

Farjeon Benjamin Leopold

Miser Farebrother: A Novel
(vol. 3 of 3)



Benjamin Farjeon

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Farjeon B. L. Benjamin Leopold

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CHAPTER I

A BAD BUSINESS

At ten o'clock on this morning Captain Ablewhite, unannounced, and without knocking at the door, walked into Jeremiah's room in the hotel at which he had taken up his quarters. Jeremiah was still in bed. Closing the door carefully behind him and turning the key, Captain Ablewhite drew a chair to the side of the bed and sat down.

"This is a bad business," said Captain Ablewhite.

Jeremiah was in a parlous condition. His face was haggard; his eyes were bloodshot; he was shaking like a man in a palsy.

"This is a bad business," repeated Captain Ablewhite, "You are too much upset to reply. But why, oh, *why* have you lost your head?"

Jeremiah put his hand up, feebly and despairingly, and passed it vacantly over his forehead.

"I have here," said Captain Ablewhite, plunging his hands into the pockets of his gorgeous dressing-gown, "a pick-me-up. It will pull you round, and then we can talk."

He produced two bottles – one containing the pick-me-up, the other soda. Taking a large tumbler from a table he poured a good dose of the pick-me-up into it, and then uncorked the soda, which he emptied into the glass.

"Drink this."

Jeremiah drank it, and almost instantly became for a while clear-brained.

"Better?" asked Captain Ablewhite.

"A great deal better," replied Jeremiah.

Then, for the third time, the jovial Captain – he was as fresh as a two-year-old – said, "This is a bad business."

And still, clear-headed as he now was, Jeremiah did not know what to say in answer to a very plain statement of fact.

"Let me see," said Captain Ablewhite, taking out his pocket-book. "There is nothing like looking a difficulty straight in the face. It is not a bit of good shirking it. What you've got to do is to meet it – and, Mr. Jeremiah Pamflett, meet it you must. Now, then, for the facts. You brought down with you to Doncaster a very comfortable sum of ready money. How much?"

"Two thousand pounds," replied Jeremiah.

"That is right. Speak clearly and plainly. Two thousand pounds. If I had that in my pocket at the present moment, I would double it before the day is over. There's a race to be run – however, let that pass."

"What race?" cried Jeremiah. "Is it a certainty?"

"It is a certainty," said Captain Ablewhite, solemnly. "I've got the tip for the Scurry Stakes, my lad, and the horse can't lose."

"But why not give it to me?" asked Jeremiah, in great excitement. "I could make everything right – everything – everything..." His voice trailed off into a whimper.

"Why don't I give it to you?" said Captain Ablewhite, very calmly. "Because I am beginning to lose my opinion of you. Let me tell you, though: you may justify it yet if you are not thoroughly white-livered."

"I will, I will!" exclaimed Jeremiah. "Only give me the tip – give me the tip!"

"Not if I know it. This little affair I will keep to myself, and I'll sweep the market. You've let too many good things slip by this week. Come, now, confess: if you had stuck to your 'system,' how much would you have won? Don't put me off. You've gone all through it, and you know the figures to the fraction of a shilling."

Jeremiah struck his forehead with his hand. "I should have won seven thousand pounds."

"Exactly. And you did not win it because you weren't game, and because you allowed yourself to be led away. What is the good of a man unless he has the courage of his opinions? Before midnight I'm going to try you; I'm going to see whether you're worth trying to save (because you are in a frightful hole, you know, and there's no telling what will happen to you if you continue to show the white feather), or whether I shall let you go to the dogs. It depends upon me, old chap. Oppose me, show ingratitude, try to prove that you're cleverer than I am, and the odds are that you will have seven years – not less – perhaps fourteen. Oh, you are clever, you are! Make no mistake, you *are* clever; but you want nerve! Why, if you had been open with me – if you had told me honestly what your system was – we might both have made fortunes. But that's neither here nor there. Things are as they are, aren't they?"

"Yes, they are," sighed Jeremiah.

"Shall I go on?"

"Yes."

"Well, then. You brought down two thousand pounds with you, and you blued it. Eh?"

"Yes."

"I don't ask you where you got the money from. It is no business of mine, and I will have nothing to do with it. I have my ideas, but I'll keep them to myself. Having lost your two thousand pounds, you get me to introduce you to a book-maker, who took your bets in the expectation of paying you if you won, and receiving from you if you lost. And you did business with him in a false name."

"I didn't get you," protested Jeremiah; "you offered to introduce me; and it was at *your* suggestion I used the name of Farebrother."

Captain Ablewhite rose and said, "Good-morning."

"No, no," cried Jeremiah, piteously; "don't desert me!"

"Did I introduce you, or did you ask me to introduce you?" demanded Captain Ablewhite.

"I asked you – I asked you!" whined Jeremiah.

"And did you use Farebrother's name upon my suggestion? Be careful, old chap."

"At my own suggestion," faltered Jeremiah.

"Good," said Captain Ablewhite, resuming his seat. "You made bets with him, and you are in his books over three thousand pounds. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"I have I O U's for another two thousand pounds. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"It is a satisfaction. You hold acceptances of mine for close on that amount, and the entire amount of cash I have received from you is about one-fourth of that amount."

"Business is business," groaned Jeremiah.

"All right. I didn't complain, and I don't. You and I are pretty well squared on that account. Taking it altogether, you have lost this week some seven thousand pounds, when you might have won as much."

"Oh, Lord!" gasped Jeremiah.

"You may clasp your head till you're blue in the face, and *that* won't get you out of the hole. Do you want to get out of it?"

"Yes; of course I do."

"Then," said Captain Ablewhite, enigmatically, "take the 1.33 train to London. You will get there at five o'clock. Have a bath and a sensible dinner, and meet me outside the Langham Hotel, on

the opposite side of the road, at nine o'clock to-night. It may be in my power to save you. No words. If you do not obey me I have done with you. Yes or no?"

"Yes," said Jeremiah.

CHAPTER II

THE DIAMOND BRACELET

This was to be a night of surprising adventure to Jeremiah. He was punctual to time. As the church clock struck the hour of nine he arrived at the Langham Hotel, and in accordance with Captain Ablewhite's instructions, waited on the opposite side of the road. There was no moon, and he paced the flag-stones in shadow. A quarter past nine, half-past, three-quarters past, then the chiming of ten o'clock, and still no Captain. Jeremiah was in a bewilderment of agonized suspense; he was on the brink of a precipice, and he relied upon Captain Ablewhite to save him – by what means he knew not, but he depended upon the Captain's word. "He is detained," thought Jeremiah; "the train is late; he is not a punctual man; perhaps he said ten o'clock instead of nine. At all events, I'll wait for him." The minutes sped on; a quarter past ten, half past, three-quarters past, and now another hour had passed. It was eleven o'clock, and Jeremiah, worked up into a state of terrible excitement, continued to pace up and down, up and down. Two or three times a policeman, attracted by his monotonous movements, strolled past, and carelessly looked at him; and on these occasions Jeremiah strove to hide his face from the policeman's scrutiny. "Will he never come?" thought Jeremiah – "will he never come?" At half-past eleven a singular incident occurred. A voice at his back accosted him. It was a woman's voice.

"Don't turn," the woman said. "Your name is Pamflett?"

"Yes," answered Jeremiah, much amazed.

"You are waiting for some one?"

"Yes."

"For whom?"

"Captain Ablewhite."

"That is right. Take this."

The woman slipped a packet into his hand and was gone. Jeremiah, turning, saw no trace of her. No time was afforded him for reflection. The Captain's voice struck upon his ear.

"Follow me," it said.

Without the evidence of the voice Jeremiah would not have recognized Captain Ablewhite, who was enveloped in a large Inverness cape, and upon whose head was a hat unlike that which he usually wore. He followed the Captain, who walked very fast, until they reached a narrow street at some distance from the Langham. It was a thoroughfare which appeared to be quite deserted.

"Well, old fellow?" said Captain Ablewhite.

"Well?" responded the mystified Jeremiah.

"Couldn't help being late. Knew you would wait for me. Ah! you have the packet, I see."

"This?" said Jeremiah.

"Yes, this;" and Captain Ablewhite took it from his hands.

"It was given to me by a woman, who hid herself from me. What is the meaning of it?"

"You will know soon enough. Go and fetch a four-wheeler."

Jeremiah departed, and returned with the conveyance.

"Give the driver this half-sovereign," whispered Captain Ablewhite. "Tell him it is on account, and that he has a good fare. Instruct him to drive along the Finchley road. No questions, old chap; do as I bid you."

Jeremiah followed out the instructions, and the next moment he and Captain Ablewhite were in the cab.

"No place like a four-wheeler," said the Captain, "for an interchange of confidences. Give me your closest attention, friend Jeremiah. You're in luck's way. Being in one of those awkward fixes

which invariably land a fellow in jail and ruin him for ever and ever, amen! something has turned up to save you. This is the way of it – but before I go into the matter you are to understand that you are to make no inquiries. What I choose to impart I will impart – nothing more. Do you agree?"

"Yes."

"To proceed, then. A lady friend of mine – call her a Duchess – has pressing need for a large sum of money, and has only one means of raising it. The amount she requires is four thousand pounds, and she has handed you jewels worth ten times as much. In a month from this date the four thousand will be repaid with interest, and the jewels will be handed back to her. They are in this packet. Seeing's believing; you shall see them."

He unfastened the packet, and took a morocco case from the wrapper. Then he produced a box of wax tapers, which he gave to Jeremiah, bidding him to keep up a light, in order that he might have a good view of the jewels. He nicked the morocco case open, and exposed to view a bracelet of diamonds of such extraordinary size that Jeremiah could not help giving utterance to an exclamation of astonishment.

"You may well cry out," said Captain Ablewhite. "The stones, if they're worth a penny, are worth fifty thousand pounds. Do you wish to know how I became associated with the affair? Well, I've no objection to tell you. The fact is, the Duchess is an old flame of mine. An antique Duke falling in love with her, and being in his dotage, I naturally consent to the marriage. But she is an awfully extravagant woman, and needing instantly the sum of money I mentioned, comes to me. 'I have a friend,' I say to her, 'in the money-lending way, who, if you give him security, will obtain millions for you.' Whereupon she says she will leave her wonderful diamond bracelet with my friend until she pays back the four thousand with ample interest. That will be your profit, Jeremiah. She dare not pledge these diamonds in the regular way with the men who deal regularly in such affairs. It would come to her husband's ears; and although the diamonds are hers, to do as she likes with, there is the future to be considered. The Duke makes her a handsome allowance; he has drawn up his will, leaving her as much as it is in his power to do; he is a very jealous, irascible, pompous-headed old idiot, and it is therefore imperative that this little matter shall be negotiated in such a way as to render it impossible it can come to his knowledge. He brings his wife to London this evening; his town mansion is not in a fit state to receive his noble carcass, so his wife drives him to the Langham. She knows from me that a friend – you, Jeremiah – is waiting outside the hotel; she comes to you, addresses you, slips her bracelet into your hand, and vanishes. What confidence! What imprudence! Dear little soul! As for the interest, charge her sixty, eighty, a hundred per cent. Yes, charge her a hundred. It won't come out of her pocket, it will come out of the Duke's. 'But,' say you, 'I haven't the money to advance; I'm clean stumped.' That need not stop the cart, friend Jeremiah. What you have to do is to go to your governor, Farebrother, and show him these diamonds. If the sight of them doesn't set his thin blood in a glow, nothing will. You say to him, 'The lady requires *six* thousand pounds on them for a month. She will give one thousand pounds interest.' That is at the rate of two hundred per cent. per annum, friend Jeremiah. You continue: 'If the money is not repaid at the end of the month, the diamonds are yours; they become forfeited. Here is a letter from her to that effect.' I will give it to you presently, Jeremiah, and you can hand it to the governor. He won't be able to resist the bait. How about the ready? Can he lay hands on it?"

"He has bonds that he can sell," replied Jeremiah.

"Good. You can manage that for him. Now, how do *you* benefit by the transaction? First and foremost, you get six thousand pounds from the governor; you hand me four and keep two. From what you let drop, friend Jeremiah, you need some such sum of ready money to replace the cash you lost at Doncaster. Well, there you have it, and you will be spared acquaintance with the criminal court. In a month you will receive four thousand pounds interest on the loan, of which you hand the governor one thousand, retaining three, which you pay to me off what you owe the book-maker. To oblige me, he will wait. The personal accounts between you and me we will go into by-and-by. You

see, friend Jeremiah, something very disagreeable, shockingly disagreeable, stares you in the face, and this is the only way out of it. I shall expect you to show your gratitude. That such a slice of luck should fall to you just in the nick of time is nothing less than miraculous. Now, then, how does the thing strike you? Farebrother will lend the money, won't he? If he doesn't, or if you have any doubt of it, I can take the diamonds somewhere else."

"I don't think," said Jeremiah, slowly, "that there is any doubt he will lend the money."

"Very well, then. Carry it through, and keep it dark. See the governor to-morrow and arrange it. You'll do it?"

"Yes."

"There's nothing more to say, then. Just see the confidence I have in you, leaving you this treasure without so much as a receipt for it. But I know you can be trusted just now, because of the fix you're in. I must see you to-morrow night to hear what you have to tell. Best not to meet at my place or yours till this little matter is concluded. Say at ten o'clock, just outside Whitechapel Church."

"You will be punctual?" said Jeremiah.

"Oh yes," said Captain Ablewhite, laughing; "I will be punctual. Ta-ta! Call to the driver to stop."

He jumped from the cab as the driver was pulling up, leaving Jeremiah to make his way back to London alone.

On the following night, at ten o'clock, they met outside Whitechapel Church, and Jeremiah informed Captain Ablewhite that Miser Farebrother had consented to lend the money. On Tuesday evening Captain Ablewhite received four thousand pounds from Jeremiah, and the gallant Captain walked off with a very peculiar smile on his face. A few hours afterward he was whirling away in the night train to Dover, bound for Italy.

CHAPTER III

SISTER AND BROTHER

For a fortnight after Phœbe reached the haven of love in Camden Town she lay between life and death. It was only when she felt herself out of danger that her strength gave way. The strain of the last few months in Parkside produced a dangerous illness, and for many days her life was despaired of. How tenderly was she nursed! What treasures of love surrounded her! She was not left alone a minute by day and night. Now it was Aunt Leth who watched by her bedside, now it was Fanny, now it was Uncle Leth. In some dim way she was conscious of this spiritual comfort, and it helped her recovery. On the twelfth day the doctors proclaimed her to be out of danger.

The Lethbridges could ill afford the expenses of her sickness. There was the regular family doctor to be paid; there were the fees of the celebrated physician who was called in, and who came in a carriage and pair with two footmen; there were the prescribed delicacies to be provided for. It was all done cheerfully and with full-hearted affection. Sacrifices were made; money was raised upon such small articles of jewelry as they possessed, even Uncle Leth's old-fashioned watch went, and not a murmur passed their lips, not a regretful thought at the loss of these treasures crossed their minds. They had but one hope, but one desire – that they might succeed in saving their beloved girl. It was granted them, and she sat in a dressing-gown in the dear little parlour, the very walls of which were sanctified in her eyes.

They did not dare to speak to her of her father, nor did she refer to him; but it needed no words from her to make them understand the cruel torture and oppression which, prolonged for a few weeks longer, would have brought death or madness to her. When she was convalescent her actions were pitiful: she clung to her friends; her hands were for ever seeking theirs; her eyes constantly travelled to the dear ones who were ministering to her, and whose eyes never rested on her pale face without a tender, cheery smile.

Fred Cornwall came daily, morning and evening, with flowers and jellies and things which it was not possible for her to eat. He had not been allowed to see her yet; but he always left his constant love for his dear girl, and messages which it would have occupied an hour to deliver. When Phœbe was sensible and strong enough, these messages, in a reasonable form, were conveyed to her, and her relatives were surprised at the grave pleasure with which she received them. The heavenly delight which fills a young girl's heart when, in a time of bitter trouble, she is assured that her lover is true to her was not expressed in her face. Pleasure she felt; but it was a thoughtful pleasure in which there seemed to be an element of pain.

"He is true to you! he is true to you!" whispered Fanny to her. "Oh! you should see him, Phœbe. Except my dear father, there is not a better man in the whole wide world."

"I am sure," said Phœbe, quietly, "that Mr. Cornwall is a good man, and my earnest hope is that he will be happy."

"Phœbe!"

"Yes, dear."

"Not *Mr.* Cornwall – Fred – your own dear Fred!" Phœbe did not reply, and Fanny continued: "He is certain to be happy, with you!"

And still Phœbe made no reply. Fanny was greatly disturbed, and she told her mother privately that she was convinced there was something on Phœbe's mind with respect to Fred.

"Do not worry her or argue with her," Aunt Leth said. "Remember the sufferings she has endured, and leave it to herself to confide in us. Time will bring happiness to her bruised heart."

"Ask her to see Fred, mamma."

"She will see him this evening, my dear; she told me so; and I have written a note to him desiring him to come early."

"Then everything will be right," said Fanny. "Mamma, is it not strange that we do not hear from her father? He must know that Phœbe is with us."

"He does know, Fanny. I wrote to him, but I have not received a reply."

"I am glad of it. Phœbe is now entirely ours, and will live with us all her life – that is, till she marries Fred."

Fred Cornwall arrived early in the afternoon, and Aunt Leth opened the door for him.

"She will see me, Aunt Leth?" he said, eagerly.

"Yes, Fred. She wishes to see you alone. You must be very gentle and quiet with her."

"Indeed I will be that. Here is some jelly, the kind she likes best."

"Thank you, Fred. Wait a moment in the dining-room. Fanny is with her, and I must call her away."

Presently Fred Cornwall entered the room in which Phœbe was sitting. She looked at him gratefully and tenderly; an angelic spirit of resolution was depicted in her face.

"Phœbe, my darling Phœbe!" he murmured, as he sat by her side and took her hand; and then he was overcome by her delicate, fragile appearance, and it was as much as he could do to prevent the tears running down his face.

She gently disengaged her hand.

"Why do you take your hand away, Phœbe? Let me hold it. Give it to me of your own free-will."

"No, Mr. Cornwall," she said, in a low, sweet tone. "I cannot – I must not."

Again "Mr. Cornwall"! He looked at her reproachfully.

"Do you no longer love me, Phœbe, that you are so changed toward me?"

She was compelled to pause before she could answer him.

"You must not ask me to reply to that question," she then said – "for pity's sake!"

"I *must* ask you," he said, impetuously. "Oh, I beg your pardon, Phœbe! Aunt Leth enjoined upon me to be gentle with you, and here am I forgetting! But Phœbe, dear Phœbe, *my* Phœbe – consider! I implore you to consider! You gave me your heart, as I have given you mine. Have I done anything to forfeit your love?"

"Nothing," she said.

"Why, then, are you so strange to me? Why have you altered so?"

"I am not altered to you," she said.

"Then you love me still!" he cried.

"Will you listen to me?" she asked, "I have been trying to strengthen myself for this meeting, and you must not weaken me. No; do not kiss me! There is something that *must* be told – that you *must* hear!"

"I will listen to you, my darling – mine, and no other man's. You do not love another, Phœbe?"

"No, Fred." She was not aware that she had uttered the dear name.

"I am happy," he said. "Go on, my dear."

Then she told him of the oath her father had extracted from her that she would not marry without his consent, and said that, with that oath upon her conscience, she could not expect Fred to be bound to her.

"To receive you as my lover," she said, "would be, to my mind, as if I am spiritually breaking the oath I have sworn. It would make me feel guilty; it would lower me in my own esteem; it would be playing with my conscience."

"When you took the oath, Phœbe," said Fred Cornwall, immensely relieved, but at the same time perplexed, by the revelation, "you were not aware what you were binding yourself to?"

"I was not aware of it," she said. "My father spoke so kindly to me, and seemed to regard you with such favour, that I thought he intended to sanction our engagement. But he may not have known

what was in my mind, as assuredly I did not know what was in his. It is not for me to say, and you must not press me. I am striving to do what is right. Help me to do it! I am bound by my oath. Without my father's consent I cannot marry you; he will never give it, and while he lives we can be nothing to each other. I have thought of it – oh, so seriously! – and I have decided in what I believe to be the right way. If in the future I am ever in your mind, I wish you to think of me with respect."

"Through all the future that is before me," said Fred, "you will be ever in my mind, and I shall ever think of you with respect. If my love needed strengthening, what you have said would strengthen it; but it can never be stronger, more devoted, more complete than it is; nothing can make it so; and nothing can weaken it. 'Give me your hand, Phœbe.'" She looked at him pleadingly. "Give me your hand, Phœbe." She gave it to him. "I swear to you solemnly, on my honour as a man, on my faith as a Christian, that I will never marry another woman. May misfortune pursue and overtake me quickly if I ever prove false to the love I have given you! Have you anything to say to me, Phœbe?"

She understood him. He had given her a solemn pledge. He had a right to a similar pledge from her.

"If I do not marry you," she said, "I will never marry. Though we may be parted for life, I will be true to the love I have given you. And now" – she held out her arms imploringly – "strengthen me, Fred!"

He rose, and stood apart from her, with his face averted. Presently he resumed his seat by her side.

"Until a happier day arrives," he said, taking her unresisting hand, "we will not meet as lovers. We are brother and sister. Kiss me, Phœbe."

She kissed him, and he kissed her. Thus the faithful compact was made.

Before the week was at an end, Fred wrote the following letter to Miser Farebrother:

"SIR, – Your daughter has told me of the oath she took that she will never marry without your consent. She feels herself bound by this oath, and will adhere to it. Thus, while you live, a life of unhappiness is before her, if you refuse to give your consent to our union. She loves me, and I love her with a most perfect love. We have pledged ourselves anew to each other, but are both clear upon the point that we cannot be wed without your sanction. I ask, I implore, you to give it. I am not a rich man; but I have a good position and the prospect of a prosperous future is before me. My family is a family of standing, and is honoured and respected. If you will permit me, I will send you credentials of my character, with which you cannot fail to be satisfied. Into my union with your daughter the question of money does not enter. We shall be satisfied to work our way without help from you in a money shape, either now or hereafter. To this I am prepared to bind myself by written document; and all that a man can do to make the woman he loves happy, that I will do to the utmost extent of my power. Respectfully and humbly, I beg of you to release your daughter from her oath, and to bestow upon her a happiness for which she and I will be ever grateful. I remain, sir, faithfully and obediently yours,

"FREDERICK CORNWALL."

The letter was despatched, and day after day Fred looked eagerly for an answer to it. But none came.

There arrived, however, at Aunt Leth's house a paper for Phœbe, in her father's writing. It was not signed, nor was she addressed in it by name. This was its purport:

"I have received from a certain Mr. Frederick Cornwall a letter in which he asks me to release you from a solemn oath you voluntarily took, and to give my consent to your marriage with him. This I will never do, nor will I ever release you from your oath. In that oath was comprised a daughter's duty to her father – a duty you have wilfully and systematically neglected and failed to perform. Your

guilty desires can only be accomplished by my death. When you are prepared to obey me in the one wish of my life, you can come to me – not until then."

CHAPTER IV

JEREMIAH IN TRIBULATION

Jeremiah Pamflett, owing the book-maker with whom he made his bets at Doncaster over three thousand pounds, very soon made the disagreeable discovery that Captain Ablewhite had played him false. He had made no arrangement with the book-maker to give Jeremiah time to settle, and Jeremiah himself personally was compelled to arrange with the man to whom he owed so large an amount of money. He found it no easy task. The book-maker bullied and blustered and threatened exposure, and the result was that Jeremiah had to part not only with acceptances of his own by which he was bound to pay sums at stated periods, but also with all the securities he held on his own account from persons with whom he had had private business. Among these acceptances was Mr. Lethbridge's for three hundred pounds, which Jeremiah had discounted for Kiss and the dramatic author, and which in a very short time would be due.

The terror of this acceptance weighed most heavily upon Uncle Leth. As the day approached upon which it was necessary it should be paid, his fears increased to an almost unbearable pitch. He had written to Jeremiah Pamflett asking for renewal, and the answer he received was to the effect that the acceptance was in the hands of another person, and that it would have to be paid on the day of maturity. The reason of Uncle Leth writing this letter to Jeremiah was that in interviews with Kiss and Mr. Linton they mournfully declared their inability to raise the smallest sum to help Uncle Leth in his difficulty. They were overwhelmed with self-reproaches, but this did not help Uncle Leth in his difficulty, nor stave off impending ruin. Uncle Leth had succeeded in discovering the name of the man who held the bill; he had appealed to him in vain for renewal. "The acceptance will have to be met," said the book-maker. "If it is not, I shall sell you up. I have ascertained that you hold a responsible position in a bank. Ask the manager to advance you the money if you happen to be short yourself."

To ask the bank manager to assist him in paying an acceptance held by a racing man would be to ask for his dismissal. It would be tantamount to a confession that he had been indulging in that worst of vices – betting on horses.

Uncle Leth had confided to his wife, and she, although she strove to comfort him, was terrified at the prospect. She had thought of Fred Cornwall, but she knew, from the young man's own indirect admissions, that he was not in a position to assist them. He knew nothing of the acceptance, and therefore could make no reference to it in his confidences with Aunt Leth. "It is an uphill fight," he had said cheerfully to her; "but I shall come out a victor in the end. At present, dear Aunt Leth, it is a tight fit." After this how could she make an appeal to him to help them out of their trouble? Meanwhile the day was approaching nearer and nearer.

It was Tuesday. On Wednesday, the following day, the acceptance was due, and Uncle Leth would have to meet it or go to the wall. The dear old home would be sold up, and they would be turned into the streets. The tears that ran down Aunt Leth's face were like tears of blood from her heart.

On this Tuesday it was that consternation seized upon Jeremiah Pamflett, and furious anger raged in Miser Farebrother's heart. The cause of these emotions was a newspaper article, which is here transcribed. It was headed:

"A STRANGE AFFAIR – THE BITERS BIT."

"A singular discovery has just come to light, and is in the hands of the police. Everybody is acquainted with the name of the wealthy miner from California, Mr. Quinlan, whose income is said to be not less than half a million a year. His name and his doings have been for a long time past in everybody's mouth. He is of humble origin, and his eccentricities may be accounted for by the fact of his having come into a marvellous fortune, the spending of the income of which would be a tax

upon the ablest man in creation. It may be remembered that his wife died a couple of years since, and that last year he contracted a second marriage with an indifferent actress, whose extravagances in her new position have drawn attention to her in every city she and her husband have visited. The finest horses, the finest equipages, the finest dresses, the finest diamonds, the finest everything, in short, that cost vast sums of money. There came to the ears of Mrs. Quinlan and her too-generous husband that a diamond bracelet of rare – nay, of fabulous – value was in the market. The stones were of a monstrous size and of the purest colour. The price asked for this bracelet was no less than sixty thousand pounds. The stones alone, if sold singly, were valued by experts at considerably more than thirty thousand. To obtain possession of an ornament so rare and costly was a natural desire on the part of Mrs. Quinlan, and to her husband was a bagatelle. What are sixty thousand pounds to a man upon whom money continues to roll in a manner so bewildering? The upshot of the negotiations was that the bracelet was purchased and paid for, and Mrs. Quinlan the happy possessor.

"About four weeks ago Mr. and Mrs. Quinlan, with their retinue and treasures, arrived at the Langham Hotel, with the intention of stopping there for two or three days. But fate willed it otherwise. Mrs. Quinlan was taken ill, and was confined to her bed. So serious was her illness that she was a prisoner in her bedroom for more than three weeks. Mr. Quinlan did not remain in attendance upon her the whole of this time. He had business which took him frequently to Paris and other places; consequently, for a greater part of the time during which his wife was suffering, he was an absentee.

"Among Mrs. Quinlan's serving-women was one of great attractions, and who was a special favourite with her mistress. This young woman's name is Alice Frost. She had the entire confidence of her mistress, and, as events have proved, was unworthy of it. To her was intrusted, during Mrs. Quinlan's sickness, the charge of the lady's jewels, which were kept in a very substantial safe in Mrs. Quinlan's bedroom. It was often impressed upon Mrs. Quinlan that she was imprudent to carry so much valuable property about with her; but she disregarded these hints, and took her pleasures in her own way. One of these pleasures, in the course of her illness, was to have all her jewels and ornaments spread out before her on her bed, and to handle and gaze upon them. We hold that she was sensible in this, for what is the use of buried treasure? The servant who took these priceless gems from the safe for the inspection of her mistress was Alice Frost.

"Suddenly Alice Frost disappears. She is not discharged, she is not sick, she is not in disgrace; she simply disappears. Mrs. Quinlan, much distressed at the loss of so great a favourite, calls in a private detective. He listens to all that Mrs. Quinlan can impart to him, and when she has finished, remarks, 'She has run away.'

"'Impossible,' says Mrs. Quinlan. 'Why should she run away? Somebody has carried her off. She is very good-looking.'

"Says the detective, 'She had charge of your jewellery?'

"'To some extent,' says Mrs. Quinlan. 'But it is all kept in the safe there.'

"'Would you have any objection to our looking through it,' says the detective, 'and seeing that nothing is missing?'

"'No objection whatever,' says Mrs. Quinlan.

"Whereupon the safe is unlocked, and the treasures laid forth. With one exception it is all correct. Nothing is missing but the wonderful diamond bracelet. That is gone.

"'It accounts,' remarked the detective, 'for the disappearance of Alice Frost.'

"Mrs. Quinlan fell back speechless, and, when she recovered, bade the detective track Alice Frost and the sixty-thousand-pound bracelet.

"What has been discovered is this: Alice Frost disappeared one Friday night. Presumably the diamond bracelet also disappeared at the same time.

"What occurred in or about the Langham Hotel on that night which may afford a clue to the discovery of the robber or robbers?

"On that night the policeman on duty observed a man walking on the opposite side of the road for a space of a couple of hours. This man did nothing but walk slowly up and down, keeping as much as possible in the dark, and looking for some person he was waiting for. The policeman on duty passed him on three occasions, and although the man endeavoured to avoid him, he obtained a good view of his features. He will be able to recognize the man.

"At half past eleven a woman came out of the Langham, and went over to the man. The policeman on duty saw this movement, but is not sure that he will be able to identify the woman. Of the man he *is* sure.

"The woman spoke to the man behind his back. The man did not turn his face. She slipped a parcel into his hands, and walked rapidly away. Almost immediately the man was joined by another in an Inverness cape, and the two walked away together. The policeman on duty saw nothing more of them. From the manner in which they walked away together there is no doubt that they were intimately acquainted with each other, and that they were confederates. So far, the policeman; now for the next evidence.

"As near as the cabman can remember, driver of a four-wheeler, it was within a few minutes of midnight that a man hailed him and bade him come along. They went a couple of hundred yards and took up a man in an Inverness cape. The man who hailed the driver gave him half a sovereign 'on account,' and directed him to drive along the Finchley Road. He did so, and observed while he was driving that the men inside the cab were lighting matches, which proves that they were examining something – probably the diamond bracelet. After driving about an hour he was called upon to stop, and before he had pulled up his horse the man in the Inverness cape jumped out of the cab and disappeared. Then he was directed to drive back to London, and he did so, stopping, by orders, in Portland Place. The man who hailed him first (now the only one remaining in the cab) alighted, and the cabman noticed that he had a parcel in his hand. Again the diamond bracelet. The cabman asked for a few shillings more, reminding his fare that the half-sovereign given to him was 'on account.' The man said that he was well paid, and refused to part with anything further. The cabman began to argue with him, but the man did not stop; he ran off. The cabman's description of his fare tallies with that of the policeman on duty at the Langham Hotel. The cabman will be able to identify him.

"In some way which we are not at liberty to divulge, but in which we may say the good-looking Alice Frost is concerned, the disappearance of a blackleg going by the name of Captain Ablewhite bears upon the robbery. It is known that this Captain Ablewhite took the night train on the following Tuesday to Dover. Nothing further is at present discovered of him.

"Now comes the piquant feature in the robbery.

"To Mr. Quinlan, who arrived at the Langham Hotel after the discovery of the robbery, the detective narrated all the particulars of the affair. Mr. Quinlan laughed. His wife asked him what he was laughing at.

"My dear,' he said to her, 'the loss is not so great as you suppose. Your diamond bracelet is safe.'

"Safe!' she cried.

"Here it is.' He pulled it from his pocket. 'The fact is, you would not be persuaded that it was imprudent to travel with so much valuable property about you, and I therefore took the precaution of having a bracelet made exactly like this. *All the stones in the bracelet that is stolen are false!*'

"An agreeable contemplation for the robbers. The biters are bit.

"The affair is in the hands of the detectives in Scotland Yard, who are confident that they will be able to track the robbers."

This newspaper article it was that struck consternation to the heart of Jeremiah Pamflett. He turned hot and cold. First he was clammy; the next moment he broke out into a hot perspiration. He had been swindled, tricked, betrayed; he, the wretched, depraved thief, had fallen amongst thieves. He, the sharper, had been sharped. Truly, the biter was bit!

What should he do? How was he to act in order to insure his safety? The policeman who had been on duty at the Langham Hotel on that Friday night said that he could identify him. The cabman he had engaged said the same. If he had had a sufficient sum of money he would have flown the country, but he had been compelled on that day to make a payment to the book-maker who held his acceptances for his losses at Doncaster, and he had not enough left to pay his fare to the Continent. And what would be the use of his going there if he had? He could not live without money; he did not understand a word of any other language than English; and he would be sure to be tracked and brought back. His flight would make it worse for him; it would be an admission of guilt. Should he stop and brave it out? Upon reflection he gained a little courage. He argued with himself, despite the policeman's and the cabman's declarations that they could identify him, that it was scarcely possible they could do so unless he betrayed himself. He had been at great trouble to conceal his features from the policeman's scrutiny, and it only required him to put a good face on the matter to brazen it out; to so confuse the man, even if he came into contact with him, that he would pass unnoticed. But there was no occasion for him to come into contact with the policeman. He would keep out of the way, and the affair would blow over. Captain Ablewhite would not, could not, come back. The mere thought of Captain Ablewhite roused him to fury. He looked blindly round for something to strangle. If the bland, smiling Captain were before him now! If he could meet him in some dark place! All surrounding objects seemed to be swimming in blood.

He ran into his bedroom, and filling the wash-hand basin with cold water, plunged his head into it. The action recalled him to his calmer self. Notwithstanding which, he said aloud, with a cunning smile, "I may find you one day, my Captain, and then, and then!" He clenched his hand and opened it, and twined his fingers, as though he had them on Captain Ablewhite's throat.

But there was no telling whether he was in danger or not. What it was imperatively necessary he should get possession of at once was money, in order to be prepared. Where could he get it from? Ah, his mother!

He would go down to Parkside immediately. Perhaps he might find Miser Farebrother's hidden treasure.

He emerged into the streets. As he descended the stairs he saw before him a vision of blood. Two men struggled for life and death. The house was very quiet. Only he and the *other man* occupied space. He tore at the Shadow's throat, he took a knife from his pocket, he plunged it in —

Blood, blood everywhere! Above him, beneath him, around him. Again and again the knife descended. What a delight to punish an enemy so! You tricked me, you robbed me, you laid snares for me! Take that — and that — and that!

He laughed aloud before he went into the street, and then he put on a smug face.

There were a number of persons walking this way and that, but not one took the slightest notice of him. He nodded to a passing acquaintance, who nodded back at him, and smiled. He was safe. What cause was there for fear?

In the sunlight the vision of blood vanished. He was face to face with the world, and his native cunning asserted itself.

Then he thought he was going down to Parkside to see his mother. He would have to see Miser Farebrother. He must have some excuse for the visit. He retraced his steps and went back to the office, arming himself with account-books, which he took up indiscriminately and made into a parcel, tying it up with string —

The string was red! Miser Farebrother's offices were very gloomy; the windows had been frosted, so that no person should see through; a strange silence prevailed.

As he tied the books together with the string, a streak of blood appeared, stretched itself along the table, and dropped, drip by drip, on the floor. Jeremiah held himself in suspense to listen to the spiritual sound which his mood had brought to his ears. Drip, drip, drip!

Captain Ablewhite's blood. The policeman's blood. The cabman's blood. The blood of any person who was his enemy.

Yes, he would crush the life out of them. Like this, like this, like this! He ground his foot into the floor, and looked down, smiling. Then, locking the doors and putting the keys into his pocket, he descended the stairs.

He walked slowly to the street landing. There were not many stairs; but all the way down he was engaged in the life and death struggle, and all the space around was bathed in blood. A ruthless ferocity was awakened within him. His safety, his liberty, his very life was at stake. What mattered all else? "Every man for himself, and – "

He paused at the next word, "God," against which he mentally strove, and conquering it, cast a defiant look at the pulsing, bloody shadows which encompassed him, and threw the street door open.

Once more in the sunlight – and safe! That was the great point. And safe! He called a cab, a four-wheeler, and looked the driver straight in the face; then laughed, and directed the man to drive him to the railway station.

CHAPTER V

MISER FAREBROTHER THREATENS JEREMIAH

He usually travelled third-class to Beddington, but on this occasion he took a first-class ticket. To this piece of extravagance he was impelled by two reasons. He wished to be alone, and the first-class carriages were nearly always empty at this time of the day. Then, in the position in which he found himself – brought about partly by his own folly, but chiefly by the treachery of Captain Ablewhite – it mattered little how much he spent. What were pounds, shillings, and pence in comparison with his safety? He had worked himself into the belief that not only his liberty, but his life, was in peril.

The three first-class carriages in the train were unoccupied, and he got into one, and closed the door. No other passenger entered the carriage, and he travelled to Parkside alone.

He read again the newspaper article upon the diamond bracelet, and his feelings became more bitter and revengeful. The visions which had haunted him in Miser Farebrother's office reappeared. The words he was reading were printed in letters of blood; his eyes became blurred, and he wiped them with his handkerchief. The blood-shadows were on the handkerchief as he looked at it; the stains spread to his hands, as though they had just been employed upon a ruthless deed; the compartment in which he sat was throbbing with a silent life and death struggle, from which he emerged triumphant and free.

He was aroused by the stopping of the train at Beddington. He jumped out, with the account-books in his hands, and gazed defiantly around. No one challenged or accosted him, and he walked through the village toward Parkside. He heard a voice calling to him:

"Jeremiah! Jeremiah!"

The currents of his blood seemed to be suddenly arrested. Was he so soon discovered? Were they after him already?

"Jeremiah! Jeremiah!"

His mother, panting, laid her hand upon his shoulder. He shook her off violently, and was about to fly when he recognized her.

"How fast you walk, Jeremiah!" He glared at her, and raised his hand with the intention of striking her, but she caught his arm and prevented him.

"Well, then!" he said, suddenly. "What do you come running after a fellow like that for? Just as if – " He did not finish the sentence.

"Just as if what, Jeremiah?" asked Mrs. Pamflett.

"Ask no questions and you'll hear no lies," he replied. "How is it that you're here instead of at Parkside?"

"Miser Farebrother sent me with a message to the telegraph office."

"A telegram!" he cried, all his fears reviving. "To whom?"

"To you, telling you to come here without a moment's delay."

"Oh, the old thief wants me?"

"He wants you badly, Jeremiah!"

"Does he? Was there nothing else in the telegram except that I was to come here without a moment's delay?"

"You were to bring the account-books."

"I have them, you see. Was the old thief in a good humour?"

"Jeremiah, I was listening outside his room, and I heard him limping up and down, muttering to himself. I didn't catch what he was saying, but he was in a desperate temper. Yet when he rang his bell, and I answered it, he was sitting at the writing-table, with the sweetest smile on his face, and

his voice was like honey. 'Take this to the telegraph office,' he said, giving me the message; and he asked me how you were getting on, and whether you were saving money, and whether I had saved any. I told him I had a little – "

"How much?" asked Jeremiah, interrupting her.

"I didn't tell him that, Jeremiah."

"Of course you didn't; but *I* want to know."

"I have got more than a hundred pounds, Jeremiah."

"So – you've been saving up secretly, unbeknown to me!"

"It was done for your good, Jeremiah; it is all for you. Women are not as strong as men, nor as bold and venturesome, but they see further sometimes. 'Perhaps,' I thought to myself, 'one day Jeremiah may want a little help; there may be something he wishes to do and is just a little short. Then I will give him my savings, and he will praise me for my prudence and foresight.'"

"I praise you now, mother," said Jeremiah. "Can you lay your hands on the money? Is it in your room?"

"No, Jeremiah; it is in the Post-office Savings-bank."

"Curse it! You can't get it out to-day. What's the good of it when I want it now – this very minute?"

"What for, Jeremiah?"

"That's my business. Go on about the old thief. He pretended to be very sweet, did he, and tried to pump you? What's that?"

He clutched his mother, shaking like one in an ague. They were in a narrow lane, and a boy in their rear had uttered a loud shout, and had thrown a stone at a bird. The boy ran on, and the colour returned to Jeremiah's face.

"Jeremiah!" whispered Mrs. Pamflett.

"Well?"

"You have been doing something wrong. You are in trouble."

"Yes, I am in trouble. I have been robbed – swindled – tricked and ruined by a damned scoundrel. If I had him here now, in this quiet lane, with no one near, his life wouldn't be worth a moment's purchase. There, the murder's out! What did I say?"

"You said, 'the murder's out.'"

"Did I?" he exclaimed, with a nervous laugh. "Murder, eh? Well, if it's my life against another man's – "

"Is it as bad as that, Jeremiah?"

"It is. I am in a fearful hole, and I must get out of it. Look here, mother. Ever since I was born you've been drumming in my ears that you cared for nothing in the world but me, that you lived only for me, that you loved no one but me, that you would do anything for me – never mind what – anything, anything! Is it true, or a lie?"

"It is true, Jeremiah," said Mrs. Pamflett, her thin lips set, but slightly parted, and her eyes glittering like cold steel. "If you're in danger, you must get out of it. If I can help you to get out of it, you have only to show me the way. You don't know what a woman like me – what a mother like me – is capable of. I will show you. A scoundrel has ruined you, and something must be done to save you. I understand; I understand. Whatever it is, if it is for me to do it, I am ready. I have never spoken one false word to you, and I won't say one word to you now to reproach you for not having confided in me before to-day. If you had made your fortune I was to share it. You are in trouble now, and I will share it. Give me a kiss, and say you love me!"

"I should be a beast if I didn't," said Jeremiah, kissing her. "You're something like a mother!"

"Jeremiah, if that venomous wretch Phœbe Farebrother had married you, would you be in danger now?"

"No; there would be nothing to trouble me if she hadn't rounded on me. I shouldn't have been compelled to do what I have done."

"Ah! She called you a reptile, and I am your mother. Oh, to be even with her – to be even with her!"

Half an hour afterward Jeremiah Pamflett was in the presence of Miser Farebrother. The miser received his managing clerk with more than graciousness; there was even cordiality in his manner, and had Jeremiah's usually clear mind not been unbalanced by the threatening clouds which hung above him, this apparently favourable demeanour would have rendered him suspicious, and put him on his guard. Experience had taught him that there was always mischief in the wind when Miser Farebrother's words were smooth and fair.

"I sent a telegram for you, Jeremiah," said Miser Farebrother.

"Yes, sir," said Jeremiah; "my mother told me so. Fortunately I was on my way to you."

"You have brought the books with you?"

"Here they are, sir."

"You anticipate my wishes, Jeremiah. What master was ever served as I am served by you – so conscientiously, so faithfully! Is the bank-book here? Yes, yes; I see it is. We will go into the accounts presently. Before I sent for you, Jeremiah, I was in great pain, and feared I had not long to live. That kind of feeling makes a man sad – it unsettles him, and he is apt to repine at the hard fate which seems determined to snatch him from all the joys of life. I have not had many of them, and the consolation I had looked forward to in your contemplated union with my ungrateful child has been denied me. You look tired, Jeremiah. Doubtless you have been up late at night, attending to correspondence connected with the business, and running through the accounts."

"I have been working very hard," said Jeremiah.

"That is it. When I did the work myself I also used to sit up night after night poring over the books. An anxious mind, Jeremiah – an anxious mind. And you resemble me – oh, how you resemble me! What does a late night now and then matter to the young and strong? They can bear it; it leaves no ill effects behind. *I* could bear it once; *I* was once young and strong as you are; *I* was once filled with hope and enthusiasm. And now, look at me. I am a wreck, a feeble wreck, scarcely able to contend with an infant. My strength gone, my hope and enthusiasm gone, my confidence gone in every being in the world with the exception of you and your mother. No reward can be too great for service so faithful! You are affected. I thank you, Jeremiah – I thank you! That sympathizing look, those genuine tears, testify to the friendship you bear toward me."

In point of fact, Jeremiah had taken his handkerchief from his pocket and had dabbed his forehead with it, and it was this action which Miser Farebrother chose to construe into an exhibition of sympathy. Jeremiah's face was damp with perspiration; he was bewildered by the flow of words which fell like honey from the miser's lips; bewildered also by the presence of the master he had wronged and robbed, of the man who held his fate in his hands. Lying back in his chair, Miser Farebrother seemed to have scarcely an hour's life in him; his strength seemed to be ebbing away, and death to be fast approaching. What if he were to die there, within the hour, while Jeremiah was in the room? Then all would be well. He could obtain possession of the valueless bracelet; he could obtain possession of the hoards of money which Miser Farebrother had put in some secret place, which, the miser dead, Jeremiah and his mother would have little difficulty in finding. Yes; then all would be well. Before he had presented himself to his master, he had confided to his mother all the particulars of the danger which threatened him, and they had debated what had best be done. His mother had said, "If Miser Farebrother were out of the way," and then had paused. If Miser Farebrother were out of the way! That is, if he were dead! Yes; if he were dead! "What then?" Jeremiah had asked, after a terrible silence, during which their minds were threading labyrinths of awful possibilities of action which would extricate Jeremiah from his peril. "What then, mother?" Jeremiah had asked. "Why, then," his mother had replied, "we could get the bracelet, and would find a means to restore

it immediately to the lady from whom it had been stolen. It would have to be done carefully and secretly; it would be necessary that we should not be seen or suspected in the matter. The bracelet restored, the lady would have nothing to complain of. She has not been robbed of money; only we and the old man upstairs know where the money came from which was lent upon the bracelet, and only we should be the losers."

"We could get his hidden treasure as well, mother," Jeremiah had said. "No one but ourselves knows of that. If it were necessary, we could leave England for a time." But this suggestion had been stoutly opposed by Mrs. Pamflett. "It would never do," she had said. "Our disappearance would draw instant suspicion upon us. We have managed for him so many years – I here in Parkside, you in the London office. No, Jeremiah; we must stop and brave it out. I am certain there would be very little to fear, and that neither the policeman nor the cabman would be able to identify you. Besides, the bracelet restored, there would be no charge. The lady's maid stole it, not you, and she will not come back. She is in sure hiding, and so is that monster Captain Ablewhite. You would be safe, Jeremiah – you would be safe." And then she repeated, "If Miser Farebrother were out of the way!" Already their dark thoughts had compassed the result. The means had not been mentioned or discussed, but they were ready for any expedient, however desperate which would bring it about and remove the threatened danger. Mrs. Pamflett, to insure her son's safety, was prepared for any risk to herself, for any sacrifice.

And here, sitting within a few inches of Jeremiah, was the man whose death meant life and liberty for him – was the man who could make a felon of him, who could ruin him absolutely and for ever and ever! "If he were to die now in his chair!" thought Jeremiah. Then came the thought that Miser Farebrother was an old man, weak and nerveless, and that two strong hands around his neck would squeeze the life out of him in a very few moments. It would be soon over, and there would be an end to the tortures Jeremiah was suffering. Meanwhile Miser Farebrother was speaking again.

"Were those the office keys jingling in your pocket, Jeremiah, when you took out your handkerchief? Let me see them; it may be the last opportunity I shall have of handling the old friends. Yes, here they are, all on a single ring – the key of the office door, the key of the room in which you sleep, the keys of the safe and the deed and cash boxes. All here, all here! Have you duplicates of them? No! Then without these keys you could not enter the office, you could not open the safe? Come, old friends, into *my* drawer you go – and you are safely locked there, and the key in my pocket!"

And now, to Jeremiah's astonishment and consternation, Miser Farebrother rose to his feet and stood upright before his knavish clerk. All his apparent weakness had disappeared; his face was flushed with anger; in his eyes there was a look of stern resolution.

"I summoned you here," he said, and his firm voice struck terror to Jeremiah's heart, "to obtain not only an explanation but satisfaction from you. Doubtless you have read this."

He held out to Jeremiah the newspaper containing the account of the robbery of the diamond bracelet. Mechanically Jeremiah took the paper; but he did not look further than the heading: "A Strange Affair – The Biters Bit."

"Answer me," said the miser. "Have you read it?"

"No," faltered Jeremiah.

"How do you know you have not read it when you have scarcely glanced at the paper I have given you? That you lie is proved by your side pocket, which would not bulge out as it does if it did not contain a copy of this damnable strange affair, by which you have swindled me out of four thousand pounds."

"I did not swindle you," Jeremiah found courage to say. "I believed the diamonds were genuine."

"You lie again, and you will continue to lie. But it will not help you. I will have my money back! Do you hear, you thief? – I will have my money back, which you and your confederates have shared between you! I will not wait long for it. Before twelve o'clock to-morrow you shall count it out to me on this table. If you do not, you shall stand in the felon's dock. All your cunning shall not save you.

I am a fool to give you one moment's grace. You thief! you scoundrel! you swindler! I will have my money! my money! my money! Have I not toiled for it all my life? – and now to find myself robbed by a scoundrel I snatched from the gutter! If you don't pay me what you have stolen from me I will so pursue you that your life shall be a slow torture. You shall wish you were dead; but you shall live to suffer. At least I will have revenge, and I will pay for it. I will have your heart's blood, to the last drop! My money! my money! my money!"

His passion exhausted him, and he was compelled to stop. His torrent of furious words had, in the first instance, overwhelmed Jeremiah with despair; but as the miser went on, this feeling was gradually replaced by one of fierce malignity. He grew cooler every moment.

"Do you wish to know why I wanted the books?" continued Miser Farebrother. "I will tell you. To-morrow they will be placed in the hands of an accountant, who shall go through them and examine them, and who will tell me the full extent of your robberies; for my eyes are opened now. I have been blind! blind! This swindle of the bracelet is not your only theft; there are others, and I will have them ferreted out, and you shall repay me to the last farthing. You thief! you have fattened upon the money you have stolen from me – you have grown rich by your knavery! Well, I will beggar you – every shilling you possess is mine, and I will have it. I leave it to you to judge whether I am in earnest or not, and whether I will do what I have threatened. Do you wish to know why I wanted the keys of the office and the safe? I will tell you. It is that you shall never again enter my doors – it is that it shall be out of your power to destroy the evidences of your guilt which are to be found there. Till twelve to-morrow – not one moment longer! Then, when restitution is made – full, complete restitution – you and your cat-mother shall pack, the pair of you! I will fling you both into the gutter, and if you rot and die there, so much the better! I will look down upon you and laugh. Is what I say plain enough?"

"Quite," replied Jeremiah, in whose heart now reigned a cold, ferocious cunning; but his voice was very humble. "You force me to confess."

"I thought I should succeed in that, at least. But no confessions will satisfy me without my money, you vile, ungrateful thief! My money! Do you hear? – my money!"

"You shall have it; you shall not lose one farthing by me."

"Good! good! You are rich, then? You have robbed me systematically! You villainous knave!"

"I am not rich. I have saved a little, and I have friends who will assist me in the misfortune which has overtaken me. I have not robbed you systematically; you do me an injustice, as you will learn when the accountant has gone through the books. I court inquiry – I invite it – I *will* have it, now that you have accused me, and I will compel you to admit that I have served you faithfully. My character is dear to me, and I will not allow you to cast suspicion upon it. As for the bracelet, I *did* believe that the stones were genuine; and if they *were* genuine they would have been worth ten times the sum you lent on them. I laugh at the public exposure with which you threaten me. Me it cannot harm; you, it can. For, after all, I am only your servant; you are the principal. That the business of the bracelet was introduced to me by a man whose character will not bear investigation is true. I did not know this at the time; but what if I did? He did not ask *me*

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