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Scamp and I: A Story of City By-Ways

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Содержание

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Chapter One
I'd Choose to be a Queen

The time was the height of the London season for 1875; the height of that gay time when the parks, and streets, and shops are full, when pleasure-promoters are busy keeping up a fresh supply of every form of entertainment, when pleasure-seekers are flocking to the garden parties, and strawberry parties, the operas, and theatres, and all other amusements provided for them; when the world – the world at least of Regent Street, and Piccadilly, of Eaton Square, and all Belgravia – looks so rich and prosperous, so full of life and all that makes life enjoyable.

It was that gay time when no one thinks of gloom, when ambitious men dream of fame, and vain women of vanity, when the thoughtless think less than any other time, and when money seems to be the one god that rules in every breast.

This was the time in the merry month of May, when one afternoon, at the hour when Regent Street is brightest and fullest,

a little ragged urchin of about ten pushed his way boldly through the crowd of carriages and people surrounding Swan and Edgar's, and began staring eagerly and fearlessly in at the windows.

He was the only ragged child, the only representative of poverty, within sight, and he looked singularly out of place, quite a little shadow in the midst of the splendid carriages, and brilliant and prosperous men and women.

The few who noticed him wondered languidly what brought him there, why he intruded his disreputable little person in the midst of scenes and people with which he never had, and never could have, anything in common.

The little fellow seemed to guess the thoughts which a few in the crowd favoured him with, and in his own way to resent them. In and out among the rich and fashionable people his small head kept bobbing, his agile body kept pushing.

He avoided the police, he escaped unhurt from under the impatient horses' legs, he was never stationary, and yet he was always there. He pressed his dirty little form against more than one fine lady's dress, and received more than one sharp reprimand, and sharper tap on the head, from the powdered and liveried footmen.

Still he held his ground and remained faithful to Swan and Edgar's. He was a dirty, troublesome little imp, but on his worn and prematurely old face might have been seen a curious, bright expression. Those who looked at him might have pronounced him hungry, certainly poor, but, for the time being, not at all

unhappy.

Round and round the splendid establishment he dodged rather than walked, examining with a critical eye the mantles and costumes on view in the windows; then he carefully looked over and reckoned the carriages, gazed up with a full, bright, impudent stare into the face of more than one proud and titled dame, and at last, apparently satisfied, turned his back on the gay shop and gay crowd, and set off down Regent Street at a swinging pace. Presently, by means of a series of short cuts, he found himself in Old Compton Street, from thence he proceeded through Seven Dials into a street which we will call Duncan Street.

He had come this distance very quickly, and had withstood several temptations to linger on his road. A band of musical niggers, who danced, and sang, and played the bones, had waylaid him in vain; his own particular chum, Jenks, had met him, and called to him to stop, but he had not obeyed; the shrimp man, who always gave him a handful, had come directly in his path. He had paused for nothing, and now dashing headlong, not into a house, but through a hole in the pavement, down a slippery ladder, into a cellar, he called out "Flo."

From the bright sunshine outside, the gloom of this Place, lit by the flickering flame of one tallow candle, was profound. Its roof was on a level with the road, its floor several feet below the gas-pipes and sewage; it had no window, and its only means of light and ventilation was through the narrow opening in the pavement, against which a ladder was placed.

The ragged boy, rushing down these steps, made his way to a cobbler's stool, in the middle of the room, on which was seated a little girl busily repairing an old boot, while a heap of boots and shoes, apparently in the last stage of decay, were scattered round her. This child, a year or so younger than the boy, had the utterly colourless appearance of a flower shut away from the sunshine.

"Flo," said her companion eagerly.

A little voice, very thin, but just as eager, responded with, —

"Yes, Dick dear."

"Is you up to a bit o' 'joyment this 'ere blessed minit, Flo?"

"Oh, Dick! *is* it the shops, and the picters, and the fine ladies? *Is* it, Dick?"

"Yes; queens, and ladies, and lords goin' about in golden carriages, and shops full up to bustin', and we a standin' and a lookin' on. Better'n wittles, eh?"

"Oh yes, Dick!"

She threw aside the old boot, held out her dirty little hand to Dick, and together the children scampered up the broken, rickety ladder into the air and light of day.

"Now, Flo, you 'as got to put your best foot forrard, 'cos we 'as a goodish bit o' a way to tramp it. Then I'll plant you front o' me, Flo; and when we gets there, you never mind the perleece, but look yer fill. Oh, my heyes! them is hosses!"

Flo, seen by daylight, had brown eyes, very large and soft; curling, golden brown hair, and a sweet gentle little face. Had she been a lady she would have been pronounced a lovely child, and

in all probability would have been a lovely child, but her cellar-life had produced sharp shoulders, a complexion of greyish-white, and a certain look of premature age and wisdom, which all children so brought up possess. She raised her hand now to shade her face, as though the daylight pained her, looked round eagerly, then tightened her clasp of Dick.

"Is there blue, and yaller, and red, and majinta dresses in them 'ere winders, Dick? and is there lace on 'em? and is there welwet and silk dresses, Dick?" Dick winked, and looked mysterious.

"Silk gownds, and satin gownds, and welwet gownds," he replied, "and gownds – some trimmed with wot looks like paper cut into 'oles, and gownds made o' little round 'oles hall over. And the bonnets in them shops! My heyes, Flo! them bonnets 'ave got about hevery bird in Saint Martin's Lane killed and stuffed, and stuck in 'em. But come," he added, hastily bringing his vivid description to a close, "the lords and ladies will be gone."

He held the slight little fingers placed in his, with a firm hold, and together they trotted swiftly from their dark Saint Giles's cellar, to the bright fairy-land of Regent Street.

There were plenty of people, and carriages, and grand ladies and gentlemen still there; and the dresses were so fine, and the feathers so gay, that Flo, when she found herself really in their midst, was speechless, and almost stunned. She had dreamed of this day for months – this day, when Dick was to show her the other side of London life, and she had meant when the time came to enter into it all, to realise it if possible.

She and Dick were to carry out quite a pretty play; they were to suppose *themselves* a grand lady and gentleman; Flo was to single out the nicest looking and most beautifully dressed lady present, and imagine *herself* that lady; those clothes were *her* clothes, those silken dresses, those elegant boots and gloves, that perfect little bonnet, were all Flo's; the carriage with its spirited horses was hers, and the fine gentleman with the splendid moustache seated by her side, was none other than Dick.

They had arranged the whole programme; the carriage was to drive off rapidly – where?

Well, *first* Dick said they would stop at a restaurant, and instead of, as the real Flo and Dick did, standing a sniffin' and a sniffin' outside, they would walk boldly in, and order – well, beef, and potatoes, and plum-pudding were vulgar certainly, but once in a way they *would* order these for dinner. Then back in the carriage to Swan and Edgar's, where Flo would have the creamiest of silk dresses, and a new bonnet with a pink tip, and Dick, who was supposed to be in perfect attire as it was, would talk loudly of "my tailor," and buy the most beautiful flower, from the first flower-girl he met, to put in his button-hole. Then at night they would have a box at the theatre.

Their whole plan was very brilliantly constructed, and Dick, having got Flo into a capital position, just opposite a row of lovely dresses, with carriages close up to the footway, and grand ladies sweeping against her tattered gown each moment, was very anxious for her to begin to carry out their play.

"Come, Flo," he said, giving her a nudge. "S'pose a bit, Flo. Which fine lady'll yer be? Look at that 'ere little 'un, in blue and white, I guess she's an hearl's wife. Come, Flo, choose to be her. I'll be the hearl, and you the hearl's wife, Flo."

"Be hearls the biggest swells?" asked Flo.

Dick opened his eyes.

"Bless us!" he said. "Why, Flo, I'm 'shamed o' yer hignorance. Why there's markises, and dooks, and there's kings and queens – all them's bigger than hearls, Flo."

"Is queens the biggest of all swells?" asked Flo.

"Sartinly, they be the biggest woman swells."

"Then, Dick, I'll s'pose to be the biggest swell, I'll s'pose to be a queen. Find me hout a queen to take Pattern of, Dick."

"Oh! Flo, there ain't none yere, there be but one queen, Flo, and 'ers away, locked hup at Bucknam Palace. You can't s'pose to be the queen, Flo, but I guess we'll be the hearl and the hearl's wife, and let us s'pose now as we is turnin' in fur our dinners, and the kivers is orf the roast beef, and the taters is 'ot and mealy, and a whackin' big puddin' is to foller." At this juncture, when Dick's imagination was running riot over his supposed dinner, and Flo's little face was raised to his with a decided gesture of dissent, a hand was laid familiarly on his shoulder, and turning quickly he discerned the smiling, mischievous face of his friend Jenks.

"Wot ails the young 'un?" said Jenks.

Dick was ashamed of his play beside his tall friend (Jenks was fourteen), and answered hastily —

"Nothing."

But Flo replied innocently, and in an injured tone —

"I wants fur to be a queen, and there is no queens hout this arternoon fur me to take pattern of."

The black eyes of Jenks sparkled more mischievously than ever; but he liked Flo, and knew she was fond of supposing herself a great lady.

"Look at that 'ere 'oman," he said, pointing to a stout old lady in black velvet and white lace shawl; "s'pose you is 'er, Flo. My heyes! wot a precious big swell you would look in that 'ere gownd."

Here Dick and Jenks both laughed uproariously, but the ambitious little Flo still answered in a fretful tone —

"I'll not be that 'ere swell, I'll choose to be a queen."

"Then come along both o' yers," said Jenks, "and see the queen. She 'ave got to pass hout of Bucknam Palace in arf an 'our, on 'er way to Victoria Station. Come, Flo, I'll 'old yer 'and. Come, Dick, old pal." The children, only too delighted to be seen anywhere in Jenks's company, followed eagerly, and led by their clever friend down several by-ways, soon found themselves in the midst of the crowd which had already collected outside Buckingham Palace gates to see the queen.

Flo was excited and trembling. *Now* she should behold with her own eyes the biggest swell in all the world, and for ever after in her dark Saint Giles's cellar she could suppose, and go over in her imagination, the whole scene. No vulgar "dook" or "markis"

could satisfy Flo's ambition; when she soared she would soar high, and when she saw the queen she would really know how to act the queen to perfection.

So excited was she that she never observed that she was really alone in the crowd, that Jenks and Dick had left her side.

She was a timid child, not bold and brazen like many of her class, and had she noticed this she would have been too frightened even to look out for the greatest woman in the world. But before she had time to take in this fact there was a cheer, a glittering pageant passed before Flo's eyes, – she had never seen the Life Guards before! – a carriage appeared amidst other carriages, a lady amidst other ladies, and some instinct told the child that this quietly-dressed, dignified woman was the queen of England. The eager crowd had pushed the little girl almost to the front, and the queen, bowing graciously on all sides, looked for an instant full at Flo.

She was probably unconscious of it, but the child was not. Her brown eyes sparkled joyfully; she had seen the queen, and the *queen had seen her*.

They were to meet again.

Chapter Two
A Hot Supper

When the royal carriage had passed by, the crowd immediately scattered, and then for the first time Flo perceived that she was deserted by her companions. She looked to right and left, before and behind her, but the little rough and ragged figures she sought for were nowhere visible.

She was still excited by the sight she had witnessed, and was consequently not much frightened though it did occur to her to wonder how ever she should find her way home again. She turned a few steps, – Saint James's Park with the summer sunshine on it lay before her. She sat down on the grass, and pulled a few blades and smelt them – they were withered, trampled, and dry, but to Flo their yellow, sickly green was beautiful.

She gathered a few more blades and tucked them tenderly into the bosom of her frock – they would serve to remind her of the queen, they had sprouted and grown up within sight of the queen's house, perhaps one day the queen had looked at them, as to-day she had looked at Flo.

The child sat for half-an-hour unperceived, and therefore undisturbed, drinking in the soft summer air, when suddenly a familiar voice sounded in her ears, and the absent figures danced before her.

"I say, Flo, would yer like somethink *real*, not an ony s'pose?"

Flo raised her eyes and fixed them earnestly on Dick.

"No, Dick," she replied slowly, "there beant but one queen, and I've seen the queen, and she's beautiful and good, and she looked at me, Dick, and I'm not a goin' to take 'er place, so I'll be the hearl's wife please, Dick dear."

The two boys laughed louder than ever, and then Jenks, coming forward and bowing obsequiously, said in a mock serious tone —

"Will my Lady Countess, the hearl's wife, conderscend to a 'elpin' o' taters and beef along o' her 'umble servants, and will she conderscend to rise orf this 'ere grass, as hotherwise the perleece might feel obligated to give 'er in charge, it being contrary to the rules, that even a hearl's wife should make this 'ere grass 'er cushion."

Considerably frightened, as Jenks intended she should be, Flo tumbled to her feet, and the three children walked away. Dick nudged his sister and looked intensely mysterious, his bright eyes were dancing, his shock of rough hair was pushed like a hay-stack above his forehead, his dirty freckled face was flushed. Jenks preceded the brother and sister by a few steps, getting over the ground in a light and leisurely manner, most refreshing to the eyes of Dick.

"Ain't 'ee a mate worth 'avin'?" he whispered to Flo.

"But wot about the meat and taters?" asked Flo, who by this time was very hungry; "ain't it nothink but another 's'pose' arter

all?"

"Wait and you'll see," replied Dick with a broad grin.

"Here we 'ere," said Jenks, drawing up at the door of an eating-house, not quite so high in the social scale as Verrey's, but a real and substantial eating-house nevertheless.

"Now, my Lady Countess, the hearl's wife, which shall it be? Smokin' 'ot roast beef and taters, or roast goose full hup to chokin' o' sage and onions? There, Flo," he added, suddenly changing his tone, and speaking and looking like a different Jenks, "you 'as but to say one or t'other, so speak the word, little matey."

Seeing that there was a genuine eating-house, and that Jenks was in earnest, Flo dropped her assumed character, and confessed that she had *once* tasted 'ot fat roast beef, long ago in mother's time, but had never so much as *seen* roast goose; accordingly that delicacy was decided on, and Jenks having purchased a goodly portion, brought it into the outer air in a fair-sized wooden bowl, which the owner of the eating-house had kindly presented to him for the large sum of four pence. At sight of the tempting mess cooling rapidly in the breeze, all Flo's housewifely instincts were awakened.

"It won't be *'ot* roast goose, and mother always did tell 'as it should be heat up 'ot," she said pitifully. "'Ere, Dick, 'ere's my little shawl, wrap it round it fur to keep it 'ot, do."

Flo's ragged scrap of a shawl was accordingly unfastened and tied round the savoury dish, and Dick, being appointed bowl-

bearer, the children trudged off as rapidly as possible in the direction of Duncan Street. They were all three intensely merry, though it is quite possible that a close observer might have remarked, that Dick's mirth was a little forced. He laughed louder and oftener than either of the others, but for all that, he was not quite the same Dick who had stared so impudently about him an hour or two ago in Regent Street. He was excited and pleased, but he was no longer a fearless boy. An hour ago he could have stared the world in the face, now even at a distant sight of a policeman he shrank behind Jenks, until at last that young gentleman, exasperated by his rather sneaking manner, requested him in no very gentle terms not to make such a fool of himself.

Then Dick, grinning more than ever, declared vehemently that "*'ee* wasn't afraid of nothink, not 'ee." But just then something, or some one, gave a vicious pull to his ragged trouser, and he felt himself turning pale, and very nearly in his consternation dropping the dish, with that delicious supper.

The cause of this alarm was a wretched, half-starved dog, which, attracted doubtless by the smell of the supper, had come behind him and brought him to a sense of his presence in this peremptory way.

"No, don't 'it 'im," said Flo, as Jenks raised his hand to strike, for the pitiable, shivering creature had got up on its hind legs, and with coaxing, pleading eyes was glancing from the bowl to the children.

"Ain't 'ee just 'ungry?" said Flo again, for her heart was moved

with pity for the miserable little animal.

"Well, so is we," said Dick in a fretful voice, and turning, he trudged on with his load.

"Come, Flo, do," said Jenks, "don't waste time with that little sight o' misery any more, 'ees ony a street cur."

"No 'ee ain't," said Flo half to herself, for Jenks had not waited for her, "'ees a good dawg."

"Good-bye, good dawg," and she patted his dirty sides. "Ef I wasn't so werry 'ungry, and ef Dick wasn't the least bit in the world crusty, I'd give you a bite o' my supper," and she turned away hastily after Jenks.

"Wy, I never! 'ee's a follerin' o' yer still, Flo," said Jenks.

So he was; now begging in front of her, paying not the least attention to Jenks – Dick was far ahead – but fixing his starved, eager, anxious eyes on the one in whose tone he had detected kindness.

"Oh! 'ee *is* starvin', I must give 'im one bite o' my supper," said Flo, her little heart utterly melting, and then the knowing animal came closer, and crouched at her feet.

"Poor brute! hall 'is ribs is stickin' hout," said Jenks, examining him more critically. "I 'spects 'ees strayed from 'ome. Yer right, Flo, 'ees not such a bad dawg, not by no means, 'ee 'ave game in 'im. I ses, Flo, would you like to take 'im 'ome?"

"Oh, Jenks! but wouldn't Dick be hangry?"

"Never you mind Dick, I'll settle matters wid 'im, ef you likes to give the little scamp a bite o' supper, you may."

"May be scamp's 'ees name; see! 'ee wags 'is little tail."

"Scamp shall come 'ome then wid us," said Jenks, and lifting the little animal in his arms, he and Flo passed quickly through Seven Dials, into Duncan Street, and from thence, through a gap in the pavement, into the deep, black cellar, which was their home.

Chapter Three
What the Children Promised Their Mother

In the cellar there was never daylight, so though the sun was shining outside, Flo had to strike a match, and poking about for a small end of tallow candle, she applied it to it. Then, seating herself on her cobbler's stool, while Jenks and Dick squatted on the floor, and Scamp sat on his hind legs, she unpacked the yellow bowl; and its contents of roast goose, sage and onions, with a plentiful supply of gravy and potatoes, being found still hot, the gutter children and gutter dog commenced their supper.

"I do think 'ees a dawg of the right sort," said Jenks, taking Scamp's head between his knees. "We'll take 'im round to Maxey, and see wot 'ee ses, Dick."

"Arter supper?" inquired Dick indistinctly, for his mouth was full.

"No, I wants you arter supper for somethink else; and look yere, Dick, I gives you warning that ef you gets reg'lar in the blues, as you did this arternoon, I'll 'ave no callin' to you."

"I'll not funk," said Dick, into whose spirit roast goose had put an immense accession of courage.

"Lor! bless yer silly young heyes, where 'ud be yer supper ef you did? No, we'll go on hour bis'ness to-night, and we'll leave

the little dawg with Flo. He's lost, por little willan, and 'ave no father nor mother. He's an horfan, is Scamp, and 'as come to us fur shelter."

The boys and girl laughed, the supper, however good and plentiful, came to an end, and then Dick in rather a shamefaced way prepared to follow Jenks; the two lads ran up the ladder and disappeared, and Flo stood still to watch them with a somewhat puzzled look on her woman's face.

She was eight years old, a very little girl in any other rank of life, but in this Saint Giles's cellar she was a woman. She had been a woman for a whole year now; ever since her mother died, and she had worked from morning to night for her scanty living, she had put childish things away, and taken on herself the anxieties, the hopes, and fears, of womanhood. Dick was ten, but in reality, partly on account of her sex, partly on account of the nature within her, Flo was much older than her little brother.

It was she who worked all day over those old shoes and boots, translating them, for what she called truly "starvegut" pay, into new ones. It was Dick's trade, but Flo really did the work, for he was always out, looking, as he said, for better employment.

But the better employment did not come to Dick, perhaps because Dick did not know how to come to it, and Flo's little fingers toiled bravely over this hard work, and the wolf was barely kept from the door.

Her mother had taught her the trade, and she was really a skilful little work-woman.

Comforted now by her good meal, by her run in the open air, by the wonderful sights, and by the crowning sight of all she had seen; comforted also not a little by Scamp's company, she resumed her employment.

The dog, satisfied and well pleased, rolled himself up as close as possible to her ragged gown, and went to sleep; and Flo, feeling sure that she would be now undisturbed, arranged quite a nice amusement for herself.

She would begin supposing now in earnest.

She had seen the queen, she had seen fine ladies, she knew at last what velvet and silk, what lace and feathers, what horses and carriages were like. She could suppose to any amount. She had no longer need to draw wholly on her own resources, she knew what the real things were, at last.

She had a very vivid imagination, and she dropped her work, and her big brown eyes looked far away from the real and ugly things about her, to beautiful things elsewhere. But somehow, and this was strange, unpleasant thoughts would intrude, a present anxiety would shut away imaginary joys, and with a sigh the little girl resumed her work and her cares.

Her trouble was this. What railed Dick? His embarrassment, his fear of the police, his forced mirth, had none of them escaped Flo's observant eyes.

Generally he was the merriest little fellow in the world, but to-night, even while partaking of a supper that would have rejoiced any heart, even while eating those exasperatingly delicious

morsels, he had been grave, subdued, and his laugh (for through it all he laughed constantly) had no true ring in it. He was also the bravest little boy possible; he had never in all his life funked any one or anything, and yet to-night at the sight of a policeman even in the far distance he had got in the most cowardly way behind Jenks.

There was some cause for this. There was also something else to be accounted for.

How was that supper bought? Where had the money come from? Flo knew well that 'ot roast goose, with sage and onions, with taters and gravy, not to make any mention of the bowl that held them, had not been purchased for a few pence; so where, where had the money come from?

Dick had it not, and Jenks, though *werry* liberal, liberal to the amount of now and then presenting her with a whole red herring for their supper, was to all appearance as poor and as hard up as themselves.

True, Flo did not know how Jenks made his living; his trade – for he told her he had a trade – was a secret, which he might enlighten her about some time, but certainly not at present.

Jenks got his money, what little money he had, in some mysterious way, of that there was no doubt.

She thought over it all to-night, and very grave were her fears and suspicions.

Was it possible that Jenks was a bad boy, and that he was teaching Dick to be a bad boy?

Was it possible that Jenks was not honest, and that the delicious supper they had just eaten was not honestly come by?

What a pity if this was so, for 'ot roast goose *was* so good. Perhaps Dick had helped some old lady to find a cab, and she had given him a shilling, and perhaps Jenks, who was *werry* good-natured, had kindly assisted some other body, and thus earned 'arf-a-crown; this sum would pay for their supper, good as it was!

But no; had they earned the money in that way, they would have told Flo, they would have been proud to tell Flo, whereas the word money had never been mentioned at all between them!

Had Dick got the money rightly he would have been only too glad to speak of it; so it was clear to Flo that in some wrong manner alone had it come into his possession!

Well! why should she care? They were very poor, they were as low down in the world as they well could be; nobody loved them, nobody had ever taught them to do right. Dick and Flo were "horfans," same as Scamp was an orphan. The world was hard on them, as it is on all defenceless creatures. If Dick *could* "prig" something from that rich and greedy world that was letting them both starve, would it be so very wrong?

If he could do this without the police finding out, without fear of discovery, would it not be rather a good and easy way of getting breakfasts, and dinners, and suppers? For surely some people had *too* much; surely it was not fair that all those buns and cakes, all those endless, countless good things in the West End shops should go to the rich people; surely the little hungry boys

and girls who lived, and felt, and suffered in the East End should have their share!

And if only by stealing they could taste roast goose, was it very wrong, was it wrong at all to steal?

Flo knew nothing about God, she had never heard of the eighth commandment, but nevertheless, poor ignorant little child, she had a memory that kept her right, a memory that made it impossible for her, even had she really starved, to touch knowingly what was not her own.

The memory was this.

A year ago Flo's mother had died in this cellar. She was a young woman, not more than thirty, but the damp of the miserable cellar, together with endless troubles and hardships, had fanned the seeds of consumption within her, and before her thirty-first birthday she had passed away. She knew she was dying, and in her poor way had done her best to prepare her children for her loss. She taught them both her trade, that of a translator, – not a literary translator, poor Mrs Darrell could not read, – but a translator of old boots and shoes into new; and Flo and Dick, young as they were, learned the least difficult and lighter parts of the business before her death. She had no money to leave them, no knowledge beyond that of her trade; she knew nothing of God or of heaven, but she had one deeply-instilled principle, and this she endeavoured by every means in her power to impart to the children.

Living in a place, and belonging to a grade of society, where

any honesty was rare, she was nevertheless a perfectly honest woman. She had never touched a penny that was not her own, she was just and true in all her dealings. She was proud of saying – and the pride had caused her sunken, dying eyes to brighten even at the last – that none of her belongings, however low they had fallen, had ever seen the inside of a prison, or ever stood in a prisoner's dock. They were honest people, and Dick and Flo must keep up the family character. Come what might, happen what would, they must ever and always look every man in the face, with the proud consciousness, "I have stolen from none."

On the night she died, she had called them both to her side, and got them to promise her this. With pathetic and solemn earnestness, she had held their little hands and looked into their little faces, and implored of them, as they loved their dead father and mother, never, never to disgrace the unstained name they had left to them.

"'Tis just hevery think," said the dying woman. "Arter hall my 'ard life, 'tis real comfa'ble to look back on. Remember, Dick and Flo, I dies trustin' yer. You'll never, wot hever 'appins, be jail-birds – promise me that?"

"Never, mother," said Flo, kissing her and weeping; and Dick promised, and kissed her, and wept also, and then the two children climbed up on the bed and lay down one at each side of her, and the poor dying woman closed her eyes and was cheered by their words.

"Is you dying to-night, mother?" asked Flo, gazing with awe

at her clammy cold face.

"Yes, dearie."

"Where'll you be to-morrer, then, mother?"

A shadow passed over the peaceful, ignorant face, the brown eyes, so like her little daughter's, were opened wide.

"Oh! I doesn't know – yes, it be *werry* dark, but I guess it 'ull be all right." Then after a pause, very slowly, "I doesn't mind the grave, I'd like a good bit o' a rest, for I'm awful – awful tired."

Before the morning came the weary life was ended, and Dick and Flo were really orphans.

Then the undertaker's men came, and a coffin was brought, and the poor, thin, worn body was placed in it, and hauled up by ropes into the outer world, and the children saw their mother no more.

But they remembered her words, and tried hard to fight out an honest living for themselves.

This was no easy task; it sent them supperless to bed, it gave them mouldy crusts for dinner, it gave them cold water breakfasts; still they persevered, Flo working all day long at her cobbling, while Dick, now tried a broom and crossing, now stood by the metropolitan stations waiting for chance errands, now presented himself at every shop where an advertisement in the window declared a boy was wanting, now wandered about the streets doing nothing, and occasionally, as a last resource, helped Flo with her cobbling.

But the damp, dark cellar was unendurable to the bright little

fellow, and he had to be, as he himself expressed it, a goodish bit peckish before he could bear it. So Flo uncomplainingly worked in the dismal room, and paid the small rent, and provided the greater part of the scanty meals, and Dick thought this arrangement fair enough; "for was not Flo a gel? *she* could bear the lonely, dark, unwholesome place better'n him, who was a boy, would one day be a man, and – in course it was the place of womens to kep at 'ome." So Flo stayed at home and was honest, and Dick went abroad and was honest, and the consciousness of this made them both happy and contented.

But about a month before this evening Dick returned from his day's roaming very hungry as usual, but this time not alone, a tall boy with merry twinkling eyes accompanied him. He was a funny boy, and had no end of pleasant droll things to say, and Dick and Flo laughed, as they had not laughed since mother died.

He brought his share of supper in his pocket, in the shape of a red herring, and a large piece of cold bacon, and the three made quite merry over it.

Before the evening came to an end he had offered to share the cellar, which was, he said, quite wasted on two, pay half the rent, and bring in his portion of the meals, and after a time, he whispered mysteriously, he would go "pardeners" with Dick in his trade.

"Why not at once?" asked Dick. "I'd like to be arter a trade as gives folks red 'errings and bacon fur supper."

But Jenks would neither teach his trade then, nor tell what it

was; he however took up his abode in the cellar, and since his arrival Flo was much more comfortable, and had a much less hard time.

Scarcely an evening passed that some dainty hitherto unknown did not find its way out of Jenks's pocket. Such funny things too. Now it was a fresh egg, which they bored a tiny hole in, and sucked by turns; now a few carrots, or some other vegetables, which when eaten raw gave such a relish to the dry, hard bread; now some cherries; and on one occasion a great big cucumber. But this unfortunately Flo did not like, as it made her sick, and she begged of Jenks very earnestly not to waste no more money on cowcumburs.

On the whole she and Dick enjoyed his society very much. Dick indeed looked on him with unfeigned admiration, and waited patiently for the day when he should teach him his trade. Flo too wondered, and hoped it was a girl's trade, as anythink would be better and less hard than translating, and one day she screwed up all her courage, and asked Jenks if it would be possible for him when he taught Dick to teach her also.

"Wot?" said Jenks eagerly; "you'd like to be bringin' carrots and heggs out o' yer pocket fur supper? Eh!"

"Yes, Jenks, I fell clemmed down yere, fur ever 'n ever."

Then Jenks turned her round to the light, and gazed long into her innocent face, and finally declared that "she'd do; and he'd be blowed ef she wouldn't do better'n Dick, and make her fortin quite tidy."

So it was arranged that when Dick learned, Flo should learn also. She had never guessed what it meant, she had never the least clue to what it all was, until to-night.

But now a glimmering of the real state of the case stole over her. That supper was not honestly come by, so far things were plain. Once in his life Dick had broken his word to his dying mother, once at least he had been a thief. This accounted for his forced mirth, for his shamefaced manner. He and Jenks had stolen something, they were thieves.

But perhaps – and here Flo trembled and turned pale – perhaps there were worse things behind, perhaps the mysterious trade that Jenks was to teach them both was the trade of a thief, perhaps those nice eggs and carrots, those red herrings and bits of bacon, were stolen. She shivered again at the thought.

Flo was, as I said, a totally ignorant child; she knew nothing of God, of Christ, of the Gospel. Nevertheless she had a gospel and a law. That law was honesty, that gospel was her mother.

She had seen so much pilfering, and small and great stealing about her, she had witnessed so many apparently pleasant results arising from it, so many little luxuries at other tables, and by other firesides, that the law that debarred her from these things had often seemed a hard law to her. Nevertheless for her mother's sake she loved that law, and would have died sooner than have broken it.

Dick had loved it also. Dick and she had many a conversation, when they sat over the embers in the grate last winter, on the

virtues of honesty.

In the end they felt sure honesty would pay.

And Dick told her lots of stories about the boys who snatched things off the old women's stalls, or carried bread out of the bakers' shops; and however juicy those red apples were, and however crisp and brown those nice fresh loaves, the boys who took them had guilty looks, had downcast faces, and had constant fear of the police in their hearts.

And Dick used to delight his sister by informing her how, ragged and hungry as he was, he feared nobody, and how intensely he enjoyed staring a "p'leece-man" out of countenance.

But to-night Dick had been afraid of the "p'leece." Tears rolled down Flo's cheeks at the thought. How she wished she had never tasted that 'ot roast goose, but had supped instead off the dry crust in the cupboard!

"I'm feared as mother won't lay com'fable to-night," she sobbed, "that is, ef mother knows. Oh! I wish as Dick wasn't a thief. S'pose as it disturbs mother; and she was so awful tired." The little girl sobbed bitterly, longing vainly that she had stayed at home in her dark cellar, that she had never gone with Dick to Regent Street, had never seen those fine dresses and feathers, those grand ladies and gentlemen, above all, that in her supposing she had not soared so high, that she had been content to be a humble hearl's wife, and had not wished to be the queen; for when Flo had seen the great queen of England going by, then must have been the moment when Dick first learned to be a thief.

Chapter Four
A Dog and his Story

If ever a creature possessed the knowledge which is designated "knowing," the dog Scamp was that creature. It shone out of his eyes, it shaped the expression of his countenance, it lurked in every corner and crevice of his brain. His career previous to this night was influenced by it, his career subsequent to this night was actuated by it.

Only once in all his existence did it desert him, and on that occasion his life was the forfeit. But as then it was a pure and simple case of heart preponderating over head, we can scarcely blame the dog, or deny him his full share of the great intellect which belongs to the knowing ones.

On this evening he was reaping the fruits of his cleverness. He had just partaken of a most refreshing meal, he had wormed himself into what to him were very fair quarters, and warmed, fed, and comforted, was sleeping sweetly. By birth he was a mongrel, if not a pure untainted street cur; he was shabby, vulgar, utterly ugly and common-place looking.

He had however good eyes and teeth, and both these advantages of nature he was not slow in availing himself of.

By the pathos of his eyes, and a certain knack he had of balancing himself on the hinder part of his body, he had won

Flo's pity, and secured a shelter and a home. He guessed very accurately the feelings of his hosts and hostess towards him.

Dick's hospitality was niggardly and forced, Jenks made him welcome to his supper, for he regarded him with an eye to business, but Flo gave him of her best, from pure kindness of heart. The wise dog therefore resolved to take no notice of Dick, to avoid Jenks, and as much as possible to devote himself to Flo.

He had passed through a terrible day, had Scamp.

In the morning he had been led out to execution. To avoid the dog-tax, his master, who truth to tell had never regarded him with much affection, had decreed that Scamp should be drowned. In vain had the poor faithful creature, who loved his brutal master, notwithstanding the cruel treatment to which he so often subjected him, looked in his face with all the pathetic appeal of his soft brown eyes, in vain he licked his hand as he fastened the rope with a stone attached to it round his neck. Drowned he was to be, and drowned he would have been, but for his own unequalled knowingness. Scamp guessed what was coming, hence that appeal in his eyes; but Scamp was prepared for his fate, rather he was prepared to resist his fate.

As his master was about to raise him in his arms and fling him far into the stream, he anticipated him, and leaped gently in himself, when, the stone being round his neck, he sank at once to the bottom.

His master, well pleased, and thinking how nicely he had "done" Scamp, laughed aloud, and walked away. The dog, not

wasting his breath in any useless struggles, heard the laugh as he lay quietly in the bottom of the stream, he heard also the retreating footsteps.

Now was *his* time.

He had managed to sink so near the edge of the stream as to be barely out of his depth, he dragged himself upright, pulled and lurched the heavy stone until his head was above water, and then biting through the rope with those wonderful teeth, was a free dog once more.

Quite useless for him to go home; he must turn his back on that shelter, and come what may, face the great world of London.

So all day long he had wandered, foot-sore, exhausted, and hungry, over many a mile of street, until at last the smell of hot roast goose had so overcome him, that he had in his desperation fastened his teeth into Dick's trousers, thereby ultimately securing for himself a supper, and another home.

Now after all his troubles, hardships, and alarms, he was sleeping sweetly, enjoying the repose of the weary. It was unpleasant to be disturbed, it was truly annoying to have to open those heavy brown eyes, but Scamp had a heart, and sobs of distress had roused him from his pleasant dreams. He cocked his ears, stretched himself, rose, and pushing his big awkward head against Flo's, bent low in her hands, began licking her face with his small, rough tongue.

Finding she took no notice of this, he forced her to look up and attend to him, by jumping wholesale into her lap.

"Oh! Scamp," said the child, putting her arms round him, "does *you* know as Dick isn't an honest boy no more."

Had Scamp comprehended the words addressed to him, he would not have considered them a subject for sorrow, as any means by which such a supper as they had just eaten was attained would have been thought by him quite justifiable.

It was however his wisest course at present to sympathise with Flo, and this he did by means of his tail, tongue, and eyes.

"Oh! you *be* a nice dawg," said the little girl, comforted by his caressing.

She laid her head on his shaggy coat, and in a few moments both were asleep.

Two hours later Jenks and Dick returned. Dick's cheeks were now flushed, and his eyes bright. Jenks, on the contrary, was as cool as usual.

"Shall we take orf the dawg now, or in the mornin'?" asked the little boy of his companion.

"No, no, in the mornin', or maybe to-morrow night; old Maxey's sure ter be shut up afore now."

"How much 'ull he give us, Jenks?"

"Well, Scamp's a likely lookin' tyke, and good size. I 'spect he'll about suit fur 'is young 'un. Maybe, ef we're lucky, we may get a matter o' a bob, or a bob and a tanner, but wot I'll count on more, and bargain fur, is a sight o' the fight."

"Oh, Jenks! is it werry jolly?"

"Awful – real pretty sport," said Jenks, "partic'lar ef yer cur

'ave a bit of blood in 'im, as I 'spects this 'un 'ave."

"Will you bring me to see it, Jenks?"

"I can't rightly say yet, but don't tell nothink to the little 'un," jerking his thumb over his shoulders at Flo. "Now come to bed, and don't let us talk no more."

They lay down, and soon Jenks was asleep.

Yes, Jenks was asleep – his hardened heart knew no fears, his conscience did not trouble him. Flo, wearied with her sorrow, was also slumbering, and gentle breathings of sweet content and rest came from Scamp, who knew nothing of his impending fate, and felt that he had done his duty.

But Dick could not sleep; he lay in the dark tired enough, but wide awake and trembling.

On that very bed in this cellar had lain not quite a year ago the still, stiff, and cold form of his mother; of the mother who, with her thin arms round his neck, and her beseeching eyes looking into his, had begged of him to keep from bad ways, and to be honest.

He had promised that never, happen what might, would he touch what was not his own, he had promised her solemnly, as even such ignorant little children will promise their dying mothers, that he would ever and always be an honest boy; and until to-day he had kept his word bravely, kept it too in the midst of very great temptations, for he was only a Street Arab, a gutter child, living on his wits, and for such children to live on their wits without prigging off stalls and snatching off counters, is

very hard work indeed. He was such a clever little fellow too, and had such a taking innocent face, that he could have made quite a nice living, and have had, as he expressed it, quite a jolly time, if only he had consented to yield to his many temptations, and do as his companions did. But he never had yielded. One by one, as the temptations arose, as the opportunities for thieving came, he had turned from them and overcome them. Not that he thought thieving wrong – by no means. Whatever he might say to Flo, he had in his heart of hearts a strong admiration for those plucky young thieves, his companions, and though they *were* afraid of the "p'leece," and often did disappear for longer or shorter periods altogether from their gay life, yet still they had a jolly time of it on the whole. Then, how splendidly the robbers acted at those delightful 'penny gaffs! – oh, yes! it was nonsense to starve rather than take from those who had more than they could use themselves. Nevertheless Dick had often passed a day from morning to night without food rather than steal – why was that?

Ah! how strongly we cling to our first and tenderest memories! Dick could never forget the time when poor as they were, when, struggling as they were, he and Flo were rich, as the richest of all children, in love.

He could never forget the pressure of his mother's arms, he could never forget the sweetness of the dry crust eaten on his mother's knee. Had he an ache or a trouble, his mother was sorry for him. Even when he was bad and vexed her, his mother forgave

him. She was always working for her children; never resting on account of her children. She stood between them and the cold world, a great shelter, a sure refuge.

They thought it mighty and everlasting, they did not know that it was mortal, and passing away.

She grew tired – awful tired, as she herself expressed it, so weary that not even her love for Dick and Flo could keep her with them, so exhausted that no rest but the rest of the grave could do her any good. So she went to her grave, but before she went her children had promised her to keep honest boy and girl, to grow up honest man and woman, and this promise was to them both more precious than their lives.

They kept it faithfully, – it was a great principle for light in the minds of these little children.

Yes, they had both kept their promise carefully and faithfully until to-day; but to-day, in a moment of great and sudden temptation, goaded and led on by Jenks, Dick had slipped his clever little hand into a lady's pocket, and drawn out a purse with six bright new shillings in it.

The theft had been most cleverly done, and triumphant with his success, and elated by the praise Jenks had lavished on him, he had felt little compunction until now.

But remorse was visiting him sternly now. He was frightened, he was miserable; he had let go the rudder that kept him fast to anything good, – he was drifting away. But the act of thieving gave him no pain, he was not at all sorry for that smiling, good-

natured looking woman whose purse he had taken; he was quite sure *she* never knew what hunger was; he quite agreed with Jenks in his remark, that "'Ee and Dick and Flo wanted 'ot roast goose more'n 'er."

No; the agony was the memory of his mother's face.

He was afraid even to open his eyes, afraid, sore afraid, that if he did he should see her standing before him, asking him to answer to her for this day's deed.

He was afraid that tired, awful tired as she was, she would get up out of her grave to reproach him with his broken promise, to tell him that on account of him there now could be no more rest for her. And he loved his mother, – oh, how he loved his mother!

A second time that night was Scamp disturbed by sobs, but the sobs did not proceed from Flo this time. The tired little girl was sleeping heavily, her head on the dog's neck. Scamp could only open his eyes, which he did very wide; if he moved the least bit in the world he would wake Flo. The sounds of distress grew louder, he gave a low growl, then a bark, then with a sudden, uncontrollable impulse, he was off Flo's lap and on the bed with Dick, – he was cuddling down by Dick, fawning on him, and licking the tears off his face.

The boy repulsed him rudely. It was quite beyond the capacity of Scamp, great as his powers were, to comfort him. Nevertheless, Scamp had again done his duty. In his rude exit from Flo's lap he had effectually awakened her. She, too, heard the low smothered sobs of distress, and rising from her cobbler's

stool, she lay down on the straw beside her little brother.

"I'm real glad as you is cryin', Dick," said Flo.

This speech of Flo's was an immense relief to Dick. Of all things he had dreaded telling his sister of his theft.

He dreaded telling her, and yet he longed for her to know. Now by her words he felt sure that in some way she did know. He nestled close to her, and put his arms round her neck.

"Is mother in the room, Flo?"

"No, no, Dick; wot makes you say that? Mother's in her grave, 'avin' a good tidy bit o' a sleep."

"You ain't sure," said Dick, half-defiantly, "you ain't sure but ef you opened yer heyes werry wide you mightn't see mother – just there, acrost our bed and Jenks' – standin' and a shakin' her 'ead."

"Why, ef she were I couldn't see," said Flo. "It be as dark as dark, – I couldn't see nothink ef I was to look ever so."

"Oh yes, you could," said Dick, "you could see ghosts, and mother's a ghost. I seed ghosts at the gaff, and them is hall in wite, with blue lights about 'em. Ef you opened yer heyes werry wide you could see, Flo."

"Well, I 'as 'em open," said Flo, "and I tell you there ain't no ghosts, nor nothink."

"Are you sure?" asked Dick.

"No doubt on it," responded Flo encouragingly. "Mother ain't yere, mother's in 'er grave, 'avin' a good time, and restin' fine."

"Are you quite sure?" persisted Dick. "Are you quite sartin as

she ain't turnin' round in 'er corfin, and cryin'?"

"Oh no; she's restin' straight and easy," said Flo in an encouraging tone, though, truth to tell, she had very grave misgivings in her own mind as to whether this was the case.

"Then she don't know, Flo?"

"It ain't reached 'er yet, I 'spect," said Flo. Then hastening to turn the conversation —

"Wot was it as you took, Dick?"

"A purse," said Dick.

"A purse full o' money?" questioned Flo.

"There was six bobs and a tanner," said Dick, "and Jenks said as I did it real clever."

"That was wot bought us the 'ot roasted goose," continued Flo.

"Yes. Jenks said, as it wor the first time, we should 'ave a rare treat. They cost three bobs, that 'ere goose and taters. I say, worn't they jist prime?"

"'Ave you any more o' that money?" asked Flo, taking no notice of this last query.

"Yes, I 'ave a bob and I 'ave the purse. Jenks said as I was to have the purse, and I means the purse for you, Flo."

"You needn't mean it for me, then," said Flo, raising her gentle little voice, "fur I'd rayther be cut up in bits than touch it, or look at it, and you 'as got to give back that 'ere bob to Jenks, Dick, fur ef we was to starve hout and hout we won't neither of us touch bite nor sup as it buys. I thought as you was sorry, Dick, when I heard you cryin', but no, you ain't, and you 'ave furgot mother,

that you 'ave."

At these words Dick burst out crying afresh. Flo had reserved her indignation for so long, that when it came it took him utterly by surprise.

"No, I 'aven't forgot, Flo – I be real orfle sorry."

"You won't never do it again?"

"No."

"And you'll give back the purse and bob to Jenks, and tell 'im yer'll 'ave no more to do wid 'is way?"

"Oh! I doesn't know," said Dick, "'ee would be real hangry."

"Very well," replied Flo; "good-night to you, Dick. I ain't goin' to sleep 'long of a thief," and she prepared to retire with dignity to her cobbler's stool.

But this proposal filled Dick with fresh alarm, he began to sob louder than ever, and promised vigorously that if she stayed with him he would do whatever she told him.

"'Zactly wot I ses?" asked Flo.

"Yes, Flo, I'll stick fast to you and never funk."

"You'll translate the old boots and shoes wid me fur the next week?"

"Yes."

"And you'll break orf wid Jenks, and be his pardener no more?"

"Yes," with a sinking heart.

"Werry well – good-night."

"But, Flo," after a long pause, "is you *sure* as mother isn't ris

from her grave?"

"No, I'm not sure," answered Flo slowly, "but I thinks at the most, she 'ave on'y got a sort o' a wake, and I thinks, Dick, ef you never, never is a thief no more, as mother'll 'ave a good longish rest yet."

Chapter Five
Jenks Passes his Word

But Flo knew even better than her little brother that it would be easier for Dick to steal the second time than the first.

Very few boys and girls she had ever heard of, none indeed, had left off prigging from stalls, and snatching from bakers' shops, and thrusting their hands into old gentlemen's pockets, when once they had begun to do so.

Not punishment, not even prison, could break them. They had their time of confinement, and then out they came, with more thieving propensities than ever.

Her mother had told her stories upon stories of what these children, who looked some of them so innocent, and began in this small way, had ended with – penal servitude for life – sometimes even the gallows.

She had made her hair stand on end with frightful accounts of their last days in the murderers' cells – how day and night the warder watched them, and how when being led out to execution they passed in some cases over their own graves.

And children once as innocent as Flo and Dick had come to this.

Now Flo knew that as mother had not appeared the first time Dick stole, she might not the second, and then he would gradually

cease to be afraid, and learn to be a regular thief.

The only chance was to save him from temptation, to part him from Jenks.

Flo liked Jenks very much – he had a bright way about him, he was never rough with her, but, on the contrary, had not only helped to keep the pot boiling, but had cobbled vigorously over her old boots and shoes, when he happened to come home in time in the evenings.

Still, nice as he was, if he was a thief, and they meant never to be thieves, the sooner they parted company the better.

She knew well that Dick would never have courage to say to Jenks what he ought to say, she knew that this task must be hers.

Accordingly, in the first light of the summer morning, though all they saw of it in the cellar was a slanting ray which came down through the hole in the pavement, when in that early light Jenks stumbled to his feet, and running his fingers through his shaggy hair by way of toilet, ran up the ladder, Flo, rising softly, for fear of waking Dick, followed him.

"Jenks," she said, laying her hand timidly on his coat-sleeve, "I wants fur to speak to you."

Jenks turned round with merry eyes.

"I'm yer 'umble servant, my Lady, the Hearl's wife," he said, with a mock bow to Flo; but then noticing her white little anxious face, he changed his tone to one of compassion. "Why, wot hever ails you, young 'un? You is all of a tremble. Come along and 'ave a drop of 'ot coffee at the stalls."

"No, Jenks, I doesn't want to. Jenks, I come fur to say as you, and me, and Dick mustn't be pardeners no more. You mustn't come no more to this yere cellar, Jenks."

Jenks was about to ask why, but he changed his mind and resumed his mocking tone.

"My Lady, you is alwis werry perlite – you is not one of them fine dames as welwet, and silk, and feathers maks too 'igh and mighty to speak to a chap. Might a poor and 'umble feller ax you then to be so werry obligin' as to tell 'im the reason of this 'eart-breakin' horder."

Here Jenks pretended to whimper.

"Yes, Jenks, I'll tell you," said Flo; "'tis because Dick and me isn't never goin' to be *thiefs*, Jenks. Dick did prig the purse yesterday, but 'ees never, never goin' to do so no more."

Jenks was silent, and Flo after a pause continued – "I wants fur to be perlite to you, Jenks. I likes you, Jenks, and now I'm goin' to tell you why."

"Oh! my heyes," said Jenks, "that's an honour. Oh! my stars! can I abear so big an honour? 'Old me, Flo, I feels kind of top 'eavy. Now then, break it heasy, Flo."

"I never know'd as yer trade was that of a thief, Jenks," quietly continued the little girl. "I thought as it wor a real nice trade as me and Dick might larn, and we mustn't larn that, not ef we was to starve. Dick and me must never be thiefs. But, Jenks, I'm not a blamin' you – it ain't wrong fur you, Jenks – you 'adn't never a mother, as telled you to keep an honest boy."

At these words Jenks started violently, the fun died out of his face, and he looked quite white and shaky.

"Why does you say that?" he asked rather savagely. "How does yer dare say as I 'av'n't a mother? as honest a woman as hever walked."

"I doesn't say it, Jenks. I on'y ses that *if* you 'ad a mother as was alwis honest, and, no, not ef we was starvin' would prig anythink, and that mother lay a dyin', and she axed yer werry soft and lovin' to keep honest, and never, no never to steal nothink, and you promised yer mother 'cause you loved 'er; would you be a thief then, Jenks?"

"Moonshine!" growled Jenks.

"No, but *would* you, Jenks?"

"How can I tell?" replied Jenks. "Look yere, Flo, leave *off* about mothers, do. Wot does I know of such? Say wot yer 'as to say, as I must be gone."

"I wants you not to come back no more, dear Jenks, and never, never to speak to Dick no more."

"*Dear* Jenks, come back no more," mimicked the boy. "And why not, little sweetheart?"

"'Cause you is a thief, and you is larnin' thiefin' to Dick."

"Oh my! the precious young cove, I didn't know as 'ee was to be reared hup so tender. But why does you say as *I* am a thief, Flo – it wor Dick tuk the purse yesterday."

"But you larned 'im *'ow* to take it, Jenks."

"No, I didn't, 'ee larned 'imself, 'ee wanted none of my

coddlin' and dressin'. Tell yer 'ee'd make a real stunnin' thief arter a bit. But I'll not teach 'im nothink, not I. No, Flo," (this gravely), "I'll promise yer this, and yere's my 'and on it, ef I sees 'im touch so much as a brass farthing, I'll give 'im a whackin' as 'ull soon teach 'im to be an honest boy."

"And you won't come back no more?"

"I won't say that – the cellar's conwenient, and I pays fur 'arf. Yes, I'll turn in to-night, and as long as I 'ave a mind to. Now I'm orf to my work – wot *ain't* that of a thief," and snapping his fingers disdainfully, Jenks disappeared.

Flo stood for a moment, her hand over her eyes, looking up the hot street. Her mission she felt was only half accomplished, but it was some consolation to know, that the next time Dick acted the part of a thief, his companion, instead of loading him with praise, would bestow on him instead a far-sounding whacking.

Flo did not mind how hard it was, if only it saved her brother from following in the steps of those boys of whom her mother had so often told her.

Chapter Six
Give the Poor Dog a Bone

That knowing dog Scamp was rather puzzled on the evening after his arrival, at the marked change in the manners of Dick and Jenks towards him. Clever as he was, their total change of manner threw him off his guard, and he began to accuse himself of ingratitude in supposing that at any time they had not wished for his company, that at any time they had treated him as an intruder. Not a bit of it. Here were they patting and making much of him; here was that good-natured fellow Jenks allowing him to repose his big, awkward body across his knees, while Flo and Dick, who had been indoors all day very grave and silent, were now in fits of laughter over his rough attempts at play.

"Flo," said Jenks, pulling some loose coppers out of his ragged vest pocket, "ef you'll buy wittles fur the dawg fur a week, I'll pay 'em."

And then he further produced from some mysterious store a good-sized, juicy bone, cut from a shank of mutton, which bone he rubbed gently against the dog's nose, finally allowing him to place it between his teeth and take possession of it. As Scamp on the floor munched, and worried, and gnawed that bone, so strong were his feelings of gratitude to Jenks, that he would have found it easy, quite easy, to follow him to the world's end.

And so Jenks seemed to think, for when supper was over he arose, and giving Dick an almost imperceptible nod, he called Scamp, and the boys and the dog went out.

They walked nearly to the end of the street, and then Jenks caught up Scamp, and endeavoured to hide him with his ragged jacket. This was no easy matter, for in every particular the dog was ungainly – too large in one part, too small in another. Impossible for a tattered coat-sleeve to hide that great rough head, which in sheer affection, caused by the memory of that bone, would push itself up and lick his face. Jenks bestowed upon him in return for this regard several severe cuffs, and was altogether rough and unpleasant in his treatment; and had Scamp not been accustomed to, and, so to speak, hardened to such things, his feelings might and probably would have been considerably hurt. As it was, he took it philosophically, and perceiving that he was not at present to show affection, ceased to do so.

The boys walked down several by-streets, and took some villainous-looking short cuts in absolute silence. Dick went a little in advance of his companion, and kept his eyes well open, and at sight of any policeman exchanged, though without looking round, some signal with Jenks; on which Jenks and Scamp would immediately, in some mysterious way, disappear from view, and Dick would toss a marble or two out of his pocket and pretend to be aiming them one at the other, until, the danger gone by, Jenks and Scamp would once more make their appearance. At last they

came to streets of so low a character, where the "nippers," as they called them, so seldom walked, that they could keep together, and even venture on a little conversation.

Dick, who had been sadly depressed all day, began to feel his spirits rising again. He had quite resolved never, never to be a thief no more, but this expedition would bring them in money in a way that even Flo could hardly disapprove of; at least, even if Flo did disapprove, she could hardly call it dishonest. The dog was theirs, had come to them. If they could get money for the dog would they not be right to take it? *They* were too poor to keep Scamp.

Just then Dick turned round and encountered a loving, trusting glance from the dumb creature's affectionate eyes, a sudden fit of compunction came over him, for *he* knew to *what* they were selling Scamp.

"S'pose as Scamp beats Maxey's young 'un?" he questioned to his companion.

"Not 'ee," said Jenks contemptuously, "'ee's nothink but a street cur, and that young 'un is a reg'lar tip-topper, *I* can tell yer."

"Well, Scamp 'ave sperrit too," said Dick.

"And ef 'ee 'adn't, would I bring 'im to Maxey? Would I insult Maxey's young dawg wid an hout and hout street cur wid no good points? Why, Maxey wouldn't give a tanner fur a cur *widout* sperrit, you little greenhorn."

Here they stopped at the door of a low ale-house, where the company were undoubtedly "doggy."

Jenks transferred Scamp to Dick's care, and disappeared into the public, from whence in a few moments he issued with a small stoutly-built man, of ill-looking and most repulsive aspect.

"I 'ave named my price," said Jenks, putting Scamp down on the ground and beginning to exhibit his different points. "Two bobs and a tanner, and a sight o' the fight fur me and this 'ere chap."

"Come, that's werry fine," said the man addressed as Maxey; "but 'ow is it, you young willan, you dares to insinniwate as *I* 'ave dog-fights? Doesn't you know as dog-fight's 'gainst the law of the land? You wouldn't like to see the hinside of Newgate fur bringin' this 'ere dog to me fur the purpose o' fightin' another dog? You didn't reckon *that* in the price of the dog. Come now, ef I doesn't give you into the hands of the perleece, and ef I takes the dog, and puts 'im away tidy, and gives you and yer pardener a tanner between yer? Come, that's lettin yer off cheap, ain't it?"

Dick was considerably frightened, but Jenks, taking these threats for what they were worth, held out firmly for two bobs and a tanner, which in the end he obtained a promise of, on condition that for one week he should tie up Scamp at home and feed him well. At the end of that time Maxey was to have him back, who further promised that Jenks and Dick should see the fight.

"And that 'ere's pretty sport," said Jenks, as well satisfied he turned away. "Maxey's young 'uns are alwis tip-toppers. Won't 'ee just give it to this willan! I guess there'll be an hawful row, and not much o' Scamp left, by the time 'tis hover." But the further

details with which Jenks favoured his young companion are too horrible to relate here. In our Christian England these things are done – done in the dark it is true, but still done.

Dog-fights, though punishable by law, are still held, and young boys and old men flock to them, and learn to be lower than the brutes in diabolical cruelty because of them.

It may still however puzzle those who read Scamp's history to know of what use he could be in a dog-fight, as only thoroughbred dogs can fight well.

Alas! Scamp could be made use of; such dogs as Scamp can further this wicked sport.

Such dogs are necessary in the training of the fighting-dogs. Jenks knew this well, hence his desire to obtain the poor animal.

His use was this – I here quote from Mr Greenwood's well-known "Low Life Deeps."

"He at once good-naturedly explained to me the way in which a young (fighting) dog is trained.

"I was given to understand that the first practice a fighting pup had was with a 'good old gummer,' that is to say, with a dog which had been a good one in his day, but was now old, and toothless, and incapable of doing more than 'mumble' the juvenile antagonist that was set against him, the one great advantage being that the young dog gained practical experience in the making of 'points.'

"The next stage, as I was informed, in training the young aspirant for pit-honours was to treat him to a 'real mouthful,' or,

in other words, 'to let him taste dog'…" What this means, Mr Greenwood goes on partially to explain, but the explanation is too fearful to be repeated here; suffice it to say that Scamp was the dog that Maxey's young 'un was to taste.

Considerably elated, the boys started off on their way home. The thought of two-and-sixpence, and a sight of a real dog-fight, was quite enough to silence all Dick's scruples, and Jenks never had any.

Yet once, long ago now, Jenks had cried when the cat pounced on his canary, once Jenks had a kind heart. It was not all hard yet, though very nearly so. Still some things could touch him, some faces, some words, some tones, could reach a vulnerable part within him. He hardly knew himself that the better part of him, not yet quite dead, was touched, he only called it being in a fix. He was in a fix about Dick. It had been his intention, it had been his motive, in coming to live in the Saint Giles's cellar, to train Dick as a thief, and if possible Flo also.

He was a very expert young hand himself, – no boy in London with lighter fingers, or more clever in dodging the police, than he. He knew that the first requisite for any successful thief was to possess an innocent appearance, and the moment he saw Dick and Flo he knew that their faces would make their own, and probably his fortune, in this criminal trade. He had gone cautiously about his work, for eyes much less sharp than his must have perceived that the children were strictly honest. Their honesty, their horror of theft, had filled him with surprise, and

added greatly to his difficulties. He saw, however, that Dick was the weaker of the two, and his scruples he determined first to overcome. It took him some time, a whole month, but at last Dick fell, and Jenks was triumphant. All now was smooth sailing with him, he was in high, the highest spirits. Dick should be taken down skilfully step by step the broad descent, and presently Flo would follow.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.