousand schemes for making a fortune, and in each of them he believed fully. He never abandoned a scheme from any doubt of success; only, when a new way to fame and fortune occurred to him, he embraced it with an enthusiasm so large as to overwhelm the old idea.

As an English master he was worse than useless, but I didn't see that it was my place to tell old Collingwood so; and as long as a master was popular old Collingwood was satisfied. He had no means, poor brute, of knowing whether a teacher was efficient or not; and the Linguist was popular. The German master liked him because he was patient, and played chess. The French master liked him because he was simple, and made an excellent and totally unconscious

butt. The lambs liked him because he was a thoroughly good fellow, and had, further, some distinction in athletics which gave him a *prestige* he could never have attained by proficiency in any scholastic branch. And the Amber Witch liked him because he was handsome and well-grown, a gentleman, and, from her point of view, a catch. The Amber Witch was the daughter of the Management at Ludovici's. She was dark and pretty, with immense black eyes as hard and shiny as beads, and a mouth like a scarlet flower. Her rejection of ineligible suitors always surprised them very much indeed. All her lovers believed in her pathetically, and she generally wore yellow. So we called her the Amber Witch.

Our Linguist fell in love with her the moment he caught sight of her through the tomatoes, salads, and sauce bottles of the window at Ludovici's. He fell in love with all the enthusiasm and hopefulness that

characterized him. Whenever he could get away from the lambs he was at the café—he lunched and dined and supped there, and he strolled in there for coffee and ices. And the Management smiled upon him. He used to talk Italian at first to the Amber Witch, but after a while he told me that she preferred to talk French to him.

"She says she wants to improve her accent," he explained. My own belief is, that she felt he had not command of enough Italian to come to the point in; and she knew, as well as I did, that he would rather never have told his love than have lowered himself by a declaration in his own language, of which she was entire mistress. Any way, I believe he proposed in French, and the Amber Witch accepted him. They were formally engaged. I confess that I did not expect the engagement to last—that I thought it would go the way of the many brilliant money-making schemes which the last few

months had brought to bud, to blossom, and to decay. But here no new enthusiasm supervened, and I felt what a fool I had been not to try interference before things had gone so far, for he loved the girl with all the faith and passion of a very pure and candid soul. The girl, ordinary little Italian milliner that she was, accepted his love as a matter of course, and his proposal as a matter of business. I had to look on and see it. And it was hard, for I had grown to love the boy. He was generous, unselfish, always at the command of any one who needed help; his schemes for money-making had always in postscripts a kindly application of his wealth when he should have made it.

"You know," said he to me, as we sat in the dog-hutch one evening, when the French master was at the theatre and the German master was at the Birkbeck—"you know, I must think of something at once to make

a position for *her*. She couldn't stand farming, so of course *that* question is settled. I think, as principal of an international college, I should make my mark—eh?"

"I should think so," I answered gravely. For the life of me, I could not help answering him as though he were a child building air-castles.

"You see, I come of age next month," he said, "and then I can do as I like. Of course my proficiency in languages would be a great thing in my favour, and I think the boys like me a little, don't they—eh?"

"Of course they do," I said.

"God knows why they should," he went on. In all but the one point he was the humblest man I ever knew. "Nor why *she* should. But she does, thank God; and they do. I ought to succeed. Oh yes; I shall succeed." There was the usual fire of enthusiasm in his eyes.

"I hope so, old fellow," said I, putting my

hand on his shoulder. "Let us have a game of chess," I went on. I wish I hadn't. I wish I had let him talk, but I was tired of my work, and very sad about my own affairs, which don't concern this story, and I felt I could not bear any more talk of his projects just then. So we played chess—and I wish we hadn't.

He didn't say any more about the international college. We were all very busy with the holidays coming on—the Easter holidays.

When I came back after Easter I saw at the end of our crescent a very large and new brass plate on the gate of a big house that had been empty some time. I crossed the road to look at it.

"INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE."

And below was the Linguist's name as principal.

As I stood there, gaping, he came running down the broad steps to me.

"Ah! I knew you'd be pleased," he said. "You see, I'm doing it in style. I got a hundred down when I came of age, and I'm doing most of it on tick. We're to be married in June. The thing will be fairly under way by then."

"What does your uncle say?"

"Oh, he's furious! Poor dear old boy! His class prejudices are monstrous. But, you see, it's my money, and he'll have to come round sooner or later. Come and see over the house." It was very large and bare, and had very little furniture in it; but that, he explained, would be all right when he had had time to look about him, And pupils—how many promises had he?

Well, in point of fact, none at present; but a great many of the boys at old Collingwood's had often told him they would like to come to his school, and he had some first-rate prospectuses.

He took me into a large bleak room whose

emptiness was only italicized by the desks and forms that ran down its gaunt length. Here was a deal table strewn with a lot of very expensive-looking stationery. I turned over some of it and noticed a line which ran, "Special attention will, of course, be given to Foreign Languages." I had it on my tongue's tip to tell him what a fool he was, and I laid down the prospectus and cleared my throat. Then I saw his face, and I simply could not do it. The boy was radiant; all the delight of a child with a new toy shone in his big blue eyes.

"Something like a prospectus that, eh!" he said, rubbing his hands.

I said it was indeed.

"I flatter myself that will fetch them if the plate doesn't," he went on.

I said if that didn't nothing would. Then he took me off to show me the kitchen and offices. As we went down the steep stairs I tried again to tell him he was an absolute

idiot, and I had actually opened my mouth for the purpose, when as we reached the bottom step he turned and threw his arm over my shoulder, in a boyish affectionate way he had, and said—

"No dog-hutches here, old fellow. You shall have the best room in the house for your study, and any screw you like to name. Eh? You'll come to me after midsummer—when the wedding's over and we're settled —eh?"

And then, I give you my word, I could not do it. I could not tell him that he hadn't a ghost of a chance of doing any good with his school, or with the Amber Witch either; that his foreign languages would be the contempt of a child in Ahn's First Course; that, in short, all his hopes and dreams were vain and fruitless. A better man would have told him all this at once. I wish I were a better man.

I only clapped him on the back and

wished him luck and thanked him for his offer; and then went back to Collingwood's, feeling as mean as a man who has promised a silver new nothing to a trusting three-year old.

Old Collingwood was furious at the brass plate. Of course he didn't know how little there was behind it—in every sense—and I wasn't going to enlighten him.

I helped the Linguist to address and send out his circulars, our French master smoking and looking on just to encourage us; and our German master helped me to carry them to the post in the waste-paper basket—a vehicle bitterly appropriate. Then the Linguist sat down and awaited applications from parents. But the post only brought disappointment, secured in halfpenny wrappers, mostly taking the form of advertisements from tradesmen desiring his custom. And his hundred pounds was nearly spent. He had bought an engagement ring and a locket

for the Amber Witch, and had taken her up the river and to the theatre. I imagine that time of waiting for pupils was the happiest of his life.

The continued silence of the parents had no effect on him. He was, as I have said, incurably hopeful. He was not saddened even by the curiously unanimous pressure brought to bear on him by about the middle of June by the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick-maker.

"This is terrible," I said to him, turning over a heap of blue and white bills. "What are you going to do——"

"Wolf at the door, eh?" he said cheerfully.

"Yes," I said, "the wolf is indeed at the door, calling for absolutely the last time before the matter leaves his hands." And indeed an angry milkman had just left a message in those terms.

"Oh, well, I must write to my uncle, I

suppose; though I did want him to see that I could do without him. However, for the poor wolf's sake——"

So he wrote, enclosing a prospectus. I was with him when the answer came.

"Now we'll send a bone to your friend the wolf," he said, tearing open the envelope. Then he grew suddenly silent—a breathless silence. He read the letter through twice, and his face was like death. The paper dropped from his fingers. He got up abruptly, and, walking to the window, looked out.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Read that," he said in a choked voice. I read—

"My dear Nephew,

"Your conduct in running counter to all my advice compels me to tell you that you are mistaken in your estimate of your fortune. You have nothing. All that your

father left you he desired me to use at my discretion. I have put it all into the farm, which is, besides, heavily mortgaged. Your only chance of pulling anything out of the fire is to return to the farm, to your duty, and to me. As for your engagement, I presume that will now be at an end. Your aunt sends her love, and

"I remain,

"Your affectionate

"UNCLE."

I laid the letter on the table.

"What shall I do? O my God, what shall I do? Think of *her*, old fellow. How can I tell her?"

"It won't make any difference to her," I said. "If she's any sort of girl she'll only love you the more."

There again I was wrong. I knew the Amber Witch better than to suppose that in that sense she was "any sort of a

girl," but I wanted to console him, and that seemed the easiest way. So I said again—

"Of course she'll never give you up because you're poor."

I wish I hadn't said that. He looked at me very earnestly.

"You think that angel would share my poverty?"

"Of course," I said. I knew it wasn't true, but his eyes frightened me. It was the first time I had seen them without the light of hope.

"Then," he said very slowly, "*I* must give *her* up."

"That's well said," I answered, feeling that good was coming out of evil. "That would be the honourable and right course. Don't see her again," I said, trying to spare him pain which the Amber Witch would not have spared him.

"No," he answered, in a dazed sort of

way—"no, I'll never see her again—never, never, never."

"Dear old man," I said, "don't take it so to heart. If I were you I should just write her a letter and then go home."

"Yes," he said in the same dazed voice, "I'll just write her a letter, and then go home. You think she would never give me up?" He suddenly raised his forlorn blue eyes to put the question.

"No," I said, feeling that I had got on the right tack. "She's as true as steel. You mustn't drag her into poverty. She could never stand a farm life."

"No, I mustn't drag her into poverty. I—I will be brave. Don't think me a fool."

He laid his arms on one of the long desks and his head on his arms, and I saw his shoulders heave. There was a lump in my own throat and a pricking in my own eyes as I stood with my hand on his arm.

"I *must* go," I said; "I have to take those wretched lambs for preparation. I'll run round afterwards."

He stood up. It was characteristic of him that he did not try to hide from me, any more than a child would have done, his tear-stained face.

"Don't come back," he said, "I'd rather say good-bye now. I—I shall take your advice —you know. Just write her a letter and go home—now—to-night. We've been awful jolly together, haven't we—eh? I—perhaps we may meet again some day—somehow—somewhere. I won't say good-bye, old man. Only *au revoir*. Eh?"

"*Au revoir*," I said. "Cheer up! It'll all come right in the end." I don't in the least know what I meant.

The Linguist shook hands with me, and came with me to the front door. There he shook hands again, and suddenly took both my hands.

"You won't let them say I was a coward or afraid of work—or afraid of poverty with her — will you? You'll explain that I couldn't drag her down? That I knew she would be true as steel—so the only way was for me to give her up. You'll tell them it was the only possible way out of it?"

"Of course," I said. Then the boy kissed me, French fashion, on both cheeks.

I looked back over the big brass plate of the International College, and the Linguist waved me a farewell from the top step. "*Au revoir*," he cried. And I answered, "*Au revoir*."

My mind was full of him; and when the lambs were quiet at last, I thought it could do no harm to run round and see if he had gone home.

On the steps of the International College I found a stout stranger with the air and scent of the country about him. Beside him was one of the waiters from the Café Ludovici.

"I can't make any one hear," said the stranger.

"Ni moi non plus," said the waiter. "Here, sir—letter from mademoiselle; no réponse." He handed me a note addressed to the Linguist, and hurried back to his round of service.

The stranger spoke.

"You seem a friend of his?"

I named my name.

"Yes, I've heard him speak of you. Now, I'll tell you what it is. He's headstrong and silly, and my wife, she put me up to writing him a letter, just to bring him to himself; but I felt no good would come of it, and the more I thought of it the less I liked it. And at last I couldn't bear it any longer, and so I've just run up to town to put things right. And now he's so angry he won't let me in."

"I think he's gone home," I said; "but we'll try again."

We tried again.

We heard the bell clang loudly in the unfurnished house—but no footstep.

"You are his uncle, I suppose?" I said. "I saw your letter to him."

"Was he much put out?"

"Naturally."

The man nodded. "I wrote the same letter to the girl's father," he said. "It was a lie, young man, and a cruel lie. I see that now, but you know what women be, at persuading and persuading, and scheming and scheming. His money's as right as right in Consols, and——"

"All right," I said; "he's broken off with her and gone home."

"You don't think"—the uncle's rosy, wholesome face blanched in the street lamp's light—"that he's been taken ill or anything?"

"No," I said. Then I remembered how in a moment of enthusiasm he had forced a

latchkey on me in readiness for the time when I should be his English master with "the best room in the house, and any screw I liked to name."

"I forgot—I have a key," I said, and opened the door.

It was very dark inside. I stood in the hall and called his name to an answering echo.

We struck a match, and, going into the schoolroom, lighted the gas there. The Linguist was sitting at the deal table where the prospectuses were kept, his arms laid on the table, and his head on his arms. There were some letters lying by him.

His uncle sprang towards him, calling him by name. He never moved. The old man laid his hand on the bowed head.

"My dear boy," he said, "it's not true. It was—it was—a sort of joke. Forgive your old uncle."

I came close and raised his head.

"He is dead," I said, and stood beside him, sick at heart, with her letter of insolent dismissal in my hand.

"It was laudanum," I said presently, pointing to a blue, red-labelled bottle on the table.

"It was my doing," said the old man, trembling, and hanging to my arm.

"It was mine," I said to my soul. The heart knoweth its own bitterness.

I have her letter to him, and his to her. His letter told her very simply how he, knowing that only death could shake such constancy as hers, now by his death released her. The letter was written in French. It was stained in places, and the Amber Witch sold it to me for a sovereign.

I have his letter, I say, but I am not going to print it here, because of what happened when I showed it to our French master. It was in the dog-hutch. He looked over my

shoulder as I re-read it by the dim light of the candle in the battered tin candlestick. I read the honest outpouring of the boy's generous simple heart, and presently the words grew indistinct, and I felt my face flush and my eyes prick.

Then the French master said, shrugging his shoulders—

"Je vous demande un peu! What construction!"

And that was the Linguist's epitaph.

A WOMAN'S VENGEANCE.

It was a council of war. The little attic under the lean-to roof was in the wildest confusion from end to end. A clean little attic, graced with white dimity and well-scrubbed boards, and in its everyday dress it was a tidy little attic too. But now all Nellie's wardrobe had been dragged from the drawers, bandboxes, and brown paper parcels that held it in ordinary times, and was spread out on bed and chairs and dressing-table before the critical eyes of her friend. Louisa had looked at each piece with interest. She had examined the "best dress" of faded blue-grey, with its short

waist and villainously cut skirt. She had looked at the old hats, whose flowers had settled themselves into sodden masses under the weight of rain and dust; and now the two girls were sitting on the floor, looking through that inexhaustible treasure-chest, the corner drawer.

There were ribbons and bits of lace, the imitation ivory Prayer-book given to Nellie at her confirmation, the embroidered muslin handkerchief with "N" in the corner which enfolded that Prayer-book when its owner took it to church.

Nellie showed her treasures, from the little shell boxes that her aunt had brought her from Brighton, to the crockery dogs that she herself had bought "towards housekeeping" last fair day, and when they had looked through everything, Nellie's glance despairingly turned again to the grey dress.

"It's no use," she said; "I've shown you every rag I have, and you must see I couldn't

go to Sandhurst Flower Show that sight. I must have a new gown."

"So must I," said Louisa.

She was tall, handsome, and red-haired. She affected dark blue, and the almost unrecognizable form which the latest fashions took by the time they reached Sandhurst.

"Of course I ought to be keeping my money laid up for the winter," Nellie went on, rumpling her hair desperately with her little red hands; "but I can't bring myself to scare the crows on Flower Show day, not if I have to wear my old winter jacket another two years."

"And quite right," said Louisa, warmly; "and I, for one, don't blame you. What's that?" she said suddenly, diving into the drawer and bringing up a photograph, which had slipped from the folds of a blue silk handkerchief.

"Why, it's Albert Munn," she went on, evading Nellie's sudden snatch, and holding

the photograph at arm's length with one hand and her friend at arm's length with the other.

"I wish you would leave my things alone," said Nellie. "What I wants you to see I shows you."

"Well, there, there, don't get your monkey up!" retorted the other. "No young man's worth that, my dear; but I see now why you want to be so smart on Flower Show day."

"Nothing of the kind," said Nellie hotly, and she got up and began to fold her things and put them back in their places. As she did so Louisa shot an evil glance at her out of her reddish-brown eyes, and closed her teeth so sharply that they made a little click as they met, and her lips became one thin red line.

"Well, don't be cross," she said, after a minute or two; "I'm sure I didn't mean to offend you. I beg your pardon if I've said

anything to give offence. Let's talk of your new dress. I don't know what I'm going to get myself yet; but I'm going to see my cousin at Hastings."

"What, her that dress-makes?" said Nellie.

"Yes, and I shall get her to give me an idea or two; and, besides, I can look through all the fashions—she has 'em all in books. They do say," she went on after a pause, "that fashions is going to take a wonderful turn. It would be nice if you and me were to be the first in Sandhurst to have the new ones, eh, Nellie?"

"That would it." Surprised gratitude was in Nellie's tone. "Oh, Louisa, I wish I could go with you to Hastings!"

"I'm afraid that's no ways possible," said Louisa quickly, "seeing I must go to-morrow, and I know it's your baking-day. But I tell you what, Nellie, I'll look at the fashions, and, if you like to let me have your money, I'll make the best bargain I can for you, and

you shall be dressed in the best fashion, like the county folks themselves; and we two will take the shine out of the Collins' girls at the Mill, anyhow."

Nellie flung her arms round her friend and kissed her heartily.

"Well, you *are* a good un," she said, "and I'm sorry I spoke disagreeable just now."

"You'll be sorrier yet afore you've done," said Louisa to herself, as she went down the narrow stair.

Louisa went up the village, between the rows of white-faced, thatch-roofed houses, with the beginnings of a crime in her heart. She, also, had a photograph of Albert Munn. That also bore on its back the inscription, "From your affectionate friend, Albert," and Albert was by far the best match in the village. To begin with, he was the son of a well-to-do grocer; secondly, he was in London, apprenticed to a lithographer; and thirdly,

he was much the handsomest of all the youths who smoked their pipes on the green of a holiday time.

* * * * *

Her sense of her own wickedness was heavy on Louisa when she woke the next morning, but she did not falter in her purpose.

She took the train to Hastings and had a long consultation with her cousin in the stuffy little room, littered with snippings of silk and velvet and cloth, and furnished with piles of *Young Ladies' Journals* and fashion magazines. Among these she found what she sought, a model for her own dress. It was in last week's number—a very wide skirt and immense sleeves, hunched up at the shoulders. Her own waist was not as small as the model's, but a new pair of stays would, she trusted, do much.

Then among the fashions of *twelve years before* she sought the model for Nellie's

gown! She found it—a simple dress of the kind that used to be called a "housemaid's skirt," with a full falling frill of lace round the neck and soft, clinging sleeves.

Armed with these prints, she sought the principal draper's, and bought for herself the most magnificent plaid stuff and shot velvet that its resources could produce. For Nellie she bought a Madras muslin of a pale, dull, clay colour.

"If that isn't the dowdiest thing in Hastings, or all Sussex, for that matter, you may call me a fool," she said to her cousin, when she got back, and her cousin applauded with all the enthusiasm born of the affection of kinship and the spite of sex.

The next day she took the muslin to Nellie with the fashion plate, from which she had carefully cut the date, and, exhibiting the two with affectionate pride, said—

"I told you the fashion was going to change. Now we shall be the same as the

folks up at the hall, and Collins' girls will have to hide their heads, I know."

Nellie was not very much in love with the Madras muslin, but she was far too grateful and gentle to say to Louisa what she said to her heart—that she would have liked a nice mauve or pink, something bright for the Flower Show.

However, all her money was gone, for the muslin, in reaching Louisa's ideal of the dowdy, had reached the limits of Nellie's savings, and there was not even a couple of shillings left to buy cherry-coloured ribbons with.

"Don't you let any one see it afore Flower Show day," urged Louisa. "My cousin is making my dress, so I can come and help you to sew yours, if you like."

And she did.

The Flower Show morning dawned with all the fresh sparkle of July's best.

"I shall see you in the tent," Louisa had

said. "What with Maggie and Lottie coming home for the day, and the Munns coming to dinner with us, there will be more than I can manage in the morning without coming round to you. But my cousin has sent a hat to go with your dress. I'll send it along if you will accept it as a present."

* * * * *

The horrible iniquity of her conduct somewhat dashed Louisa's enjoyment of her umbrella skirt and ponderous velvet sleeves. She hardly dared to think what would happen when Nellie found out how she had been tricked. She herself, she knew, would be ready to tear the eyes out of any girl who could so betray the claims of friendship as to send her to a social function arrayed in a bygone fashion.

But Nellie was quite happy when she put on the soft pale gown and large "granny" bonnet—also in the fashion of twelve years

ago—unearthed by Louisa's cousin from the faded stock of a failing draper in a back street in Hastings. She could not help seeing how pretty she looked in them; prettier, she thought to herself with many blushes and much confusion in the privacy of her little bedroom, prettier than she had ever looked before.

The frame of the bonnet was like an aureole round her delicate little face, and the clay colour of the muslin showed up the dainty tints of the cheeks, and lips, and eyes. She had trimmed the bonnet with some old yellow-drab ribbon that had belonged to her mother, and fastened some pale pink monthly roses in the cheap brooch in her neck. Her gloves were a delightful six-button pair that Albert Munn had sent her the Christmas before.

* * * * *

She went down to the tent, where the

Flower Show was in full swing—a little late, because she had had to see to father's dinner, and to set the table for the tea, to which some dozen of their friends were invited. A farmer's daughter has not so much time to spend on dress as some of her richer sisters; but, when handsome eyes and a black moustache are included in the day's programme, you may be sure that she thinks as much of her dress as your Duchess or your fashion-article writer.

When Nellie entered the tent, Louisa concluded that she would perceive at a glance, as she herself would have done, the terribly false position in which she was placed by her old-fashioned costume. But Nellie did not perceive it. She did not even notice Louisa's heavy grandeur, because directly she appeared in the doorway, Albert Munn came forward, with a light in his eyes she had never seen there before, tucked her hand under his arm, and led her off to look at the

roses. He had been talking to Louisa up to that moment, and had been content in talking to her; but when Nellie, in her old-fashioned dress, showed against the blue sky in the opening of the tent, he saw at once a picture, a goddess, some one who had stepped out of one of the oleographs up at the office—a girl to whom *billets-doux*, and trysts, and kisses, and true love should all come as part of the day's work, just as her costume did in oleograph-land. The straight folds of the gown, its graceful outlines and delicate colouring, appealed to him at once and convincingly.

When they came back from the roses, Nellie's face was pinker than the ones she wore. As they came near Louisa they stopped.

"Miss Louisa," said Albert, "you must wish us joy! I had no idea you were such a matchmaker! Nellie tells me this beautiful gown was your idea. If it hadn't

been for you I might have gone another six months without seeing that Nellie is the prettiest person in the world and the dearest? How can we ever thank you enough?"

THE JUDGMENT: A BROADMOOR BIOGRAPHY.

YES, a villainous-looking brute, as you say, sir; and I thank the Lord *he's* got all he earned, and more. Sometimes the beggars has grit and more pluck than some folk like to see in such vermin, but some of them ain't no more spunk nor a mouse. I love pluck myself, though; if a man's good he's the better for it, and if he's bad he ain't none the worse. Most of them as come here commit crimes through their madness; but it wasn't that way quite with him, and yet here he is at Broadmoor.

Do you know, he's almost the only one here I never felt a bit of pity for—and you'll

feel the same, see if you don't, when you've heard all about him.

Now, don't you be interrupting me by asking me how I know this and that and the other. I got it all out of the evidence, only I pieced it together, so as to tell myself how it all happened.

He'd always been a regular bad one, he had—and the Lord only knows what he hadn't done in his time—but he'd never been lagged for anything more than thieving, till he met with a cleverer chap than him, and together they did more than one bad night's work, I know. Well, this other chap, he found out somehow that there was something about a certain house in a certain village that made it worth while for him to hang around there above a bit.

"It's a first-class job," says he to our man here. "If we pull it off, it's idleness and the fat of the land for the rest of our born days. Are you on?"

"I'm on," says our man, like the brute he is, never so much as asking what it is he's on in.

This house was called Chudleigh Abbey, and it seems it was an old house, all over ivy and creepers; and an old lady lived there with a young nephew and a pretty niece. Of course, you guess there must be some sort of love-making when a young man and his pretty cousin live under one roof. So there was, so there was. And their sort of love-making was the marrying sort. The question was popped, and the day was named, and then my young sir must needs get the family diamonds out of the bank to see how his sweetheart looked in them! He thought she looked sweetly in them, you may be sure, and he gave them to her to keep, just telling her not to let any one know she'd got them till he'd got a safe to keep them in. So she takes them up to her room, and she hides them. Now he thought,

and she thought, no one knew about them diamonds; but I don't need to tell *you*, sir, that valuable stones don't change their addresses without its being known somehow to more than one and more than two. And among those that knew were our man and his mate.

Well, they meant to have the diamonds, and they laid their plan. And there was two things made their plan easy to work. First, the young lady slept in a room at the far end of a long passage with no one near her. It was the oldest part of the house, and she liked it, because it was "so romantic." You know what young ladies be, sir! Next, the young gentleman, what always slept at home, was to sleep at the inn the night before the wedding. You know, sir, it's a custom with gentlefolks. So the plan was that on the night before the wedding, when there was only the women in the house, our man was to climb up the ivy and creep

into the young lady's room and take the diamonds.

"It'll take me some time to find where she's hid them," he says to the other chap, "so I'd better *make the girl safe first.*"

It was decided that our man was to go right away for a week, so that there mightn't be any suspicion, and when he came back his mate would meet him at a certain place and hour, and tell him if any change was wanted in the plan. If his mate didn't meet him he was to go to the house at once.

So he climbed up one night and filed the window-bars nearly through, and got all ready, and then he went away.

After a week he came back.

It was a very dark night. He waited a quarter of an hour by the old wall, but no one came, so he took his knife in his teeth, and climbed up the ivy, going very slow and quiet. The bars were just as he had left them. He took one out very gently, and laid it down,

and got into the room. It was very, very dark, and smelt of scent and camphor like a chemist's shop. He listened for the girl's breathing to guide him to the bed, but he heard nothing. Presently, feeling about, his hand touched the bed-post. Then he wraps his red cotton handkerchief round his hand, to put over her mouth, and he takes his knife in the other hand, and feels for her face . . . and pulls the sheet off her neck. . . . She never moved, and it was done in a minute! Then he lays down his wet knife on the bed, and strikes a match quite at his ease to look for the diamonds.

* * * * *

He lights a candle that stands by the bed-head, and then sees the bed and what's on it, and he gives a yell that fetches every soul in the house awake, and he goes off then and there stark raving, screaming mad. The sight of what he meant all along to do?

Not it! Conscience? Not a bit of it! Sheer fright at the sight of what he'd done and *hadn't* meant to do.

The candle showed him the bed—all a mass of white flowers—and what was lying on it under the white sheet had laid there dead long afore *he* come anigh the place. I've heard say as corpses can't bleed. . . . Well, all I know is—— Well, I won't say any more about that part of it, sir, if you don't like it. It ain't pleasant even to hear about, and the sight of it sent *'im* clean off 'is head. It was a corpse's throat he'd cut, the blundering, murdering villain, and when the servants ran in with lights they found him lying across the bed-foot, foaming at the mouth, and mad as a hatter. If he'd had any sense left for thinking he wouldn't ha' known what to think. But this is what really had happened. The other chap—once our man was out of the way—thinks to have a try for the diamonds off his own bat; but

meantime the young lady at the Abbey 'd found out the filed window-bars, and when he tried it on the young master an' the under-gardener was ready for him, and took him with the knife in his hand, bending over the empty bed. Thinks he, t'other chap shan't get off then, neither; so off he goes to jail, leaving his mate to be copped when he comes back to try it on according to agreement. And in jail he turned funky, and choked himself with his belt, for there was other things against him, besides their having found out he was the Peckham Mystery.

And no one in the Abbey expecting any more visitors through the window, they didn't have the bars mended; but a silly maid who's frightened out of her wits sticks 'em up again to look like they did afore.

* * * * *

And how come the young lady to be dead

already? Why, bless your soul, sir; didn't I tell you? It wasn't the young lady at all; it was the old housekeeper, as had been ailing this long time, and had gone off sudden with the turn the first chap give her when he screamed as he was took. And they laid her out in that room, being furthest from the other rooms.

And if he'd had an ounce of pluck our man might ha' got away. But it's my belief he wasn't meant to. The judgment takes folk queer ways sometimes.

A GRAND PIECE OF WORK.

I.

THE curtains were drawn. The fire burned brightly. A cheap shaded lamp shed its warm glow of light on the miscellaneous crockery and tinned spoons which were set out for the evening meal.

Lottie Hazell was sitting on the bright steel fender, stirring something in a little saucepan on the fire, and hushing on her knee a frail white child, not yet two years old. In spite of its obvious poverty, and a certain stuffiness which in so many minds seems indissolubly associated with comfort, the room was a cheerful one, and had a pleasant, welcoming air about it—an air not lost on its master when, having stumbled up

the ill-lighted staircase, he opened the badly hung door of his home.

The boy—he could not have been more than nineteen—came in whistling gaily, kissed his wife, and sat down in the rickety Windsor chair opposite the hearth. She looked up at him with reproach in her eyes.

"You're late, Bill."

"Yes, old gal, I've had a queer day—an uncommon queer day. How's the kid?"

"Poorly, very poorly. I took her round to the dispensary to-night, and he says 'Beef-tea.'"

Hazell bent his brows.

"It's all very well, as I told him," the wife went on; "but gravy beef's not to be had for the asking. Howsomever, we must go without something more ourselves. It seems like as if it was all 'going without.'"

A deeper line between Bill's brows had by this time crossed out the eager and

excited look with which he had entered the room.

"It's damn bad luck. I say, old girl, don't take on. It'll be all for the best. We shall pull through somehow."

She rose and stood facing him, the child in her arms, its little bloodless hand hanging helplessly.

"What do you mean, Bill?" she said. "Something's up. What is it?"

He rubbed his head and looked at her doubtfully.

"Now don't you put yourself about, Lottie. You'll see it will be all right."

"God bless the man, what is it?"

He rose with a poor assumption of its being nothing, went over to the shaky wash-hand stand, and dipped his head in the tin basin. His voice came shaky through the splashing water, "We're out on strike!"

II.

A misty, rainy morning in November. The great paved space of Tower Hill was dotted over with groups of men—twos and threes together standing talking, discussing the future of the Great Dockers' Strike. So far all had gone well—and private privations seemed little in the flush of a great enthusiasm—little to men accustomed, week in, week out, to a life of privation. There is something intoxicating in the mere fact of being banded together with one's fellow-men for the attainment of any common end—an intoxication of which your mere individualist knows nothing. The excitement of a great aim, something immeasurably beyond the dull round of their work-a-day lives—filled these men; and the talk among the groups was hopeful, bright, enthusiastic.

Bill Hazell was among them—thinner than a fortnight before—but with a keener

light in his eyes. His voice was among the loudest raised in discussion and talk—and his face bore on it most strongly the seal of determination. His was the loudest "hurrah" when the well-known straw hat of the leader of the strike was seen at last.

"He's the man to pull a thing off," Bill said to his companion, as the leader appeared in the road, which, running above Tower Hill, seems a sort of vantage ground or platform from which one can speak to a crowd.

The leader pushed forward. A nod here, a hand-shake there, a volume of prosiness cut short and answered by a word—and he sprang on the parapet and waved the straw hat in answer to the triumphant acclaim of the crowd. Then he began his speech, his daily speech from which the dock labourers learned what were the hopes of victory, what the threats of defeat. What matter what he said? He knew how to

speak straight from his heart to the hearts of the men who heard him. He checked, encouraged, reproved, stimulated, passed on his own enthusiasm and faith, and, above all, he always looked like winning. He told them what money had been sent by the workers of other countries to help them in their hour of need. He told them what he had done and what other men had done on their behalf since the previous day. He told them what would be done by him and them that day to further the cause they all had at heart. Then, amid ringing cheers and a fire of enthusiasm that even a London rain was powerless to damp, the crowd dissolved, dispersed, and, bannered and banded, the procession of the penniless started on its daily march through the richest city in the world.

Bill was of it. He held one of the cords of a banner, a position of responsibility that lightened the fatigue of his long hour's

march. The roads were muddy with three days' rainfall; and boots in the Army of Labour are seldom much to boast of. Even scarcely interested passers-by, glancing casually at that procession with its firm step, its haggard, resolved faces, and the brave light in the dockers' eyes, said to themselves, "These men mean winning, and they will win."

Bill had no dinner that day, unless the slice of bread which his rear-rank man shared with him can be called a dinner, and he was sick with hunger as he climbed the stairs to the little room which held his wife and child.

III.

As he entered the room his wife sprang to meet him, and flung her arms round his neck.

"Thank God you've come home, Bill," she said hoarsely. "She's worse."

"Who's worse? The child," he said, but not in the tone of asking a question.

"Yes—the child, our little girl as you said you loved dearer than me."

"I only said it to tease you, my girl;" he held her with his arm, and stroked her with a sort of rough gentleness. "Let's have a look at the kid—and then a bit of supper. I'm wore out, Lottie, old woman."

She lighted the candle, and the father and mother stood beside the bed where the child lay—wasted and thin. Any doctor could have told them that the child was weakly—could never live to grow up, but doctors are not given to plain speaking. To them it seemed that if the baby could only be better fed, she might grow round and rosy, like the children who played on the flags of the court outside—children of parents a little higher in the social scale than a dock labourer, children energetic enough to "play at strikes" with an old tin tray and a few

bits of rag for flags. The two stood looking at the child; Bill broke the silence in answer to something unspoken.

"Poor little kid! I can't help it, Lottie; I can't help it. I gives you everything I get —relief tickets, grocery tickets, and all. I can't help it. What's a chap to do?"

She turned on him almost fiercely.

"Do? Why, chuck up this cursed strike. Go back to work. You're sure of work now —and better money."

"Go back to work," he repeated slowly.

"Look here," she went on, "look at our home. It wasn't much afore, but look at it now. Where's our sticks? Where's our duds? Where's everything? Gone to pay for your holiday for you to go processioning about all day long, while me and the kid may stay at home and starve for all you care."

Bill sat down on the edge of the bed.

"You knock me all of a heap, Lottie," he

said; "you do indeed. I told you what the strike meant, and you said——"

"I don't care what I said."

"But unless we stand by each other, as Jack was saying to-day, the strike's no good, and all this goes for nothing."

"One won't make any difference to them," she answered, walking heavily across the room and leaning her elbows on the mantelpiece.

"But suppose every one says that, the strike would be over;" and he rubbed his rough chin with his hand.

"Never mind what every one says. What you've got to think of is me and baby."

"Don't I think of you?" he cried with sudden violence, getting off the bed and beginning to walk up and down the room. "God bless and save the woman! What else do you suppose I think of when I'm tramping about all day on an empty stomach? It's for the sake of our wives and kids that

we strike for better money; Jack said so this morning."

"Hang Jack!" Then she hesitated a moment, and then came across the room to him.

"Bill," she said, "have I been a good wife to you, or haven't I?"

"'Course you have, old woman. Don't take on so! Don't 'ee now."

"Then, Bill, I beg and pray you on my knees to drop this strike and go back to work, and—save our little un. Oh, Bill, what does it matter what you do? You ain't everything to the strike—but we haven't nothing but you—me and baby haven't."

She had actually flung herself down on the floor as she spoke. He stooped to lift her.

"No," she cried wildly, "not till you say 'Yes.' Oh, Bill, for God's sake—there's nothing left to pawn—them grocery tickets

is no good for getting her what she wants—say 'Yes.'"

He did raise her then, and set her on the wooden box that served as a chair.

"I can't, my girl," he said; "I can't go back on my mates. It would be a damn dirty trick. I can't do it."

There was a long silence, broken only by the sound of a street fight below.

Bill tried to return to the commonplace.

"Got any supper for me, old girl? I'm wore out."

"No," said Lottie, bitterly, "I've got no supper for you, nor for me neither; nor no breakfast nor no dinner. I sold the ticket for tuppence to get beef tea for baby, and I've had nothing all day." Her voice faltered here. "Oh, Bill, I'm so hungry. Won't you go back to work? I could borrow threepence from the people downstairs this minute, if you'd promise."

"My poor old woman," he answered

drearily. "I can't do it. I couldn't never look a mate in the eye again. I can't—not if we all starve for it."

"May God forgive you, then; I can't."

And at the bitter cry the child woke, wailing, weakly, pitifully. The mother's arms were round her in a moment.

"And she's hungry again, now. My God, what can I do?"

IV.

"End of strike. All men to return to work on Monday morning. By order of the Council."

That notice was posted up outside head-quarters on Saturday evening, but Bill Hazell did not see it. He was with his wife, who sat on the straw that served them for a bed, with the baby in her arms. They fed the child with milk, but she took little, and lay, mostly sleeping, in her mother's arms.

When she was awake her mother sang to her the gayest songs she could recall—sang them with the unmanageable lump in her throat, the unspeakable weight at her heart.

On Sunday morning Bill went out.

"Bully finish, eh?" said a mate who met him near Tower Hill.

"What?"

"Strike's over. We've won. Last procession starts at ten. You must be in it."

Bill turned and ran back along the streets, bright with the autumn sunshine. He would not lose a moment in telling Lottie the news. Ah! poor girl, how sad she had looked an hour before when he had left her!

"The strike's over, my girl," he cried, "and we've won."

His wife was still sitting on the bed with the child in her arms. She turned and looked at him coldly without speaking.

Bill flung his old hat up in an uncontrol-

lable access of triumph—all hardships and struggles forgotten in victory.

"We've won—by God," he said. "A grand piece of work!"

"Hush!" said his wife, still not moving, "hush—baby's dead. Yes; it's a grand piece of work."

THE END.

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