ARTHUR TIMOTHY SHAY

CAST ADRIFT

Timothy Arthur
Cast Adrift

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=36365486
Cast Adrift:

Содержание

T. S. Arthur
Cast Adrift

TO THE READER

IN this romance of real life, in which the truth is stranger than the fiction, I have lifted only in part the veil that hides the victims of intemperance and other terrible vices—after they have fallen to the lower deeps of degradation to be found in our large cities, where the vile and degraded herd together more like wild beasts than men and women—and told the story of sorrow, suffering, crime and debasement as they really exist in Christian America with all the earnestness and power that in me lies.

Strange and sad and terrible as are some of the scenes from which I hare drawn this veil, I have not told the half of what exists. My book, apart from the thread of fiction that runs through its pages, is but a series of photographs from real life, and is less a work of the imagination than a record of facts.

If it stirs the hearts of American readers profoundly, and so awakens the people to a sense of their duty; if it helps to inaugurate more earnest and radical modes of reform for a state of society of which a distinguished author has said, "There is not a country throughout the earth on which it would not bring a curse; there is no religion upon the earth that it would not deny;

there is no people upon the earth it would not put to shame;"—then will not my work be in vain.

Sitting in our comfortable homes with well-fed, well-clothed and happy-hearted children about us—children who have our tenderest care, whose cry of pain from a pin-prick or a fall on the carpeted floor hurts us like a blow–how few of us know or care anything about the homes in which some other children dwell, or of the hard and cruel battle for life they are doomed to fight from the very beginning!

To get out from these comfortable homes and from the midst of tenderly cared-for little ones, and stand face to face with squalor and hunger, with suffering, debasement and crime, to look upon the starved faces of children and hear their helpless cries, is what scarcely one in a thousand will do. It is too much for our sensibilities. And so we stand aloof, and the sorrow, and suffering, the debasement, the wrong and the crime, go on, and because we heed it not we vainly imagine that no responsibility lies at our door; and yet there is no man or woman who is not, according to the measure of his or her influence, responsible for the human debasement and suffering I have portrayed.

The task I set for myself has not been a pleasant one. It has hurt my sensibilities and sickened my heart many times as I stood face to face with the sad and awful degradation that exists in certain regions of our larger cities; and now that my work is done, I take a deep breath of relief. The result is in your hands, good citizen, Christian reader, earnest philanthropist! If it stirs your

heart in the reading as it stirred mine in the writing, it will not die fruitless.

THE AUTHOR.

CHAPTER I

A BABY had come, but he was not welcome. Could anything be sadder?

The young mother lay with her white face to the wall, still as death. A woman opened the chamber door noiselessly and came in, the faint rustle of her garments disturbing the quiet air.

A quick, eager turning of the head, a look half anxious, half fearful, and then the almost breathless question,

"Where is my baby?"

"Never mind about the baby," was answered, almost coldly; "he's well enough. I'm more concerned about you."

"Have you sent word to George?"

"George can't see you. I've said that before."

"Oh, mother! I must see my husband."

"Husband!" The tone of bitter contempt with which the word was uttered struck the daughter like a blow. She had partly risen in her excitement, but now fell back with a low moan, shutting her eyes and turning her face away. Even as she did so, a young man stepped back from the door of the elegant house in which she lay with a baffled, disappointed air. He looked pale and wretched.

"Edith!" Two hours afterward the doctor stood over the young mother, and called her name. She did not move nor reply. He laid his hand on her cheek, and almost started, then bent down and looked at her intently for a moment or two. She had fever.

A serious expression came into his face, and there was cause.

The sweet rest and heavenly joy of maternity had been denied to his young patient. The new-born babe had not been suffered to lie even for one blissful moment on her bosom. Hard-hearted family pride and cruel worldliness had robbed her of the delight with which God ever seeks to dower young motherhood, and now the overtaxed body and brain had given way.

For many weeks the frail young creature struggled with delirium—struggled and overcame.

"Where is my baby?"

The first thought of returning consciousness was of her baby.

A woman who sat in a distant part of the chamber started up and crossed to the bed. She was past middle life, of medium stature, with small, clearly cut features and cold blue eyes. Her mouth was full, but very firm. Self-poise was visible even in her surprised movements. She bent over the bed and looked into Edith's wistful eyes.

"Where is my baby, mother?" Mrs. Dinneford put her fingers lightly on Edith's lips.

"You must be very quiet," she said, in a low, even voice. "The doctor forbids all excitement. You have been extremely ill."

"Can't I see my baby, mother? It won't hurt me to see my baby."

"Not now. The doctor—"

Edith half arose in bed, a look of doubt and fear coming into her face.

"I want my baby, mother," she said, interrupting her.

A hard, resolute expression came into the cold blue eyes of Mrs. Dinneford. She put her hand firmly against Edith and pressed her back upon the pillow.

"You have been very ill for nearly two months," she said, softening her voice. "No one thought you could live. Thank God! the crisis is over, but not the danger."

"Two months! Oh, mother!"

The slight flush that had come into Edith's wan face faded out, and the pallor it had hidden for a few moments became deeper. She shut her eyes and lay very still, but it was plain from the expression of her face that thought was busy.

"Not two whole months, mother?" she said, at length, in doubtful tones. "Oh no! it cannot be."

"It is just as I have said, Edith; and now, my dear child, as you value your life, keep quiet; all excitement is dangerous."

But repression was impossible. To Edith's consciousness there was no lapse of time. It seemed scarcely an hour since the birth of her baby and its removal from her sight. The inflowing tide of mother-love, the pressure and yearning sweetness of which she had begun to feel when she first called for the baby they had not permitted to rest, even for an instant, on her bosom, was now flooding her heart. Two months! If that were so, what of the baby? To be submissive was impossible.

Starting up half wildly, a vague terror in her face, she cried, piteously,

"Oh, mother, bring me my baby. I shall die if you do not!"

"Your baby is in heaven," said Mrs. Dinneford, softening her voice to a tone of tender regret.

Edith caught her breath, grew very white, and then, with a low, wailing cry that sent a shiver through Mrs. Dinneford's heart, fell back, to all appearance dead.

The mother did not call for help, but sat by the bedside of her daughter, and waited for the issue of this new struggle between life and death. There was no visible excitement, but her mouth was closely set and her cold blue eyes fixed in a kind of vacant stare.

Edith was Mrs. Dinneford's only child, and she had loved her with the strong, selfish love of a worldly and ambitious woman. In her own marriage she had not consulted her heart. Mr. Dinneford's social position and wealth were to her far more than his personal endowments. She would have rejected him without a quicker pulse-beat if these had been all he had to offer. He was disappointed, she was not. Strong, self-asserting, yet politic, Mrs Dinneford managed her good husband about as she pleased in all external matters, and left him to the free enjoyment of his personal tastes, preferences and friendships. The house they lived in, the furniture it contained, the style and equipage assumed by the family, were all of her choice, Mr. Dinneford giving merely a half-constrained or half-indifferent consent. He had learned, by painful and sometimes humiliating experience, that any contest with Mrs. Helen Dinneford upon which he might enter was sure

to end in his defeat.

He was a man of fine moral and intellectual qualities. His wealth gave him leisure, and his tastes, feelings and habits of thought drew him into the society of some of the best men in the city where he lived—best in the true meaning of that word. In all enlightened social reform movements you would be sure of finding Mr. Howard Dinneford. He was an active and efficient member in many boards of public charity, and highly esteemed in them all for his enlightened philanthropy and sound judgment. Everywhere but at home he was strong and influential; there he was weak, submissive and of little account. He had long ago accepted the situation, making a virtue of necessity. A different man—one of stronger will and a more imperious spirit—would have held his own, even though it wrought bitterness and sorrow. But Mr. Dinneford's aversion to strife, and gentleness toward every one, held him away from conflict, and so his home was at least tranquil.

Mrs. Dinneford had her own way, and so long as her husband made no strong opposition to that way all was peaceful.

For Edith, their only child, who was more like her father than her mother, Mr. Dinneford had the tenderest regard. The well-springs of love, choked up so soon after his marriage, were opened freely toward his daughter, and he lived in her a new, sweet and satisfying life. The mother was often jealous of her husband's demonstrative tenderness for Edith. A yearning instinct of womanhood, long repressed by worldliness and a

mean social ambition, made her crave at times the love she had cast away, and then her cup of life was very bitter. But fear of Mr. Dinneford's influence over Edith was stronger than any jealousy of his love. She had high views for her daughter. In her own marriage she had set aside all considerations but those of social rank. She had made it a stepping-stone to a higher place in society than the one to which she was born. Still, above them stood many millionaire families, living in palace-homes, and through her daughter she meant to rise into one of them. It mattered not for the personal quality of the scion of the house; he might be as coarse and common as his father before him, or weak, mean, selfish, and debased by sensual indulgence. This was of little account. To lift Edith to the higher social level was the all in all of Mrs. Dinneford's ambition.

But Mr. Dinneford taught Edith a nobler life-lesson than this, gave her better views of wedlock, pictured for her loving heart the bliss of a true marriage, sighing often as he did so, but unconsciously, at the lost fruition of his own sweet hopes. He was careful to do this only when alone with Edith, guarding his speech when Mrs. Dinneford was present. He had faith in true principles, and with these he sought to guard her life. He knew that she would be pushed forward into society, and knew but too well that one so pure and lovely in mind as well as person would become a centre of attraction, and that he, standing on the outside as it were, would have no power to save her from the saddest of all fates if she were passive and her mother resolute. Her safety

must lie in herself.

Edith was brought out early. Mrs. Dinneford could not wait. At seventeen she was thrust into society, set up for sale to the highest bidder, her condition nearer that of a Circassian than a Christian maiden, with her mother as slave-dealer.

So it was and so, it is. You may see the thing every day. But it did not come out according to Mrs. Dinneford's programme. There was a highest bidder; but when he came for his slave, she was not to be found.

Well, the story is trite and brief—the old sad story. Among her suitors was a young man named Granger, and to him Edith gave her heart. But the mother rejected him with anger and scorn. He was not rich, though belonging to a family of high character, and so fell far below her requirements. Under a pressure that almost drove the girl to despair, she gave her consent to a marriage that looked more terrible than death. A month before the time fixed for, its consummation, she barred the contract by a secret union with Granger.

Edith knew her mother's character too well to hope for any reconciliation, so far as Mr. Granger was concerned. Coming in as he had done between her and the consummation of her highest ambition, she could never feel toward him anything but the most bitter hatred; and so, after remaining at home for about a week after her secret marriage, she wrote this brief letter to her mother and went away:

"My DEAR MOTHER: I do not love Spencer Wray,

and would rather die than marry him, and so I have made the marriage to which my heart has never consented, an impossibility. You have left me no other alternative but this. I am the wife of George Granger, and go to cast my lot with his.

"Your loving daughter,

"EDITH."

To her father she wrote:

"My DEAR, DEAR FATHER: If I bring sorrow to your good and loving heart by what I have done, I know that it will be tempered with joy at my escape from a union with one from whom my soul has ever turned with irrepressible dislike. Oh, my father, you can understand, if mother cannot, into what a desperate strait I have been brought. I am a deer hunted to the edge of a dizzy chasm, and I leap for life over the dark abyss, praying for strength to reach the farther edge. If I fail in the wild effort, I can only meet destruction; and I would rather be bruised to death on the jagged rocks than trust myself to the hounds and hunters. I write passionately—you will hardly recognize your quiet child; but the repressed instincts of my nature are strong, and peril and despair have broken their bonds. I did not consult you about the step I have taken, because I dared not trust you with my secret. You would have tried to hold me back from the perilous leap, fondly hoping for some other way of escape. I had resolved on putting an impassable gulf between me and danger, if I died in the attempt. I have taken the leap, and may God care for me!

"I have laid up in my heart of hearts, dearest of fathers, the precious life-truths that so often fell from your lips. Not a word that you ever said about the sacredness of marriage has been forgotten. I believe with you that it is a little less than crime to marry when no love exists—that she who does so, sells her heart's birthright for some mess of pottage, sinks down from the pure level of noble womanhood, and traffics away her person, is henceforth meaner in quality if not really vile.

"And so, my father, to save myself from such a depth of degradation and misery, I take my destiny into my own hands. I have grown very strong in my convictions and purposes in the last four weeks. My sight has become suddenly clear. I am older by many years.

"As for George Granger, all I can now say is that I love him, and believe him to be worthy of my love. I am willing to trust him, and am ready to share his lot, however humble.

"Still hold me in your heart, my precious father, as I hold you in mine.

"EDITH."

Mr. Dinneford read this letter twice. It took him some time, his eyes were so full of tears. In view of her approaching marriage with Spencer Wray, his heart had felt very heavy. It was something lighter now. Young Granger was not the man he would have chosen for Edith, but he liked him far better than he did the other, and felt that his child was safe now.

He went to his wife's room, and found her with Edith's letter

crushed in her hand. She was sitting motionless, her face pale and rigid, her eyes fixed and stony and her lips tight against her teeth. She did not seem to notice his presence until he put his hand upon her, which he did without speaking. At this she started up and looked at him with a kind of fierce intentness.

"Are you a party to this frightful things?" she demanded.

Mr. Dinneford weakly handed her the letter he had received from Edith. She read it through in half the time it had taken his tear-dimmed eyes to make out the touching sentences. After she had done so, she stood for a few moments as if surprised or baffled. Then she sat down, dropping her head, and remained for a long time without speaking.

"The bitter fruit, Mr. Dinneford," she said, at last, in a voice so strange and hard that it seemed to his ears as if another had spoken. All passion had died out of it.

He waited, but she added nothing more. After a long silence she waved her hand slightly, and without looking at her husband, said,

"I would rather be alone."

Mr. Dinneford took Edith's letter from the floor, where it had dropped from his wife's hand, and withdrew from her presence. She arose quickly as he did so, crossed the room and silently turned the key, locking herself in. Then her manner changed; she moved about the room in a half-aimless, half-conscious way, as though some purpose was beginning to take shape in her mind. Her motions had an easy, cat-like grace, in contrast with

their immobility a little while before. Gradually her step became quicker, while ripples of feeling began to pass over her face, which was fast losing its pallor. Gleams of light began shooting from her eyes, that were so dull and stony when her husband found her with Edith's letter crushed in her grasp. Her hands opened and shut upon themselves nervously. This went on, the excitement of her forming purpose, whatever it was, steadily increasing, until she swept about the room like a fury, talking to herself and gesticulating as one half insane from the impelling force of an evil passion.

"Baffled, but not defeated." The excitement had died out. She spoke these words aloud, and with a bitter satisfaction in her voice, then sat down, resting her face in her hands, and remaining for a long time in deep thought.

When she met her husband, an hour afterward, there was a veil over her face, and he tried in vain to look beneath it. She was greatly changed; her countenance had a new expression—something he had never seen there before. For years she had been growing away from him; now she seemed like one removed to a great distance—to have become almost stranger. He felt half afraid of her. She did not speak of Edith, but remained cold, silent and absorbed.

Mrs. Dinneford gave no sign of what was in her heart for many weeks. The feeling of distance and strangeness perceived by her husband went on increasing, until a vague feeling of mystery and fear began to oppress him. Several times he had spoken of Edith,

but his wife made no response, nor could he read in her veiled face the secret purposes she was hiding from him.

No wonder that Mr. Dinneford was greatly surprised and overjoyed, on coming home one day, to meet his daughter, to feel her arms about his neck, and to hold her tearful face on his bosom.

"And I'm not going away again, father dear," she said as she kissed him fondly. "Mother has sent for me, and George is to come. Oh, we shall be so happy, so happy!"

And father and daughter cried together, like two happy children, in very excess of gladness. They had met alone, but Mrs. Dinneford came in, her presence falling on them like a cold shadow.

"Two great babies," she said, a covert sneer in her chilling voice.

The joy went slowly out of their faces, though not out of their hearts. There it nestled, and warmed the renewing blood. But a vague, questioning fear began to creep in, a sense of insecurity, a dread of hidden danger. The daughter did not fully trust her mother, nor the husband his wife.

CHAPTER II

THE reception of young Granger was as cordial as Mrs. Dinneford chose to make it. She wanted to get near enough to study his character thoroughly, to discover its weaknesses and defects, not its better qualities, so that she might do for him the evil work that was in her heart. She hated him with a bitter hatred, and there is nothing so subtle and tireless and unrelenting as the hatred of a bad woman.

She found him weak and unwary. His kindly nature, his high sense of honor, his upright purpose, his loving devotion to Edith, were nothing in her eyes. She spurned them in her thoughts, she trampled them under her feet with scorn. But she studied his defects, and soon knew every weak point in his character. She drew him out to speak of himself, of his aims and prospects, of his friends and associates, until she understood him altogether. Then she laid her plans for his destruction.

Granger was holding a clerkship at the time of his marriage, but was anxious to get a start for himself. He had some acquaintance with a man named Lloyd Freeling, and often spoke of him in connection with business. Freeling had a store on one of the best streets, and, as represented by himself, a fine run of trade, but wanted more capital. One day he said to Granger,

"If I could find the right man with ten thousand dollars, I would take him in. We could double this business in a year."

Granger repeated the remark at home, Mrs. Dinneford listened, laid it up in her thought, and on the next day called at the store of Mr. Freeling to see what manner of man he was.

Her first impression was favorable—she liked him. On a second visit she likes him better. She was not aware that Freeling knew her; in this he had something of the advantage. A third time she dropped in, asking to see certain goods and buying a small bill, as before. This time she drew Mr. Freeling into conversation about business, and put some questions the meaning of which he understood quite as well as she did.

A woman like Mrs. Dinneford can read character almost as easily as she can read a printed page, particularly a weak or bad character. She knew perfectly, before the close of this brief interview, that Freeling was a man without principle, false and unscrupulous, and that if Granger were associated with him in business, he could, if he chose, not only involve him in transactions of a dishonest nature, but throw upon him the odium and the consequences.

"Do you think," she said to Granger, not long afterward, "that your friend, Mr. Freeling, would like to have you for a partner in business?"

The question surprised and excited him.

"I know it," he returned; "he has said so more than once."

"How much capital would he require?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

"A large sum to risk."

"Yes; but I do not think there will be any risk. The business is well established."

"What do you know about Mr. Freeling?"

"Not a great deal; but if I am any judge of character, he is fair and honorable."

Mrs. Dinneford turned her head that Granger might not see the expression of her face.

"You had better talk with Mr. Dinneford," she said.

But Mr. Dinneford did not favor it. He had seen too many young men go into business and fail.

So the matter was dropped for a little while. But Mrs. Dinneford had set her heart on the young man's destruction, and no better way of accomplishing the work presented itself than this. He must be involved in some way to hurt his good name, to blast his reputation and drive him to ruin. Weak, trusting and pliable, a specious villain in whom he had confidence might easily get him involved in transactions that were criminal under the law. She would be willing to sacrifice twice ten thousand dollars to accomplish this result.

Neither Mr. Dinneford nor Edith favored the business connection with Freeling, and said all they could against it. In weak natures we often find great pertinacity. Granger had this quality. He had set his mind on the copartnership, and saw in it a high road to fortune, and no argument of Mr. Dinneford, nor opposition of Edith, had power to change his views, or to hold him back from the arrangement favored by Mrs. Dinneford, and

made possible by the capital she almost compelled her husband to supply.

In due time the change from clerk to merchant was made, and the new connection announced, under the title of "FREELING & GRANGER."

Clear seeing as evil may be in its schemes for hurting others, it is always blind to the consequent exactions upon itself; it strikes fiercely and desperately, not calculating the force of a rebound. So eager was Mrs. Dinneford to compass the ruin of Granger that she stepped beyond the limit of common prudence, and sought private interviews with Freeling, both before and after the completion of the partnership arrangement. These took place in the parlor of a fashionable hotel, where the gentleman and lady seemed to meet accidentally, and without attracting attention.

Mrs. Dinneford was very confidential in these interviews not concealing her aversion to Granger. He had come into the family, she said, as an unwelcome intruder; but now that he was there, they had to make the best of him. Not in spoken words did Mrs. Dinneford convey to Freeling the bitter hatred that was in her heart, nor in spoken words let him know that she desired the young man's utter ruin, but he understood it all before the close of their first private interview. Freeling was exceedingly deferential in the beginning and guarded in his speech. He knew by the quick intuitions of his nature that Mrs. Dinneford cherished an evil purpose, and had chosen him as the agent for its accomplishment. She was rich, and occupied a high social position, and his ready

conclusion was that, be the service what it might, he could make it pay. To get such a woman in his power was worth an effort.

One morning—it was a few months after the date of the copartnership—Mrs. Dinneford received a note from Freeling. It said, briefly,

"At the usual place, 12 M. to-day. Important." There was no signature.

The sharp knitting of her brows and the nervous crumpling of the note in her hand showed that she was not pleased at the summons. She had come already to know her partner in evil too well. At 12 M. she was in the hotel parlor. Freeling was already there. They met in external cordiality, but it was very evident from the manner of Mrs. Dinneford, that she felt herself in the man's power, and had learned to be afraid of him.

"It will be impossible to get through to-morrow," he said, in a kind of imperative voice, that was half a threat, "unless we have two thousand dollars."

"I cannot ask Mr. Dinneford for anything more," Mrs. Dinneford replied; "we have already furnished ten thousand dollars beyond the original investment."

"But it is all safe enough—that is, if we do not break down just here for lack of so small a sum."

Mrs. Dinneford gave a start.

"Break down!" She repeated the words in a husky, voice, with a paling face. "What do you mean?"

"Only that in consequence of having in store a large stock

of unsalable goods bought by your indiscreet son-in-law, who knows no more about business than a child, we are in a temporary strait."

"Why did you trust him to buy?" asked Mrs. Dinneford.

"I didn't trust him. He bought without consulting me," was replied, almost rudely.

"Will two thousand be the end of this thing?"

"I think so."

"You only think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Very well; I will see what can be done. But all this must have an end, Mr. Freeling. We cannot supply any more money. You must look elsewhere if you have further need. Mr. Dinneford is getting very much annoyed and worried. You surely have other resources."

"I have drawn to the utmost on all my resources," said the man, coldly.

Mrs. Dinneford remained silent for a good while, her eyes upon the floor. Freeling watched her face intently, trying to read what was in her thoughts. At last she said, in a suggestive tone,

"There are many ways of getting money known to business-men—a little risky some of them, perhaps, but desperate cases require desperate expedients. You understand me?"

Freeling took a little time to consider before replying.

"Yes," he said, at length, speaking slowly, as one careful of his words. "But all expedients are 'risky,' as you say—some of them

very risky. It takes a long, cool head to manage them safely."

"I don't know a longer or cooler head than yours," returned Mrs. Dinneford, a faint smile playing about her lips.

"Thank you for the compliment," said Freeling, his lips reflecting the smile on hers.

"You must think of some expedient." Mrs. Dinneford's manner grew impressive. She spoke with emphasis and deliberation. "Beyond the sum of two thousand dollars, which I will get for you by to-morrow, I shall not advance a single penny. You may set that down as sure. If you are not sharp enough and strong enough, with the advantage you possess, to hold your own, then you must go under; as for me, I have done all that I can or will."

Freeling saw that she was wholly in earnest, and understood what she meant by "desperate expedients." Granger was to be ruined, and she was growing impatient of delay. He had no desire to hurt the young man—he rather liked him. Up to this time he had been content with what he could draw out of Mrs. Dinneford. There was no risk in this sort of business. Moreover, he enjoyed his interviews and confidences with the elegant lady, and of late the power he seemed to be gaining over her; this power he regarded as capital laid up for another use, and at another time.

But it was plain that he had reached the end of his present financial policy, and must decide whether to adopt the new one suggested by Mrs. Dinneford or make a failure, and so get rid of his partner. The question he had to settle with himself was

whether he could make more by a failure than by using Granger a while longer, and then throwing him overboard, disgraced and ruined. Selfish and unscrupulous as he was, Freeling hesitated to do this. And besides, the "desperate expedients" he would have to adopt in the new line of policy were fraught with peril to all who took part in them. He might fall into the snare set for another —might involve himself so deeply as not to find a way of escape.

"To-morrow we will talk this matter over," he said in reply to Mrs. Dinneford's last remark; "in the mean time I will examine the ground thoroughly and see how it looks."

"Don't hesitate to make any use you can of Granger," suggested the lady. "He has done his part toward getting things tangled, and must help to untangle them."

"All right, ma'am."

And they separated, Mrs. Dinneford reaching the street by one door of the hotel, and Freeling by another.

On the following day they met again, Mrs. Dinneford bringing the two thousand dollars.

"And now what next?" she asked, after handing over the money and taking the receipt of "Freeling & Granger." Her eyes had a hard glitter, and her face was almost stern in its expression. "How are you going to raise money and keep afloat?"

"Only some desperate expedient is left me now," answered Freeling, though not in the tone of a man who felt himself at bay. It was said with a wicked kind of levity.

Mrs. Dinneford looked at him keenly. She was beginning to

mistrust the man. They gazed into each other's faces in silence for some moments, each trying to read what was in the other's thought. At length Freeling said,

"There is one thing more that you will have to do, Mrs. Dinneford."

"What?" she asked.

"Get your husband to draw two or three notes in Mr. Granger's favor. They should not be for less than five hundred or a thousand dollars each. The dates must be short—not over thirty or sixty days."

"It can't be done," was the emphatic answer.

"It must be done," replied Freeling; "they need not be for the business. You can manage the matter if you will; your daughter wants an India shawl, or a set of diamonds, or a new carriage—anything you choose. Mr. Dinneford hasn't the ready cash, but we can throw his notes into bank and get the money; don't you see?"

But Mrs. Dinneford didn't see.

"I don't mean," said Freeling, "that we are to use the money. Let the shawl, or the diamond, or the what-not, be bought and paid for. We get the discounts for your use, not ours."

"All very well," answered Mrs. Dinneford; "but how is that going to help you?"

"Leave that to me. You get the notes," said Freeling.

"Never walk blindfold, Mr. Freeling," replied the lady, drawing herself up, with a dignified air. "We ought to understand each other by this time. I must see beyond the mere use of these

notes."

Freeling shut his mouth tightly and knit his heavy brows. Mrs. Dinneford watched him, closely.

"It's a desperate expedient," he said, at length.

"All well as far as that is concerned; but if I am to have a hand in it, I must know all about it," she replied, firmly. "As I said just now, I never walk blindfold."

Freeling leaned close to Mrs. Dinneford, and uttered a few sentences in a low tone, speaking rapidly. The color went and came in her face, but she sat motionless, and so continued for some time after he had ceased speaking.

"You will get the notes?" Freeling put the question as one who has little doubt of the answer.

"I will get them," replied Mrs. Dinneford.

"When?"

"It will take time."

"We cannot wait long. If the thing is done at all, it must be done quickly. 'Strike while the iron is hot' is the best of all maxims."

"There shall be no needless delay on my part. You may trust me for that," was answered.

Within a week Mrs. Dinneford brought two notes, drawn by her husband in favor of George Granger—one for five hundred and the other for one thousand dollars. The time was short—thirty and sixty days. On this occasion she came to the store and asked for her son-in-law. The meeting between her and Freeling

was reserved and formal. She expressed regret for the trouble she was giving the firm in procuring a discount for her use, and said that if she could reciprocate the favor in any way she would be happy to do so.

"The notes are drawn to your order," remarked Freeling as soon as the lady had retired. Granger endorsed them, and was about handing them to his partner, when the latter said:

"Put our name on them while you are about it." And the young man wrote also the endorsement of the firm.

After this, Mr. Freeling put the bank business into Granger's hands. Nearly all checks were drawn and all business paper endorsed by the younger partner, who became the financier of the concern, and had the management of all negotiations for money in and out of bank.

One morning, shortly after the first of Mr. Dinneford's notes was paid, Granger saw his mother-in-law come into the store. Freeling was at the counter. They talked together for some time, and then Mrs. Dinneford went out.

On the next day Granger saw Mrs. Dinneford in the store again. After she had gone away, Freeling came back, and laying a note-of-hand on his partner's desk, said, in a pleased, confidential way.

"Look at that, my friend."

Granger read the face of the note with a start of surprise. It was drawn to his order, for three thousand dollars, and bore the signature of Howard Dinneford.

"A thing that is worth having is worth asking for," said Freeling. "We obliged your mother-in-law, and now she has returned the favor. It didn't come very easily, she said, and your father-in-law isn't feeling rather comfortable about it; so she doesn't care about your speaking of it at home."

Granger was confounded.

"I can't understand it," he said.

"You can understand that we have the note, and that it has come in the nick of time," returned Freeling.

"Yes, I can see all that."

"Well, don't look a gift-horse in the mouth, but spring into the saddle and take a ride. Your mother-in-law is a trump. If she will, she will, you may depend on't."

Freeling was unusually excited. Granger looked the note over and over in a way that seemed to annoy his partner, who said, presently, with a shade of ill-nature in his voice,

"What's the matter? Isn't the signature all right?"

"That's right enough," returned the young man, after looking at it closely. "But I can't understand it."

"You will when you see the proceeds passed to our accounted in bank—ha! ha!"

Granger looked up at his partner quickly, the laugh had so strange a sound, but saw nothing new in his face.

In about a month Freeling had in his possession another note, signed by Mr. Dinneford and drawn to the order of George Granger. This one was for five thousand dollars. He handed it

to his partner soon after the latter had observed Mrs. Dinneford in the store.

A little over six weeks from this time Mrs. Dinneford was in the store again. After she had gone away, Freeling handed Granger three more notes drawn by Mr. Dinneford to his order, amounting in all to fifteen thousand dollars. They were at short dates.

Granger took these notes without any remark, and was about putting them in his desk, when Freeling said,

"I think you had better offer one in the People's Bank and another in the Fourth National. They discount to-morrow."

"Our line is full in both of these banks," replied Granger.

"That may or may not be. Paper like this is not often thrown out. Call on the president of the Fourth National and the cashier of the People's Bank. Say that we particularly want the money, and would like them to see that the notes go through. Star & Giltedge can easily place the other."

Granger's manner did not altogether please his partner. The notes lay before him on his desk, and he looked at them in a kind of dazed way.

"What's the matter?" asked Freeling, rather sharply.

"Nothing," was the quiet answer.

"You saw Mrs. Dinneford in the store just now. I told her last week that I should claim another favor at her hands. She tried to beg off, but I pushed the matter hard. It must end here, she says. Mr. Dinneford won't go any farther."

"I should think not," replied Granger. "I wouldn't if I were he. The wonder to me is that he has gone so far. What about the renewal of these notes?"

"Oh, that is all arranged," returned Freeling, a little hurriedly. Granger looked at him for some moments. He was not satisfied.

"See that they go in bank," said Freeling, in a positive way.

Granger took up his pen in an abstracted manner and endorsed the notes, after which he laid them in his bank-book. An important customer coming in at the moment, Freeling went forward to see him. After Granger was left alone, he took the notes from his bank-book and examined them with great care. Suspicion was aroused. He felt sure that something was wrong. A good many things in Freeling's conduct of late had seemed strange. After thinking for a while, he determined to take the notes at once to Mr. Dinneford and ask him if all was right. As soon as his mind had reached this conclusion he hurried through the work he had on hand, and then putting his bank-book in his pocket, left the store.

On that very morning Mr. Dinneford received notice that he had a note for three thousand dollars falling due at one of the banks. He went immediately and asked to see the note. When it was shown to him, he was observed to become very pale, but he left the desk of the note-clerk without any remark, and returned home. He met his wife at the door, just coming in.

"What's the matter?" she asked, seeing how pale he was. "Not sick, I hope?"

"Worse than sick," he replied as they passed into the house together. "George has been forging my name."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mrs. Dinneford.

"I wish it were," replied Mr. Dinneford, sadly; "but, alas! it is too true. I have just returned from the Fourth National Bank. They have a note for three thousand dollars, bearing my signature. It is drawn to the order of George Granger, and endorsed by him. The note is a forgery."

Mrs. Dinneford became almost wild with excitement. Her fair face grew purple. Her eyes shone with a fierce light.

"Have you had him arrested?" she asked.

"Oh no, no, no!" Mr. Dinneford answered. "For poor Edith's sake, if for nothing else, this dreadful business must be kept secret. I will take up the note when due, and the public need be none the wiser."

"If," said Mrs. Dinneford, "he has forged your name once, he has, in all probability, done it again and again. No, no; the thing can't be hushed up, and it must not be. Is he less a thief and a robber because he is our son-in-law? My daughter the wife of a forger! Great heavens! has it come to this Mr. Dinneford?" she added, after a pause, and with intense bitterness and rejection in her voice. "The die is cast! Never again, if I can prevent it, shall that scoundrel cross our threshold. Let the law have its course. It is a crime to conceal crime."

"It will kill our poor child!" answered Mr. Dinneford in a broken voice.

"Death is better than the degradation of living with a criminal," replied his wife. "I say it solemnly, and I mean it; the die is cast! Come what will, George Granger stands now and for ever on the outside! Go at once and give information to the bank officers. If you do not, I will."

With a heavy heart Mr. Dinneford returned to the bank and informed the president that the note in question was a forgery. He had been gone from home a little over half an hour, when Granger, who had come to ask him about the three notes given him that morning by Freeling, put his key in the door, and found, a little to his surprise, that the latch was down. He rang the bell, and in a few moments the servant appeared. Granger was about passing in, when the man said, respectfully but firmly, as he held the door partly closed,

"My orders are not to let you come in."

"Who gave you those orders?" demanded Granger, turning white.

"Mrs. Dinneford."

"I wish to see Mr. Dinneford, and I must see him immediately."

"Mr. Dinneford is not at home," answered the servant.

"Shut that door instantly!"

It was the voice of Mrs. Dinneford, speaking from within. Granger heard it; in the next moment the door was shut in his face.

The young man hardly knew how he got back to the store. On

his arrival he found himself under arrest, charged with forgery, and with fresh evidence of the crime on his person in the three notes received that morning from his partner, who denied all knowledge of their existence, and appeared as a witness against him at the hearing before a magistrate. Granger was held to bail to answer the charge at the next term of court.

It would have been impossible to keep all this from Edith, even if there had been a purpose to do so. Mrs. Dinneford chose to break the dreadful news at her own time and in her own way. The shock was fearful. On the night that followed her baby was born.

CHAPTER III

"*IT* is a splendid boy," said the nurse as she came in with the new-born baby in her arms, "and perfect as a bit of sculpture. Just look at that hand."

"Faugh!" ejaculated Mrs. Dinneford, to whom this was addressed. Her countenance expressed disgust. She turned her head away. "Hide the thing from my sight!" she added, angrily. "Cover it up! smother it if you will!"

"You are still determined?" said the nurse.

"Determined, Mrs. Bray; I am not the woman to look back when I have once resolved. You know me." Mrs. Dinneford said this passionately.

The two women were silent for a little while. Mrs. Bray, the nurse, kept her face partly turned from Mrs. Dinneford. She was a short, dry, wiry little woman, with French features, a sallow complexion and very black eyes.

The doctor looked in. Mrs. Dinneford went quickly to the door, and putting her hand on his arm, pressed him back, going out into the entry with him and closing the door behind them. They talked for a short time very earnestly.

"The whole thing is wrong," said the doctor as he turned to go, "and I will not be answerable for the consequences."

"No one will require them at your hand, Doctor Radcliffe," replied Mrs. Dinneford. "Do the best you can for Edith. As for

the rest, know nothing, say nothing. You understand."

Doctor Burt Radcliffe had a large practice among rich and fashionable people. He had learned to be very considerate of their weaknesses, peculiarities and moral obliquities. His business was to doctor them when sick, to humor them when they only thought themselves sick, and to get the largest possible fees for his, services. A great deal came under his observation that he did not care to see, and of which he saw as little as possible. From policy he had learned to be reticent. He held family secrets enough to make, in the hands of a skillful writer, more than a dozen romances of the saddest and most exciting character.

Mrs. Dinneford knew him thoroughly, and just how far to trust him. "Know nothing, say nothing" was a good maxim in the case, and so she divulged only the fact that the baby was to be cast adrift. His weak remonstrance might as well not have been spoken, and he knew it.

While this brief interview was in progress, Nurse Bray sat with the baby on her lap. She had taken the soft little hands into her own; and evil and cruel though she was, an impulse of tenderness flowed into her heart from the angels who were present with the innocent child. It grew lovely in her eyes. Its helplessness stirred in her a latent instinct of protection. "No no, it must not be," she was saying to herself, when the door opened and Mrs. Dinneford came back.

Mrs. Bray did not lift her head, but sat looking down at the baby and toying with its hands.

"Pshaw!" ejaculated Mrs. Dinneford, in angry disgust, as she noticed this manifestation of interest. "Bundle the thing up and throw into that basket. Is the woman down stairs?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Bray as she slowly drew a light blanket over the baby.

"Very well. Put it in the basket, and let her take it away."

"She is not a good woman," said the nurse, whose heart was failing her at the last moment.

"She may be the devil for all I care," returned Mrs. Dinneford.

Mrs. Bray did as she was ordered, but with an evident reluctance that irritated Mrs. Dinneford.

"Go now and bring up the woman," she said, sharply.

The woman was brought. She was past the prime of life, and had an evil face. You read in it the record of bad passions indulged and the signs of a cruel nature. She was poorly clad, and her garments unclean.

"You will take this child?" said Mrs. Dinneford abruptly, as the woman came into her presence.

"I have agreed to do so," she replied, looking toward Mrs. Bray.

"She is to have fifty dollars," said the nurse.

"And that is to be the last of it!" Mrs. Dinneford's face was pale, and she spoke in a hard, husky voice.

Opening her purse, she took from it a small roll of bills, and as she held out the money said, slowly and with a hard emphasis,

"You understand the terms. I do not know you—not even your

name. I don't wish to know you. For this consideration you take the child away. That is the end of it between you and me. The child is your own as much as if he were born to you, and you can do with him as you please. And now go." Mrs. Dinneford waved her hand.

"His name?" queried the woman.

"He has no name!" Mrs. Dinneford stamped her foot in angry impatience.

The woman stooped down, and taking up the basket, tucked the covering that had been laid over the baby close about its head, so that no one could see what she carried, and went off without uttering another word.

It was some moments before either Mrs. Dinneford or the nurse spoke. Mrs. Bray was first to break silence.

"All this means a great deal more than you have counted on," she said, in a voice that betrayed some little feeling. "To throw a tender baby out like that is a hard thing. I am afraid—"

"There, there! no more of that," returned Mrs. Dinneford, impatiently. "It's ugly work, I own, but it had to be done—like cutting off a diseased limb. He will die, of course, and the sooner it is over, the better for him and every one else."

"He will have a hard struggle for life, poor little thing!" said the nurse. "I would rather see him dead."

Mrs. Dinneford, now that this wicked and cruel deed was done, felt ill at ease. She pushed the subject away, and tried to bury it out of sight as we bury the dead, but did not find the task

an easy one.

What followed the birth and removal of Edith's baby up to the time of her return to reason after long struggle for life, has already been told. Her demand to have her baby—"Oh, mother, bring me my baby! I shall die if you do not!" and the answer, "Your baby is in heaven!"—sent the feeble life-currents back again upon her heart. There was another long period of oblivion, out of which she came very slowly, her mind almost as much a blank as the mind of a child.

She had to learn again the names of things, and to be taught their use. It was touching to see the untiring devotion of her father, and the pleasure he took in every new evidence of mental growth. He went over the alphabet with her, letter by letter, many times each day, encouraging her and holding her thought down to the unintelligible signs with a patient tenderness sad yet beautiful to see; and when she began to combine letters into words, and at last to put words together, his delight was unbounded.

Very slowly went on the new process of mental growth, and it was months before thought began to reach out beyond the little world that lay just around her.

Meanwhile, Edith's husband had been brought to trial for forgery, convicted and sentenced to the State's prison for a term of years. His partner came forward as the chief witness, swearing that he had believed the notes genuine, the firm having several times had the use of Mr. Dinneford's paper, drawn to the order of Granger.

Ere the day of trial came the poor young man was nearly broken-hearted. Public disgrace like this, added to the terrible private wrongs he was suffering, was more than he had the moral strength to bear. Utterly repudiated by his wife's family, and not even permitted to see Edith, he only knew that she was very ill. Of the birth of his baby he had but a vague intimation. A rumor was abroad that it had died, but he could learn nothing certain. In his distress and uncertainty he called on Dr. Radcliffe, who replied to his questions with a cold evasion. "It was put out to nurse," said the doctor, "and that is all I know about it." Beyond this he would say nothing.

Granger was not taken to the State's prison after his sentence, but to an insane asylum. Reason gave way under the terrible ordeal through which he had been made to pass.

"Mother," said Edith, one day, in a tone that caused Mrs. Dinneford's heart to leap. She was reading a child's simple story-book, and looked up as she spoke. Her eyes were wide open and full of questions.

"What, my dear?" asked Mrs. Dinneford, repressing her feelings and trying to keep her voice calm.

"There's something I can't understand, mother." She looked down at herself, then about the room. Her manner was becoming nervous.

"What can't you understand?"

Edith shut her hands over her eyes and remained very still. When she removed them, and her mother looked into her face the

childlike sweetness and content were all gone, and a conscious woman was before her. The transformation was as sudden as it was marvelous.

Both remained silent for the space of nearly a minute. Mrs. Dinneford knew not what to say, and waited for some sign from her daughter.

"Where is my baby, mother?" Edith said this in a low, tremulous whisper, leaning forward as she spoke, repressed and eager.

"Have you forgotten?" asked Mrs. Dinneford, with regained composure.

"Forgotten what?"

"You were very ill after your baby was born; no one thought you could live; you were ill for a long time. And the baby—"

"What of the baby, mother?" asked Edith, beginning to tremble violently. Her mother, perceiving her agitation, held back the word that was on her lips.

"What of the baby, mother?" Edith repeated the question.

"It died," said Mrs. Dinneford, turning partly away. She could not look at her child and utter this cruel falsehood.

"Dead! Oh, mother, don't say that! The baby can't be dead!"

A swift flash of suspicion came into her eyes.

"I have said it, my child," was the almost stern response of Mrs. Dinneford. "The baby is dead."

A weight seemed to fall on Edith. She bent forward, crouching down until her elbows rested on her knees and her hands

supported her head. Thus she sat, rocking her body with a slight motion. Mrs. Dinneford watched her without speaking.

"And what of George?" asked Edith, checking her nervous movement at last.

Her mother did not reply. Edith waited a moment, and then lifted herself erect.

"What of George?" she demanded.

"My poor child!" exclaimed Mrs. Dinneford, with a gush of genuine pity, putting her arms about Edith and drawing her head against her bosom. "It is more than you have strength to bear."

"You must tell me," the daughter said, disengaging herself. "I have asked for my husband."

"Hush! You must not utter that word again;" and Mrs. Dinneford put her fingers on Edith's lips. "The wretched man you once called by that name is a disgraced criminal. It is better that you know the worst."

When Mr. Dinneford came home, instead of the quiet, happy child he had left in the morning, he found a sad, almost broken-hearted woman, refusing to be comforted. The wonder was that under the shock of this terrible awakening, reason had not been again and hopelessly dethroned.

After a period of intense suffering, pain seemed to deaden sensibility. She grew calm and passive. And now Mrs. Dinneford set herself to the completion of the work she had begun. She had compassed the ruin of Granger in order to make a divorce possible; she had cast the baby adrift that no sign of the social

disgrace might remain as an impediment to her first ambition. She would yet see her daughter in the position to which she had from the beginning resolved to lift her, cost what it might. But the task was not to be an easy one.

After a period of intense suffering, as we have said, Edith grew calm and passive. But she was never at ease with her mother, and seemed to be afraid of her. To her father she was tender and confiding. Mrs. Dinneford soon saw that if Edith's consent to a divorce from her husband was to be obtained, it must come through her father's influence; for if she but hinted at the subject, it was met with a flash of almost indignant rejection. So her first work was to bring her husband over to her side. This was not difficult, for Mr. Dinneford felt the disgrace of having for a son-in-law a condemned criminal, who was only saved from the State's prison by insanity. An insane criminal was not worthy to hold the relation of husband to his pure and lovely child.

After a feeble opposition to her father's arguments and persuasions, Edith yielded her consent. An application for a divorce was made, and speedily granted.

CHAPTER IV

OUT of this furnace Edith came with a new and purer spirit. She had been thrust in a shrinking and frightened girl; she came out a woman in mental stature, in feeling and self-consciousness.

The river of her life, which had cut for itself a deeper channel, lay now so far down that it was out of the sight of common observation. Even her mother failed to apprehend its drift and strength. Her father knew her better. To her mother she was reserved and distant; to her father, warm and confiding. With the former she would sit for hours without speaking unless addressed; with the latter she was pleased and social, and grew to be interested in what interested him. As mentioned, Mr. Dinneford was a man of wealth and leisure, and active in many public charities. He had come to be much concerned for the neglected and cast-off children of poor and vicious parents, thousands upon thousands of whom were going to hopeless ruin, unthought of and uncared for by Church or State, and their condition often formed the subject of his conversation as well at home as elsewhere.

Mrs. Dinneford had no sympathy with her husband in this direction. A dirty, vicious child was an offence to her, not an object of pity, and she felt more like, spurning it with her foot than touching it with her hand. But it was not so with Edith; she listened to her father, and became deeply interested in the poor,

suffering, neglected little ones whose sad condition he could so vividly portray, for the public duties of charity to which he was giving a large part of his time made him familiar with much that was sad and terrible in human suffering and degradation.

One day Edith said to her father,

"I saw a sight this morning that made me sick. It has haunted me ever since. Oh, it was dreadful!"

"What was it?" asked Mr. Dinneford.

"A sick baby in the arms of a half-drunken woman. It made me shiver to look at its poor little face, wasted by hunger and sickness and purple with cold. The woman sat at the street corner begging, and the people went by, no one seeming to care for the helpless, starving baby in her arms. I saw a police-officer almost touch the woman as he passed. Why did he not arrest her?"

"That was not his business," replied Mr. Dinneford. "So long as she did not disturb the peace, the officer had nothing to do with her."

"Who, then, has?"

"Nobody."

"Why, father!" exclaimed Edith. "Nobody?"

"The woman was engaged in business. She was a beggar, and the sick, half-starved baby was her capital in trade," replied Mr. Dinneford. "That policeman had no more authority to arrest her than he had to arrest the organ-man or the peanut-vender."

"But somebody should see after a poor baby like that. Is there no law to meet such cases?"

"The poor baby has no vote," replied Mr. Dinneford, "and law-makers don't concern themselves much about that sort of constituency; and even if they did, the executors of law would be found indifferent. They are much more careful to protect those whose business it is to make drunken beggars like the one you saw, who, if men, can vote and give them place and power. The poor baby is far beneath their consideration."

"But not of Him," said Edith, with eyes full of tears, "who took little children in his arms and blessed them, and said, Suffer them to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

"Our law-makers are not, I fear, of his kingdom," answered Mr. Dinneford, gravely, "but of the kingdom of this world."

A little while after, Edith, who had remained silent and thoughtful, said, with a tremor in her voice,

"Father, did you see my baby?"

Mr. Dinneford started at so unexpected a question, surprised and disturbed. He did not reply, and Edith put the question again.

"No, my dear," he answered, with a hesitation of manner that was almost painful.

After looking into his face steadily for some moments, Edith dropped her eyes to the floor, and there was a constrained silence between them for a good while.

"You never saw it?" she queried, again lifting her eyes to her father's face. Her own was much paler than when she first put the question.

"Never."

"Why?" asked Edith.

She waited for a little while, and then said,

"Why don't you answer me, father?"

"It was never brought to me."

"Oh, father!"

"You were very ill, and a nurse was procured immediately."

"I was not too sick to see my baby," said Edith, with white, quivering lips. "If they had laid it in my bosom as soon as it was born, I would never have been so ill, and the baby would not have died. If—if—"

She held back what she was about saying, shutting her lips tightly. Her face remained very pale and strangely agitated. Nothing more was then said.

A day or two afterward, Edith asked her mother, with an abruptness that sent the color to her face, "Where was my baby buried?"

"In our lot at Fairview," was replied, after a moment's pause.

Edith said no more, but on that very day, regardless of a heavy rain that was falling, went out to the cemetery alone and searched in the family lot for the little mound that covered her baby—searched, but did not find it. She came back so changed in appearance that when her mother saw her she exclaimed,

"Why, Edith! Are you sick?"

"I have been looking for my baby's grave and cannot find it," she answered. "There is something wrong, mother. What was

done with my baby? I must know." And she caught her mother's wrists with both of her hands in a tight grip, and sent searching glances down through her eyes.

"Your baby is dead," returned Mrs. Dinneford, speaking slowly and with a hard deliberation. "As for its grave—well, if you will drag up the miserable past, know that in my anger at your wretched *mesalliance* I rejected even the dead body of your miserable husband's child, and would not even suffer it to lie in our family ground. You know how bitterly I was disappointed, and I am not one of the kind that forgets or forgives easily. I may have been wrong, but it is too late now, and the past may as well be covered out of sight."

"Where, then, was my baby buried?" asked Edith, with a calm resolution of manner that was not to be denied.

"I do not know. I did not care at the time, and never asked."

"Who can tell me?"

"I don't know."

"Who took my baby to nurse?"

"I have forgotten the woman's name. All I know is that she is dead. When the child died, I sent her money, and told her to bury it decently."

"Where did she live?"

"I never knew precisely. Somewhere down town."

"Who brought her here? who recommended her?" said Edith, pushing her inquiries rapidly.

"I have forgotten that also," replied Mrs. Dinneford,

maintaining her coldness of manner.

"My nurse, I presume," said Edith. "I have a faint recollection of her—a dark little woman with black eyes whom I had never seen before. What was her name?"

"Bodine," answered Mrs. Dinneford, without a moment's hesitation.

"Where does she live?"

"She went to Havana with a Cuban lady several months ago."

"Do you know the lady's name?"

"It was Casteline, I think."

Edith questioned no further. The mother and daughter were still sitting together, both deeply absorbed in thought, when a servant opened the door and said to Mrs. Dinneford,

"A lady wishes to see you."

"Didn't she give you her card?"

"No ma'am."

"Nor send up her name?"

"No, ma'am."

"Go down and ask her name."

The servant left the room. On returning, she said,

"Her name is Mrs. Bray."

Mrs. Dinneford turned her face quickly, but not in time to prevent Edith from seeing by its expression that she knew her visitor, and that her call was felt to be an unwelcome one. She went from the room without speaking. On entering the parlor, Mrs. Dinneford said, in a low, hurried voice,

"I don't want you to come here, Mrs. Bray. If you wish to see me send me word, and I will call on you, but you must on no account come here."

"Why? Is anything wrong?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Edith isn't satisfied about the baby, has been out to Fairview looking for its grave, wants to know who her nurse was."

"What did you tell her?"

"I said that your name was Mrs. Bodine, and that you had gone to Cuba."

"Do you think she would know me?"

"Can't tell; wouldn't like to run the risk of her seeing you here. Pull down your veil. There! close. She said, a little while ago, that she had a faint recollection of you as a dark little woman with black eyes whom she had never seen before."

"Indeed!" and Mrs. Bray gathered her veil close about her face.

"The baby isn't living?" Mrs. Dinneford asked the question in a whisper.

"Yes."

"Oh, it can't be! Are you sure?"

"Yes; I saw it day before yesterday."

"You did! Where?"

"On the street, in the arms of a beggar-woman."

"You are deceiving me!" Mrs. Dinneford spoke with a throb

of anger in her voice.

"As I live, no! Poor little thing! half starved and half frozen. It 'most made me sick."

"It's impossible! You could not know that it was Edith's baby."

"I do know," replied Mrs. Bray, in a voice that left no doubt on Mrs. Dinneford's mind.

"Was the woman the same to whom we gave the baby?"

"No; she got rid of it in less than a month."

"What did she do with it?"

"Sold it for five dollars, after she had spent all the money she received from you in drink and lottery-policies."

"Sold it for five dollars!"

"Yes, to two beggar-women, who use it every day, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon, and get drunk on the money they receive, lying all night in some miserable den."

Mrs. Dinneford gave a little shiver.

"What becomes of the baby when they are not using it?" she asked.

"They pay a woman a dollar a week to take care of it at night."

"Do you know where this woman lives?"

"Yes."

"Were you ever there?"

"Yes."

"What kind of a place is it?"

"Worse than a dog-kennel."

"What does all this mean?" demanded Mrs. Dinneford, with

repressed excitement. “Why have you so kept on the track of this baby, when you knew I wished it lost sight of?”

“I had my own reasons,” replied Mrs. Bray. “One doesn’t know what may come of an affair like this, and it’s safe to keep well up with it.”

Mrs. Dinneford bit her lips till the blood almost came through. A faint rustle of garments in the hall caused her to start. An expression of alarm crossed her face.

“Go now,” she said, hurriedly, to her visitor; “I will call and see you this afternoon.”

Mrs. Bray quietly arose, saying, as she did so, “I shall expect you,” and went away.

There was a menace in her tone as she said, “I shall expect you,” that did not escape the ears of Mrs. Dinneford.

Edith was in the hall, at some distance from the parlor door. Mrs. Bray had to pass her as she went out. Edith looked at her intently.

“Who is that woman?” she asked, confronting her mother, after the visitor was gone.

“If you ask the question in a proper manner, I shall have no objection to answer,” said Mrs. Dinneford, with a dignified and slightly offended air; “but my daughter is assuming rather, too much.”

“Mrs. Bray, the servant said.”

“No, Mrs. Gray.”

“I understood her to say Mrs. Bray.”

"I can't help what you understood." The mother spoke with some asperity of manner. "She calls herself Gray, but you can have it anything you please; it won't change her identity."

"What did she want?"

"To see me."

"I know." Edith was turning away with an expression on her face that Mrs. Dinneford did not like, so she said,

"She is in trouble, and wants me to help her, if you must know. She used to be a dressmaker, and worked for me before you were born; she got married, and then her troubles began. Now she is a widow with a house full of little children, and not half bread enough to feed them. I've helped her a number of times already, but I'm getting tired of it; she must look somewhere else, and I told her so."

Edith turned from her mother with an unsatisfied manner, and went up stairs. Mrs. Dinneford was surprised, not long afterward, to meet her at her chamber door, dressed to go out. This was something unusual.

"Where are you going?" she asked, not concealing her surprise.

"I have a little errand out," Edith replied.

This was not satisfactory to her mother. She asked other questions, but Edith gave only evasive answers.

On leaving the house, Edith walked quickly, like one in earnest about something; her veil was closely drawn. Only a few blocks from where she lived was the office of Dr. Radcliffe. Hither she

directed her steps.

"Why, Edith, child!" exclaimed the doctor, not concealing the surprise he felt at seeing her. "Nobody sick, I hope?"

"No one," she answered.

There was a momentary pause; then Edith said, abruptly,

"Doctor, what became of my baby?"

"It died," answered Doctor Radcliffe, but not without betraying some confusion. The question had fallen upon him too suddenly.

"Did you see it after it was dead?" She spoke in a firm voice, looking him steadily in the face.

"No," he replied, after a slight hesitation.

"Then how do you know that it died?" Edith asked.

"I had your mother's word for it," said the doctor.

"What was done with my baby after it was born?"

"It was given out to nurse."

"With your consent?"

"I did not advise it. Your mother had her own views in the case. It was something over which I had no control."

"And you never saw it after it was taken away?"

"Never."

"And do not really know whether it be dead or living?"

"Oh, it's dead, of course, my child. There is no doubt of that," said the doctor, with sudden earnestness of manner.

"Have you any evidence of the fact?"

"My dear, dear child," answered the doctor, with much

feeling, "it is all wrong. Why go back over this unhappy ground? why torture yourself for nothing? Your baby died long ago, and is in heaven."

"Would God I could believe it!" she exclaimed, in strong agitation. "If it were so, why is not the evidence set before me? I question my mother; I ask for the nurse who was with me when my baby was born, and for the nurse to whom it was given afterward, and am told that they are dead or out of the country. I ask for my baby's grave, but it cannot be found. I have searched for it where my mother told me it was, but the grave is not there. Why all this hiding and mystery? Doctor, you said that my baby was in heaven, and I answered, 'Would God it were so!' for I saw a baby in hell not long ago!"

The doctor was scared. He feared that Edith was losing her mind, she looked and spoke so wildly.

"A puny, half-starved, half-frozen little thing, in the arms of a drunken beggar," she added. "And, doctor, an awful thought has haunted me ever since."

"Hush, hush!" said the doctor, who saw what was in her mind. "You must not indulge such morbid fancies."

"It is that I may not indulge them that I have come to you. I want certainty, Dr. Radcliffe. Somebody knows all about my baby. Who was my nurse?"

"I never saw her before the night of your baby's birth, and have never seen her since. Your mother procured her."

"Did you hear her name?"

"No."

"And so you cannot help me at all?" said Edith, in a disappointed voice.

"I cannot, my poor child," answered the doctor.

All the flush and excitement died out of Edith's face. When she arose to go, she was pale and haggard, like one exhausted by pain, and her steps uneven, like the steps of an invalid walking for the first time. Dr. Radcliffe went with her in silence to the door.

"Oh, doctor," said Edith, in a choking voice, as she lingered a moment on the steps, "can't you bring out of this frightful mystery something for my heart to rest upon? I want the truth. Oh, doctor, in pity help me to find the truth!"

"I am powerless to help you," the doctor replied. "Your only hope lies in your mother. She knows all about it; I do not."

And he turned and left her standing at the door. Slowly she descended the steps, drawing her veil as she did so about her face, and walked away more like one in a dream than conscious of the tide of life setting so strongly all about her.

CHAPTER V

MEANTIME, obeying the unwelcome summons, Mrs. Dinneford had gone to see Mrs. Bray. She found her in a small third-story room in the lower part of the city, over a mile away from her own residence. The meeting between the two women was not over-gracious, but in keeping with their relations to each other. Mrs. Dinneford was half angry and impatient; Mrs. Bray cool and self-possessed.

"And now what is it you have to say?" asked the former, almost as soon as she had entered.

"The woman to whom you gave that baby was here yesterday."

A frightened expression came into Mrs. Dinneford's face. Mrs. Bray watched her keenly as, with lips slightly apart, she waited for what more was to come.

"Unfortunately, she met me just as I was at my own door, and so found out my residence," continued Mrs. Bray. "I was in hopes I should never see her again. We shall have trouble, I'm afraid."

"In what way?"

"A bad woman who has you in her power can trouble you in many ways," answered Mrs. Bray.

"She did not know my name—you assured me of that. It was one of the stipulations."

"She does know, and your daughter's name also. And she knows where the baby is. She's deeper than I supposed. It's never

safe to trust such people; they have no honor."

Fear sent all the color out of Mrs. Dinneford's face.

"What does she want?"

"Money."

"She was paid liberally."

"That has nothing to do with it. These people have no honor, as I said; they will get all they can."

"How much does she want?"

"A hundred dollars; and it won't end there, I'm thinking. If she is refused, she will go to your house; she gave me that alternative —would have gone yesterday, if good luck had not thrown her in my way. I promised to call on you and see what could be done."

Mrs. Dinneford actually groaned in her fear and distress.

"Would you like to see her yourself?" coolly asked Mrs. Bray.

"Oh dear! no, no!" and the lady put up her hands in dismay.

"It might be best," said her wily companion.

"No, no, no! I will have nothing to do with her! You must keep her away from me," replied Mrs. Dinneford, with increasing agitation.

"I cannot keep her away without satisfying her demands. If you were to see her yourself, you would know just what her demands were. If you do not see her, you will only have my word for it, and I am left open to misapprehension, if not worse. I don't like to be placed in such a position."

And Mrs. Bray put on a dignified, half-injured manner.

"It's a wretched business in every way," she added, "and

I'm sorry that I ever had anything to do with it. It's something dreadful, as I told you at the time, to cast a helpless baby adrift in such a way. Poor little soul! I shall never feel right about it."

"That's neither here nor there;" and Mrs. Dinneford waved her hand impatiently. "The thing now in hand is to deal with this woman."

"Yes, that's it—and as I said just now, I would rather have you deal with her yourself; you may be able to do it better than I can."

"It's no use to talk, Mrs. Bray. I will not see the woman."

"Very well; you must be your own judge in the case."

"Can't you bind her up to something, or get her out of the city? I'd pay almost anything to have her a thousand miles away. See if you can't induce her to go to New Orleans. I'll pay her passage, and give her a hundred dollars besides, if she'll go."

Mrs. Bray smiled a faint, sinister smile:

"If you could get her off there, it would be the end of her. She'd never stand the fever."

"Then get her off, cost what it may," said Mrs. Dinneford.

"She will be here in less than half an hour." Mrs. Bray looked at the face of a small cheap clock that stood on the mantel.

"She will?" Mrs. Dinneford became uneasy, and arose from her chair.

"Yes; what shall I say to her?"

"Manage her the best you can. Here are thirty dollars—all the money I have with me. Give her that, and promise more if necessary. I will see you again."

"When?" asked Mrs. Bray.

"At any time you desire."

"Then you had better come to-morrow morning. I shall not go out."

"I will be here at eleven o'clock. Induce her if possible to leave the city—to go South, so that she may never come back."

"The best I can shall be done," replied Mrs. Bray as she folded the bank-bills she had received from Mrs. Dinneford in a fond, tender sort of way and put them into her pocket.

Mrs. Dinneford retired, saying as she did so,

"I will be here in the morning."

An instant change came over the shallow face of the wiry little woman as the form of Mrs. Dinneford vanished through the door. A veil seemed to fall away from it. All its virtuous sobriety was gone, and a smile of evil satisfaction curved about her lips and danced in her keen black eyes. She stood still, listening to the retiring steps of her visitor, until she heard the street door shut. Then, with a quick, cat-like step, she crossed to the opposite side of the room, and pushed open a door that led to an adjoining chamber. A woman came forward to meet her. This woman was taller and stouter than Mrs. Bray, and had a soft, sensual face, but a resolute mouth, the under jaw slightly protruding. Her eyes were small and close together, and had that peculiar wily and alert expression you sometimes see, making you think of a serpent's eyes. She was dressed in common finery and adorned by cheap jewelry.

"What do you think of that, Pinky Swett?" exclaimed Mrs. Bray, in a voice of exultation. "Got her all right, haven't I?"

"Well, you have!" answered the woman, shaking all over with unrestrained laughter. "The fattest pigeon I've happened to see for a month of Sundays. Is she very rich?"

"Her husband is, and that's all the same. And now, Pinky"—Mrs. Bray assumed a mock gravity of tone and manner—"you know your fate—New Orleans and the yellow fever. You must pack right off. Passage free and a hundred dollars for funeral expenses. Nice wet graves down there—keep off the fire;" and she gave a low chuckle.

"Oh yes; all settled. When does the next steamer sail?" and Pinky almost screamed with merriment. She had been drinking.

"H-u-s-h! h-u-s-h! None of that here, Pinky. The people down stairs are good Methodists, and think me a saint."

"You a saint? Oh dear!" and she shook with repressed enjoyment.

After this the two women grew serious, and put their heads together for business.

"Who is this woman, Fan? What's her name, and where does she live?" asked Pinky Swett.

"That's my secret, Pinky," replied Mrs. Bray, "and I can't let it go; it wouldn't be safe. You get a little off the handle sometimes, and don't know what you say—might let the cat out of the bag. Sally Long took the baby away, and she died two months ago; so I'm the only one now in the secret. All I want of you is to keep

track of the baby. Here is a five-dollar bill; I can't trust you with more at a time. I know your weakness, Pinky;" and she touched her under the chin in a familiar, patronizing way.

Pinky wasn't satisfied with this, and growled a little, just showing her teeth like an unquiet dog.

"Give me ten," she said; "the woman gave you thirty. I heard her say so. And she's going to bring you seventy to-morrow."

"You'll only waste it, Pinky," remonstrated Mrs. Bray. "It will all be gone before morning."

"Fan," said the woman, leaning toward Mrs. Bray and speaking in a low, confidential tone, "I dreamed of a cow last night, and that's good luck, you know. Tom Oaks made a splendid hit last Saturday—drew twenty dollars—and Sue Minty got ten. They're all buzzing about it down in our street, and going to Sam McFaddon's office in a stream."

"Do they have good luck at Sam McFaddon's?" asked Mrs. Bray, with considerable interest in her manner.

"It's the luckiest place that I know. Never dreamed of a cow or a hen that I didn't make a hit, and I dreamed of a cow last night. She was giving such a splendid pail of milk, full to the brim, just as old Spot and Brindle used to give. You remember our Spot and Brindle, Fan?"

"Oh yes." There was a falling inflection in Mrs. Bray's voice, as if the reference had sent her thoughts away back to other and more innocent days.

The two women sat silent for some moments after that; and

when Pinky spoke, which she did first, it was in lower and softer tones:

"I don't like to think much about them old times, Fan; do you? I might have done better. But it's no use grizzling about it now. What's done's done, and can't be helped. Water doesn't run up hill again after it's once run down. I've got going, and can't stop, you see. There's nothing to catch at that won't break as soon as you touch it. So I mean to be jolly as I move along."

"Laughing is better than crying at any time," returned Mrs. Bray; "here are five more;" and she handed Pinky Swett another bank-bill. "I'm going to try my luck. Put half a dollar on ten different rows, and we'll go shares on what is drawn. I dreamed the other night that I saw a flock of sheep, and that's good luck, isn't it?"

Pinky thrust her hand into her pocket and drew out a worn and soiled dream-book.

"A flock of sheep; let me see;" and she commenced turning over the leaves. "Sheep; here it is: 'To see them is a sign of sorrow —11, 20, 40, 48. To be surrounded by many sheep denotes good luck—2, 11, 55.' That's your row; put down 2, 11, 55. We'll try that. Next put down 41 11, 44—that's the lucky row when you dream of a cow."

As Pinky leaned toward her friend she dropped her parasol.

"That's for luck, maybe," she said, with a brightening face. "Let's see what it says about a parasol;" and she turned over her dream-book.

"For a maiden to dream she loses her parasol shows that her sweetheart is false and will never marry her—5, 51, 56."

"But you didn't dream about a parasol, Pinky."

"That's no matter; it's just as good as a dream. 5, 51, 56 is the row. Put that down for the second, Fan."

As Mrs. Bray was writing out these numbers the clock on the mantel struck five.

"8, 12, 60," said Pinky, turning to the clock; "that's the clock row."

And Mrs. Bray put down these figures also.

"That's three rows," said Pinky, "and we want ten." She arose, as she spoke, and going to the front window, looked down upon the street.

"There's an organ-grinder; it's the first thing I saw;" and she came back fingering the leaves of her dream-book. "Put down 40, 50, 26."

Mrs. Bray wrote the numbers on her slip of paper.

"It's November; let's find the November row." Pinky consulted her book again. "Signifies you will have trouble through life—7, 9, 63. That's true as preaching; I was born in November, and I've had it all trouble. How many rows does that make?"

"Five."

"Then we will cut cards for the rest;" and Pinky drew a soiled pack from her pocket, shuffled the cards and let her friends cut them.

"Ten of diamonds;" she referred to the dream-book. "10, 13, 31; put that down."

The cards were shuffled and cut again.

"Six of clubs—6, 35, 39."

Again they were cut and shuffled. This time the knave of clubs was turned up.

"That's 17, 19, 28," said Pinky, reading from her book.

The next cut gave the ace of clubs, and the policy numbers were 18, 63, 75.

"Once more, and the ten rows will be full;" and the cards were cut again.

"Five of hearts—5, 12, 60;" and the ten rows were complete.

"There's luck there, Fan; sure to make a hit," said Pinky, with almost childish confidence, as she gazed at the ten rows of figures. "One of 'em can't help coming out right, and that would be fifty dollars—twenty-five for me and twenty-five for you; two rows would give a hundred dollars, and the whole ten a thousand. Think of that, Fan! five hundred dollars apiece."

"It would break Sam McFaddon, I'm afraid," remarked Mrs. Bray.

"Sam's got nothing to do with it," returned Pinky.

"He hasn't?"

"No."

"Who has, then?"

"His backer."

"What's that?"

"Oh, I found it all out—I know how it's done. Sam's got a backer—a man that puts up the money. Sam only sells for his backer. When there's a hit, the backer pays."

"Who's Sam's backer, as you call him?"

"Couldn't get him to tell; tried him hard, but he was close as an oyster. Drives in the Park and wears a two thousand dollar diamond pin; he let that out. So he's good for the hits. Sam always puts the money down, fair and square."

"Very well; you get the policy, and do it right off, Pinky, or the money'll slip through your fingers."

"All right," answered Pinky as she folded the slip of paper containing the lucky rows. "Never you fear. I'll be at Sam McFaddon's in ten minutes after I leave here."

"And be sure," said Mrs. Bray, "to look after the baby to-night, and see that it doesn't perish with cold; the air's getting sharp."

"It ought to have something warmer than cotton rags on its poor little body," returned Pinky. "Can't you get it some flannel? It will die if you don't."

"I sent it a warm petticoat last week," said Mrs. Bray.

"You did?"

"Yes; I bought one at a Jew shop, and had it sent to the woman."

"Was it a nice warm one?"

"Yes."

Pinky drew a sigh. "I saw the poor baby last night; hadn't anything on but dirty cotton rags. It was lying asleep in a

cold cellar on a little heap of straw. The woman had given it something, I guess, by the way it slept. The petticoat had gone, most likely, to Sam McFaddon's. She spends everything she can lay her hands on in policies and whisky."

"She's paid a dollar a week for taking care of the baby at night and on Sundays," said Mrs. Bray.

"It wouldn't help the baby any if she got ten dollars," returned Pinky. "It ought to be taken away from her."

"But who's to do that? Sally Long sold it to the two beggar women, and they board it out. I have no right to interfere; they own the baby, and can do as they please with it."

"It could be got to the almshouse," said Pinky; "it would be a thousand times better off."

"It mustn't go to the almshouse," replied Mrs. Bray; "I might lose track of it, and that would never do."

"You'll lose track of it for good and all before long, if you don't get it out of them women's bands. No baby can hold out being begged with long; it's too hard on the little things. For you know how it is, Fan; they must keep 'em half starved and as sick as they will bear without dying right off, so as to make 'em look pitiful. You can't do much at begging with a fat, hearty-looking baby."

"What's to be done about it?" asked Mrs. Bray. "I don't want that baby to die."

"Would its mother know it if she saw it?" asked Pinky.

"No; for she never set eyes on it."

"Then, if it dies, get another baby, and keep track of that. You

can steal one from a drunken mother any night in the week. I'll do it for you. One baby is as good as another."

"It will be safer to have the real one," replied Mrs. Bray. "And now, Pinky that you have put this thing into my head, I guess I'll commission you to get the baby away from that woman."

"All right!"

"But what are we to do with it? I can't have it here."

"Of course you can't. But that's easily managed, if your're willing to pay for it."

"Pay for it?"

"Yes; if it isn't begged with, and made to pay its way and earn something into the bargain, it's got to be a dead weight on somebody. So you see how it is, Fan. Now, if you'll take a fool's advice, you'll let 'it go to the almshouse, or let it alone to die and get out of its misery as soon as possible. You can find another baby that will do just as well, if you should ever need one."

"How much would it cost, do you think, to have it boarded with some one who wouldn't abuse it? She might beg with it herself, or hire it out two or three times a week. I guess it would stand that."

"Beggars don't belong to the merciful kind," answered Pinky; "there's no trusting any of them. A baby in their hands is never safe. I've seen 'em brought in at night more dead than alive, and tossed on a dirty rag-heap to die before morning. I'm always glad when they're out of their misery, poor things! The fact is, Fan, if you expect that baby to live, you've got to take it clean out of

the hands of beggars."

"What could I get it boarded for outright?" asked Mrs. Bray.

"For 'most anything, 'cording to how it's done. But why not, while you're about it, bleed the old lady, its grandmother, a little deeper, and take a few drops for the baby?"

"Guess you're kind o' right about that, Fan; anyhow, we'll make a start on it. You find another place for the brat."

"'Greed; when shall I do it?"

"The sooner, the better. It might die of cold any night in that horrible den. Ugh!"

"I've been in worse places. Bedlow street is full of them, and so is Briar street and Dirty alley. You don't know anything about it."

"Maybe not, and maybe I don't care to know. At present I want to settle about this baby. You'll find another place for it?"

"Yes."

"And then steal it from the woman who has it now?"

"Yes; no trouble in the world. She's drunk every night," answered Pinky Swett, rising to go.

"You'll see me to-morrow?" said Mrs. Bray.

"Oh yes."

"And you won't forget about the policies?"

"Not I. We shall make a grand hit, or I'm a fool. Day-day!" Pinky waved her hand gayly, and then retired.

CHAPTER VI

A COLD wet drizzling rain was beginning to fall when Pinky Swett emerged from the house. Twilight was gathering drearily. She drew her thin shawl closely, and shivered as the east wind struck her with a chill.

At hurried walk of five or ten minutes brought her to a part of the town as little known to its citizens generally as if it were in the centre of Africa—a part of the town where vice, crime, drunkenness and beggary herd together in the closest and most shameless contact; where men and women, living in all foulness, and more like wild beasts than human beings, prey greedily upon each other, hurting, depraving and marring God's image in all over whom they can get power or influenced—*a very hell upon the earth!*—at part of the town where theft and robbery and murder are plotted, and from which prisons and almshouses draw their chief population.

That such a herding together, almost in the centre of a great Christian city, of the utterly vicious and degraded, should be permitted, when every day's police and criminal records give warning of its cost and danger, is a marvel and a reproach. Almost every other house, in portions of this locality, is a dram-shop, where the vilest liquors are sold. Policy-offices, doing business in direct violation of law, are in every street and block, their work of plunder and demoralization going on with open

doors and under the very eyes of the police. Every one of them is known to these officers. But arrest is useless. A hidden and malign influence, more potent than justice, has power to protect the traffic and hold the guilty offenders harmless. Conviction is rarely, if ever, reached.

The poor wretches, depraved and plundered through drink and policy-gambling, are driven into crime. They rob and steal and debase themselves for money with which to buy rum and policies, and sooner or later the prison or death removes the greater number of them from their vile companions. But drifting toward this fatal locality under the attraction of affinity, or lured thither by harpies in search of new supplies of human victims to repair the frightful waste perpetually made, the region keeps up its dense population, and the work of destroying human souls goes on. It is an awful thing to contemplate. Thousands of men and women, boys and girls, once innocent as the babes upon whom Christ laid his hand in blessing, are drawn into this whirlpool of evil every year, and few come out except by the way of prison or death.

It was toward this locality that Pinky Swett directed her feet, after parting with Mrs. Bray. Darkness was beginning to settle down as she turned off from one of the most populous streets, crowded at the time by citizens on their way to quiet and comfortable homes, few if any of whom had ever turned aside to look upon and get knowledge of the world or crime and wretchedness so near at hand, but girdled in and concealed from

common observation.

Down a narrow street she turned from the great thoroughfare, walking with quick steps, and shivering a little as the penetrating east wind sent a chill of dampness through the thin shawl she drew closer and closer about her shoulders. Nothing could be in stronger contrast than the rows of handsome dwellings and stores that lined the streets through which she had just passed, and the forlorn, rickety, unsightly and tumble-down houses amid which she now found herself.

Pinky had gone only a little way when the sharp cries of a child cut the air suddenly, the shrill, angry voice of a woman and the rapid fall of lashes mingled with the cries. The child begged for mercy in tones of agony, but the loud voice, uttering curses and imprecations, and the cruel blows, ceased not. Pinky stopped and shivered. She felt the pain of these blows, in her quickly-aroused sympathy, almost as much as if they had been falling on her own person. Opposite to where she had paused was a one-story frame house, or enclosed shed, as unsightly without as a pig-pen, and almost as filthy within. It contained two small rooms with very low ceilings. The only things in these rooms that could be called furniture were an old bench, two chairs from which the backs had been broken, a tin cup black with smoke and dirt, two or three tin pans in the same condition, some broken crockery and an iron skillet. Pinky stood still for a moment, shivering, as we have said. She knew what the blows and the curses and the cries of pain meant; she had heard them before. A depraved and drunken

woman and a child ten years old, who might or might not be her daughter, lived there. The child was sent out every day to beg or steal, and if she failed to bring home a certain sum of money, was cruelly beaten by the woman. Almost every day the poor child was cut with lashes, often on the bare flesh; almost every day her shrieks rang out from the miserable hovel. But there was no one to interfere, no one to save her from the smarting blows, no one to care what she suffered.

Pinky Swett could stand it no longer. She had often noticed the ragged child, with her pale, starved face and large, wistful eyes, passing in and out of this miserable woman's den, sometimes going to the liquor-shops and sometimes to the nearest policy-office to spend for her mother, if such the woman really was, the money she had gained by begging.

With a sudden impulse, as a deep wail and a more piteous cry for mercy smote upon her ears, Pinky sprang across the street and into the hovel. The sight that met her eyes left no hesitation in her mind. Holding up with one strong arm the naked body of the poor child—she had drawn the clothes over her head—the infuriated woman was raining down blows from a short piece of rattan upon the quivering flesh, already covered with welts and bruises.

"Devil!" cried Pinky as she rushed upon this fiend in human shape and snatched the little girl from her arm. "Do you want to kill the child?"

She might almost as well have assaulted a tigress.

The woman was larger, stronger, more desperate and more thoroughly given over to evil passions than she. To thwart her in anything was to rouse her into a fury. A moment she stood in surprise and bewilderment; in the next, and ere Pinky had time to put herself on guard, she had sprung upon her with a passionate cry that sounded more like that of a wild beast than anything human. Clutching her by the throat with one hand, and with the other tearing the child from her grasp, she threw the frightened little thing across the room.

"Devil, ha!" screamed the woman; "devil!" and she tightened her grasp on Pinky's throat, at the same time striking her in the face with her clenched fist.

Like a war-horse that snuffs the battle afar off and rushes to the conflict, so rushed the inhabitants of that foul neighborhood to the spot from whence had come to their ears the familiar and not unwelcome sound of strife. Even before Pinky had time to shake off her assailant, the door of the hovel was darkened by a screen of eager faces. And such faces! How little of God's image remained in them to tell of their divine origination!—bloated and scarred, ashen pale and wasted, hollow-eyed and red-eyed, disease looking out from all, yet all lighted up with the keenest interest and expectancy.

Outside, the crowd swelled with a marvelous rapidity. Every cellar and room and garret, every little alley and hidden rookery, "hawk's nest" and "wren's nest," poured out its unseemly denizens, white and black, old and young, male and female, the

child of three years old, keen, alert and self-protective, running to see the "row" side by side with the toothless crone of seventy; or most likely passing her on the way. Thieves, beggars, pick-pockets, vile women, rag-pickers and the like, with the harpies who prey upon them, all were there to enjoy the show.

Within, a desperate fight was going on between Pinky Swett and the woman from whose hands she had attempted to rescue the child—a fight in which Pinky was getting the worst of it. One garment after another was torn from her person, until little more than a single one remained.

"Here's the police! look out!" was cried at this juncture.

"Who cares for the police? Let 'em come," boldly retorted the woman. "I haven't done nothing; it's her that's come in drunk and got up a row."

Pushing the crowd aside, a policeman entered the hovel.

"Here she is!" cried the woman, pointing toward Pinky, from whom she had sprung back the moment she heard the word police. "She came in here drunk and got up a row. I'm a decent woman, as don't meddle with nobody. But she's awful when she gets drunk. Just look at her—been tearing her clothes off!"

At this there was a shout of merriment from the crowd who had witnessed the fight.

"Good for old Sal! she's one of 'em! Can't get ahead of old Sal, drunk or sober!" and like expressions were shouted by one and another.

Poor Pinky, nearly stripped of her clothing, and with a great

bruise swelling under one of her eyes, bewildered and frightened at the aspect of things around her, could make no acceptable defence.

"She ran over and pitched into Sal, so she did! I saw her! She made the fight, she did!" testified one of the crowd; and acting on this testimony and his own judgment of the case, the policeman said roughly, as he laid his hand on Pinky.

"Pick up your duds and come along."

Pinky lifted her torn garments from the dirty floor and gathered them about her person as best she could, the crowd jeering all the time. A pin here and there, furnished by some of the women, enabled her to get them into a sort of shape and adjustment. Then she tried to explain the affair to the policeman, but he would not listen.

"Come!" he said, sternly.

"What are you going to do with me?" she asked, not moving from where she stood.

"Lock you up," replied the policeman. "So come along."

"What's the matter here?" demanded a tall, strongly-built woman, pressing forward. She spoke with a foreign accent, and in a tone of command. The motley crowd, above whom she towered, gave way for her as she approached. Everything about the woman showed her to be superior in mind and moral force to the unsightly wretches about her. She had the fair skin, blue eyes and light hair of her nation. Her features were strong, but not masculine. You saw in them no trace of coarse sensuality or

vicious indulgence.

"Here's Norah! here's the queen!" shouted a voice from the crowd.

"What's the matter here?" asked the woman as she gained an entrance to the hovel.

"Going to lock up Pinky Swett," said a ragged little girl who had forced her way in.

"What for?" demanded the woman, speaking with the air of one in authority.

"'Cause she wouldn't let old Sal beat Kit half to death," answered the child.

"Ho! Sal's a devil and Pinky's a fool to meddle with her." Then turning to the policeman, who still had his hand on the girl, she said,

"What're you goin' to do, John?"

"Goin' to lock her up. She's drunk an' bin a-fightin'."

"You're not goin' to do any such thing."

"I'm not drunk, and it's a lie if anybody says so," broke in Pinky. "I tried to keep this devil from beating the life out of poor little Kit, and she pitched into me and tore my clothes off. That's what's the matter."

The policeman quietly removed his hand from Pinky's shoulder, and glanced toward the woman named Sal, and stood as if waiting orders.

"Better lock *her* up," said the "queen," as she had been called. Sal snarled like a fretted wild beast.

"It's awful, the way she beats poor Kit," chimed in the little girl who had before spoken against her. "If I was Kit, I'd run away, so I would."

"I'll wring your neck off," growled Sal, in a fierce undertone, making a dash toward the girl, and swearing frightfully. But the child shrank to the side of the policeman.

"If you lay a finger on Kit to-night," said the queen, "I'll have her taken away, and you locked up into the the bargain."

Sal responded with another snarl.

"Come." The queen moved toward the door. Pinky followed, the policeman offering no resistance. A few minutes later, and the miserable crowd of depraved human beings had been absorbed again into cellar and garret, hovel and rookery, to take up the thread of their evil and sensual lives, and to plot wickedness, and to prey upon and deprave each other—to dwell as to their inner and real lives among infernals, to be in hell as to their spirits, while their bodies yet remained upon the earth.

Pinky and her rescuer passed down the street for a short distance until they came to another that was still narrower. On each side dim lights shone from the houses, and made some revelation of what was going on within. Here liquor was sold, and there policies. Here was a junk-shop, and there an eating-saloon where for six cents you could make a meal out of the cullings from beggars' baskets. Not very tempting to an ordinary appetite was the display inside, nor agreeable to the nostrils the odors that filled the atmosphere. But hunger like the swines', that was not

over-nice, satisfied itself amid these disgusting conglomerations, and kept off starvation.

Along this wretched street, with scarcely an apology for a sidewalk, moved Pinky and the queen, until they reached a small two-story frame house that presented a different aspect from the wretched tenements amid which it stood. It was clean upon the outside, and had, as contrasted with its neighbors, an air of superiority. This was the queen's residence. Inside, all was plain and homely, but clean and in order.

The excitement into which Pinky had been thrown was nearly over by this time.

"You've done me a good turn, Norah," she said as the door closed upon them, "and I'll not soon forget you."

"Ugh!" ejaculated Norah as she looked into Pinky's bruised face; "Sal's hit you square in the eye; it'll be black as y'r boot by morning. I'll get some cold water."

A basin of cold water was brought, and Pinky held a wet cloth to the swollen spot for a long time, hoping thereby not only to reduce the swelling, but to prevent discoloration.

"Y'r a fool to meddle with Sal," said Norah as she set the basin of water before Pinky.

"Why don't you meddle with her? Why do you let her beat poor little Kit the way she does?" demanded Pinky.

Norah shrugged her shoulders, and answered with no more feeling in her voice than if she had been speaking of inanimate things:

"She's got to keep Kit up to her work."

"Up to her work!"

"Yes; that's just it. Kit's lazy and cheats—buys cakes and candies; and Sal has to come down on her; it's the way, you know. If Sal didn't come down sharp on her all the while, Kit wouldn't bring her ten cents a day. They all have to do it—so much a day or a lickin'; and a little lickin' isn't any use—got to 'most kill some of 'em. We're used to it in here. Hark!"

The screams of a child in pain rang out wildly, the sounds coming from across the narrow street. Quick, hard strokes of a lash were heard at the same time. Pinky turned a little pale.

"Only Mother Quig," said Norah, with an indifferent air; "she has to do it 'most every night—no getting along any other way with Tom. It beats all how much he can stand."

"Oh, Norah, won't she never stop?" cried Pinky, starting up. "I can't bear it a minute longer."

"Shut y'r ears. You've got to," answered the woman, with some impatience in her voice. "Tom has to be kept to his work as well as the rest of 'em. Half the fuss he's making is put on, anyhow; he doesn't mind a beating any more than a horse. I know his hollers. There's Flanagan's Nell getting it now," added Norah as the cries and entreaties of another child were heard. She drew herself up and listened, a slight shade of concern drifting across her face.

A long, agonizing wail shivered through the air.

"Nell's Sick, and can't do her work." The woman rose as she spoke. "I saw her goin' off to-day, and told Flanagan she'd better

keep her at home."

Saying this, Norah went out quickly, Pinky following. With head erect and mouth set firmly, the queen strode across the street and a little way down the pavement, to the entrance of a cellar, from which the cries and sounds of whipping came. Down the five or six rotten and broken steps she plunged, Pinky close after her.

"Stop!" shouted Norah, in a tone of command.

Instantly the blows ceased, and the cries were hushed.

"You'll be hanged for murder if you don't take care," said Norah. "What's Nell been doin'?"

"Doin', the slut!" ejaculated the woman, a short, bloated, revolting creature, with scarcely anything human in her face. "Doin', did ye say? It's nothin' she's been doin', the lazy, trapsing huzzy! Who's that intrudin' herself in here?" she added fiercely, as she saw Pinky, making at the same time a movement toward the girl. "Get out o' here, or I'll spile y'r pictur'!"

"Keep quiet, will you?" said Norah, putting her hand on the woman and pushing her back as easily as if she had been a child. "Now come here, Nell, and let me look at you."

Out of the far corner of the cellar into which Flanagan had thrown her when she heard Norah's voice, and into the small circle of light made by a single tallow candle, there crept slowly the figure of a child literally clothed in rags. Norah reached out her hand to her as she came up—there was a scared look on her pinched face—and drew her close to the light.

"Gracious! your hand's like an ice-ball!" exclaimed Norah.

Pinky looked at the child, and grew faint at heart. She had large hazel eyes, that gleamed with a singular lustre out of the suffering, grimed and wasted little face, so pale and sad and pitiful that the sight of it was enough to draw tears from any but the brutal and hardened.

"Are you sick?" asked Norah.

"No, she's not sick; she's only shamming," growled Flanagan.

"You shut up!" retorted Norah. "I wasn't speaking to you." Then she repeated her question:

"Are you sick, Nell?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I don't know."

Norah laid her hand on the child's head:

"Does it hurt here?"

"Oh yes! It hurts so I can't see good," answered Nell.

"It's all a lie! I know her; she's shamming."

"Oh no, Norah!" cried the child, a sudden hope blending with the fear in her voice. "I ain't shamming at all. I fell down ever so many times in the street, and 'most got run over. Oh dear! oh dear!" and she clung to the woman with a gesture of despair piteous to see.

"I don't believe you are, Nell," said Norah, kindly. Then, to the woman, "Now mind, Flanagan, Nell's sick; d'ye hear?"

The woman only uttered a defiant growl.

"She's not to be licked again to-night." Norah spoke as one having authority.

"I wish ye'd be mindin' y'r own business, and not come interfarin' wid me. She's my gal, and I've a right to lick her if I plaze."

"Maybe she is and maybe she isn't," retorted Norah.

"Who says she isn't my gal?" screamed the woman, firing up at this and reaching out for Nell, who shrunk closer to Norah.

"Maybe she is and maybe she isn't," said the queen, quietly repeating her last sentence; "and I think maybe she isn't. So take care and mind what I say. Nell isn't to be licked any more to-night."

"Oh, Norah," sobbed the child, in a husky, choking voice, "take me, won't you? She'll pinch me, and she'll hit my head on the wall, and she'll choke me and knock me. Oh, Norah, Norah!"

Pinky could stand this no longer. Catching up the bundle of rags in her arms, she sprang out of the cellar and ran across the street to the queen's house, Norah and Flanagan coming quickly after her. At the door, through which Pinky had passed, Norah paused, and turning to the infuriated Irish woman, said, sternly,

"Go back! I won't have you in here; and if you make a row, I'll tell John to lock you up."

"I want my Nell," said the woman, her manner changing. There was a shade of alarm in her voice.

"You can't have her to-night; so that's settled. And if there's any row, you'll be locked up." Saying which, Norah went in and

shut the door, leaving Flanagan on the outside.

The bundle of dirty rags with the wasted body of a child inside, the body scarcely heavier than the rags, was laid by Pinky in the corner of a settee, and the unsightly mass shrunk together like something inanimate.

"I thought you'd had enough with old Sal," said Norah, in a tone of reproof, as she came in.

"Couldn't help it," replied Pinky. "I'm bad enough, but I can't stand to see a child abused like that—no, not if I die for it."

Norah crossed to the settee and spoke to Nell. But there was no answer, nor did the bundle of rags stir.

"Nell! Nell!" She called to deaf ears. Then she put her hand on the child and raised one of the arms. It dropped away limp as a withered stalk, showing the ashen white face across which it had lain.

The two women manifested no excitement. The child had fainted or was dead—which, they did not know. Norah straightened out the wasted little form and turned up the face. The eyes were shut, the mouth closed, the pinched features rigid, as if still giving expression to pain, but there was no mistaking the sign that life had gone out of them. It might be for a brief season, it might be for ever.

A little water was thrown into the child's face. Its only effect was to streak the grimy skin.

"Poor little thing!" said Pinky. "I hope she's dead."

"They're tough. They don't die easy," returned Norah.

"She isn't one of the tough kind."

"Maybe not. They say Flanagan stole her when she was a little thing, just toddling."

"Don't let's do anything to try to bring her to," said Pinky.

Norah stood for some moment's with an irresolute air, then bent over the child and examined her more carefully. She could feel no pulse beat, nor any motion of the heart,

"I don't want the coroner here," she said, in a tone of annoyance. "Take her back to Flanagan; it's her work, and she must stand by it."

"Is she really dead?" asked Pinky.

"Looks like it, and serves Flanagan right. I've told her over and over that Nell wouldn't stand it long if she didn't ease up a little. Flesh isn't iron."

Again she examined the child carefully, but without the slightest sign of feeling.

"It's all the same now who has her," she said, turning off from the settee. "Take her back to Flanagan."

But Pinky would not touch the child, nor could threat or persuasion lead her to do so. While they were contending, Flanagan, who had fired herself up with half a pint of whisky, came storming through the door in a blind rage and screaming out,

"Where's my Nell? I want my Nell!"

Catching sight of the child's inanimate form lying on the settee, she pounced down upon it like some foul bird and bore it

off, cursing and striking the senseless clay in her insane fury.

Pinky, horrified at the dreadful sight, and not sure that the child was really dead, and so insensible to pain, made a movement to follow, but Norah caught her arm with a tight grip and held her back.

"Are you a fool?" said the queen, sternly. "Let Flanagan alone. Nell's out of her reach, and I'm glad of it."

"If I was only sure!" exclaimed Pinky.

"You may be. I know death—I've seen it often enough. They'll have the coroner over there in the morning. It's Flanagan's concern, not yours or mine, so keep out of it if you know when you're well off."

"I'll appear against her at the inquest," said Pinky.

"You'll do no such thing. Keep your tongue behind your teeth. It's time enough to show it when it's pulled out. Take my advice, and mind your own business. You'll have enough to do caring for your own head, without looking after other people's."

"I'm not one of that kind," answered Pinky, a little tartly; "and if there's any way to keep Flanagan from murdering another child, I'm going to find it out."

"You'll find out something else first," said Norah, with a slight curl of her lip.

"What?"

"The way to prison."

"Pshaw! I'm not afraid."

"You'd better be. If you appear against Flanagan, she'll have

you caged before to-morrow night."

"How can she do it?"

"Swear against you before an alderman, and he'll send you down if it's only to get his fee. She knows her man."

"Suppose murder is proved against her?"

"Suppose!" Norah gave a little derisive laugh.

"They don't look after things in here as they do outside. Everybody's got the screws on, and things must break sometimes, but it isn't called murder. The coroner understands it all. He's used to seeing things break."

CHAPTER VII

FOR a short time the sounds of cruel exultation came over from Flanagan's; then all was still.

"Sal's put her mark on you," said Norah, looking steadily into Pinky's face, and laughing in a cold, half-amused way.

Pinky raised her hand to her swollen cheek. "Does it look very bad?" she asked.

"Spoils your beauty some."

"Will it get black?"

"Shouldn't wonder. But what can't be helped, can't. You'll mind your own business next time, and keep out of Sal's way. She's dangerous. What's the matter?"

"Got a sort of chill," replied the girl, who from nervous reaction was beginning to shiver.

"Oh, want something to warm you up." Norah brought out a bottle of spirits. Pinky poured a glass nearly half full, added some water, and then drank off the fiery mixture.

"None of your common stuff," said Norah, with a smile, as Pinky smacked her lips. The girl drew her handkerchief from her pocket, and as she did so a piece of paper dropped on the floor.

"Oh, there it is!" she exclaimed, light flashing into her face. "Going to make a splendid hit. Just look at them rows."

Norah threw an indifferent glance on the paper.

"They're lucky, every one of them," said Pinky. "Going to put

half a dollar on each row—sure to make a hit."

The queen gave one of her peculiar shrugs.

"Going to break Sam McFaddon," continued Pinky, her spirits rising under the influence of Norah's treat.

"Soft heads don't often break hard rocks," returned the woman, with a covert sneer.

"That's an insult!" cried Pinky, on whom the liquor she had just taken was beginning to have a marked effect, "and I won't stand an insult from you or anybody else."

"Well, I wouldn't if I was you," returned Norah, coolly. A hard expression began settling about her mouth.

"And I don't mean to. I'm as good as you are, any day!"

"You may be a great deal better, for all I care," answered Norah. "Only take my advice, and keep a civil tongue in your head." There was a threatening undertone in the woman's voice. She drew her tall person more erect, and shook herself like a wild beast aroused from inaction.

Pinky was too blind to see the change that had come so suddenly. A stinging retort fell from her lips. But the words had scarcely died on the air ere she found herself in the grip of vice-like hands. Resistance was of no more avail than if she had been a child. In what seemed but a moment of time she was pushed back through the door and dropped upon the pavement. Then the door shut, and she was alone on the outside—no, not alone, for scores of the denizens who huddle together in that foul region were abroad, and gathered around her as quickly as flies about

a heap of offal, curious, insolent and aggressive. As she arose to her feet she found herself hemmed in by a jeering crowd.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.