

disguise had been effected, how were we to know? Might not the little clergyman have been the widow as well as any one else? Fool that I was, when I had let that hamper pass me—the hamper that would have held our bags and this disguise, and might have been under the seat on the previous part of the journey! So it came to me by degrees—all except the one point of whether the widow had really been in the carriage with me to my journey's end. Years were to pass before that point was settled for me; but through those years I never once forgot the vow I made that night, never to let the remembrance of this deed fade in my mind, and to live to avenge and clear myself.

It was a beautiful, calm August evening, and having business on the branch line that had lately been opened to a fashionable sea-bathing town, I determined to stay there for a couple of days, to enjoy a dip or two. On the first evening, as I strolled to the beach, I was surprised to see a dense crowd collected in one spot. On approaching I found it to be a number of eager listeners to an open-air sermon, and looking at the preacher, who was elevated on an old boat, I recognized at once one of the men who was so often in my thoughts. There he was; changed in no one's respect, small and neat, and glossy in the delicate face and gentle eyes, and the black suit and spotless tie, of that eventful night when I saw him last. I stood and listened for a long time; but he went on so much longer than I cared to wait in one place, that I soon sauntered off. He had not put up at my hotel.

The waiter had heard the gentleman preach, and should know him in a moment; but no, he was not staying there. The next morning the coffee-room was busy indeed, the tongues went faster than the knives and forks, and that is saying much. The waiters lingered behind each chair, listening to the comments on the startling piece of news that had shaken the town—the daring and cunning robbery of the jeweller's shop the night before; the skillful way in which the theft was performed, and the total absence of any trace of the thief or thieves.

Every one who had not been to the scene of action already hastened over his breakfast, preparatory to starting. It was an intense excitement, and it seemed almost to be a pleasant one to some, to whom, perhaps, sea-side life soon grows monotonous. The strangeness of the coincidence struck me—the reminder of another robbery, which the sight of the little preacher had given me, being followed by this—and the effect it had upon me was chiefly to enforce all my thoughts of vengeance, and determine me to follow up my clue. I did not go to the scene of the robbery, though I carefully took the address, thinking I would go, if I had time, afterward; but I walked to the station. No need for hurry, I said; the thieves would not hasten off in the early, empty trains; no fear of that. The first train was starting, and the passengers took their seats, little thinking how they were scanned and examined by the lazy-looking individual who loitered here and there and everywhere upon the platform. The second puffed out of the station to meet the express at the junction; but it had only taken up half-a-dozen ladies and two fishermen. The day wore on. I might have a mouthful of lunch before the next train left, but I found I had the same sick feeling at the sight of food as I had some years before; and, without having touched it, I took my place once more upon the platform. The engine was put to, but hardly anyone was going this time. Ah! at last, out from the booking-office came two gentlemen, arm-in-arm. One, an old, stooping man, with a full, gray mustache and beard, and a velvet cap with a deep poke over his eyes; the other, a delicate looking young clergyman, apparently, with a light leather desk, held by a strap, in his hand.

They took their seats in a first-class carriage, and I, though half ashamed of my vicious resolution, yet holding to it like grim death, hurried into a carriage behind. We stopped at every little station we passed, and each time I got down I examined everyone who stopped, and then gave myself the pleasure of looking in upon the two unconscious men whom I was guarding. The old gentleman nearly always held a newspaper close up to his face, reading, but I could see enough of them for what I wanted. There seemed no end to the stations on our way. I was thinking what a relief it would be to me to know our destination, when suddenly I felt a strange, unaccountable shock, my carriage reeled and tottered on the line, then steadied itself, and was stationary. I fancied I understood it before I looked from the window, and when I did so I found I was right. The points were under repair, and the temporary fastenings had given way, and the carriages in front of me were thrown off the line and down a slight embankment. One of them lay at a greater distance than the others, and the feeling of what scenes were round me made my pulses throb. There was a hurry and confusion, and yet, through all, there was something like a terrible hush. I took out my key and jumped down. No need to tell what I passed, for what I looked down upon, or what I heard. Years have passed since that night, but every word and every sigh is as fresh in my memory as the sights and sounds of yesterday.

I found, at last, what I was seeking. In the corner of a field, among the full-eared golden corn, he lay, his head against a heap of stones, his slight figure writhing in agony, his delicate young face pale and ghastly; and close beside him the leather desk I had remarked before. Not stopping for one moment to think, I sat upon the stones and took his head upon my knee. I had a flask in my pocket, and I poured some brandy into his mouth. He looked up at me as I did so, and shivered; but the white face could grow no whiter. My limbs grew cold and cramped in their strained posture, but he never stirred. Sometimes he swallowed a little brandy; sometimes I could only moisten his lips, holding his head as easily as I could; and as I did so I remembered that all the vengeance I had sworn to take was in my power now; the sinner was caught and at my feet, and I should stand clear before my fellow-men. And as I

thought of this I remembered, too, that there was another judgment, before which he would stand before many hours had passed, and One would judge him before whom my sin would be as great if I took his work into my own weak hands. I bent my face, uncertain even if he breathed.

"You want me?" he said, faintly. "He saw you following us."

"Where is he?" I asked, steadily gazing down into the dim eyes, as if afraid of the light fading there too soon.

"He was with me. Has he escaped?"

I turned away my head, but not to look for frayed, who had duped me more than once more. Presently I looked again down into the quivering face.

"There is no one near us," I whispered; "have you no word to say?"

With a strained effort to keep his eyes open and upon my face, he fumbled with one weak, shaking hand at his waistcoat pocket. I watched him for a few moments, then, seeing how useless was the attempt, I put my own hand in its place. There was nothing but an old purse in the pocket; but when I drew it out a faint gleam of intelligence passed over his face. Still, something more was wanted. I made a random guess, and opened the purse.

There was money there, I should fancy, to a considerable amount; and besides that there was a key—the key, evidently, of a small painted lock. Was that it? Yes; he pointed feebly to my own pocket, and I put it in, closed the purse, and replaced it.

He seemed to lie even more still than before, and once more I whispered to him, "Can you follow me? Can you say after me?" And the humble prayer of the publican rose to my lips. No sound came from him, until the last two words were said—"a sinner;" then, with a cry of pain, the sinner was in the presence of his Judge. He was carried away with others, and I lifted the desk, that lay as near to me as to him, and took it with me, feeling it was the key of that which he had given me, and that in doing so he had wished me to open it for some purpose. I was not long in doubt. It contained the jewellery that had been stolen the night before.

The next day the owner received back his property, carefully packed and addressed, but with no clue as to who had taken it or returned it. The other thief I have never seen or heard of since; but my resolution of hunting him down is broken. The death I faced in doing so before was too awfully sudden for me to make another attempt. When I meet the gentlemen belonging to the Littleborough bank now, the hand-shakes they give me are warm and ready, and there no longer rests upon me the shadow of that crime.

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