THE SECOND SCENE - **SKELDERGATE, YORK.**

CHAPTER I.

IN that part of the city of York which is situated on the western bank of the Ouse there is a narrow street, called Skeldergate, running nearly north and south, parallel with the course of the river. The postern by which Skeldergate was formerly approached no longer exists; and the few old houses left in the street are disguised in melancholy modern costume of whitewash and cement. Shops of the smaller and poorer order, intermixed here and there with dingy warehouses and joyless private residences of red brick, compose the present a spect of Skeldergate. On the river-side the houses are separated at intervals by lanes running down to the water, and disclosing lonely little plots of open ground, with the masts of sailing-barges rising beyond. At its southward extremity the street ceases on a sudden, and the broad flow of the Ouse, the trees, the meadows, the public-walk on one bank and the towing-path on the other, open to view.

Here, where the street ends, and on the side of it furthest from the river, a narrow little lane leads up to the paved footway surmounting the ancient Walls of York. The one small row of buildings, which is all that the lane possesses, is composed of cheap lodging-houses, with an opposite view, at the distance of a few feet, of a portion of the massive city wall. This place is called Rosemary Lane. Very little light enters it; very few people live in it; the floating population of Skeldergate passes it by; and visitors to the Walk on the Walls, who use it as the way up or the way down, get out of the dreary little passage as fast as they can.

The door of one of the houses in this lost corner of York opened softly on the evening of the twenty-third of September, eighteen hundred and forty-six; and a solitary individual of the male sex sauntered into Skeldergate from the seclusion of Rosemary Lane.

Turning northward, this person directed his steps toward the bridge over the Ouse and the busy center of the city. He bore the external appearance of respectable poverty; he carried a gingham umbrella, preserved in an oilskin case; he picked his steps, with the neatest avoidance of all dirty places on the pavement; and he surveyed the scene around him with eyes of two

different colors--a bilious brown eye on the lookout for employment, and a bilious green eye in a similar predicament. In plainer terms, the stranger from Rosemary Lane was no other than--Captain Wragge.

Outwardly speaking, the captain had not altered for the better since the memorable spring day when he had presented himself to Miss Garth at the lodge-gate at Combe-Raven. The railway mania of that famous year had attacked even the wary Wragge; had withdrawn him from his customary pursuits; and had left him prostrate in the end, like many a better man. He had lost his clerical appearance--he had faded with the autumn leaves. His crape hat-band had put itself in brown mourning for its own bereavement of black. His dingy white collar and cravat had died the death of old linen, and had gone to their long home at the paper-maker's, to live again one day in quires at a stationer's shop. A gray shooting-jacket in the last stage of woolen atrophy replaced the black frockcoat of former times, and, like a faithful servant, kept the dark secret of its master's linen from the eyes of a prying world. From top to toe every square inch of the captain's clothing was altered for the worse; but the man himself remained unchanged--superior to all forms of moral mildew, impervious to the action of social rust. He was as courteous, as persuasive, as blandly dignified as ever. He carried his head as high without a shirt-collar as ever he had carried it with one. The threadbare black handkerchief round his neck was perfectly tied; his rotten old shoes were neatly blacked; he might have compared chins, in the matter of smooth shaving, with the highest church dignitary in York. Time, change, and poverty had all attacked the captain together, and had all failed alike to get him down on the ground. He paced the streets of York, a man superior to clothes and circumstances--his vagabond varnish as bright on him as ever.

Arrived at the bridge, Captain Wragge stopped and looked idly over the parapet at the barges in the river. It was plainly evident that he had no particular destination to reach and nothing whatever to do. While he was still loitering, the clock of York Minster chimed the half-hour past five. Cabs rattled by him over the bridge on their way to meet the train from London, at twenty minutes to six. After a moment's hesitation, the captain sauntered after the cabs. When it is one of a man's regular habits to live upon his fellow-creatures, that man is always more or less fond of haunting large railway stations. Captain Wragge gleaned the human field, and on that unoccupied afternoon the York terminus was as likely a corner to look about in as any other.

He reached the platform a few minutes after the train had arrived. That entire incapability of devising administrative measures for the management

of large crowds, which is one of the characteristics of Englishmen in authority, is nowhere more strikingly exemplified than at York. Three different lines of railway assemble three passenger mobs, from morning to night, under one roof; and leave them to raise a traveler's riot, with all the assistance which the bewildered servants of the company can render to increase the confusion. The customary disturbance was rising to its climax as Captain Wragge approached the platform. Dozens of different people were trying to attain dozens of different objects, in dozens of different directions, all starting from the same common point and all equally deprived of the means of information. A sudden parting of the crowd, near the second-class carriages, attracted the captain's curiosity. He pushed his way in; and found a decently-dressed man--assisted by a porter and a policeman--attempting to pick up some printed bills scattered from a paper parcel, which his frenzied fellow-passengers had knocked out of his hand.

Offering his assistance in this emergency, with the polite alacrity which marked his character, Captain Wragge observed the three startling words, "Fifty Pounds Reward," printed in capital letters on the bills which he assisted in recovering; and instantly secreted one of them, to be more closely examined at the first convenient opportunity. As he crumpled up the bill in the palm of his hand, his party-colored eyes fixed with hungry interest on the proprietor of the unlucky parcel. When a man happens not to be possessed of fifty pence in his own pocket, if his heart is in the right place, it bounds; if his mouth is properly constituted, it waters, at the sight of another man who carries about with him a printed offer of fifty pounds sterling, addressed to his fellow-creatures.

The unfortunate traveler wrapped up his parcel as he best might, and made his way off the platform, after addressing an inquiry to the first official victim of the day's passenger-traffic, who was sufficiently in possession of his senses to listen to it. Leaving the station for the river-side, which was close at hand, the stranger entered the ferryboat at the North Street Postern. The captain, who had carefully dogged his steps thus far, entered the boat also; and employed the short interval of transit to the opposite bank in a perusal of the handbill which he had kept for his own private enlightenment. With his back carefully turned on the traveler, Captain Wragge now possessed his mind of the following lines:

"FIFTY POUNDS REWARD.

"Left her home, in London, early on the morning of September 23d, 1846, A YOUNG LADY. Age--eighteen. Dress--deep mourning. Personal appearance--hair of a very light brown; eyebrows and eyelashes darker; eyes light gray;

complexion strikingly pale; lower part of her face large and full; tall upright figure; walks with remarkable grace and ease; speaks with openness and resolution; has the manners and habits of a refined, cultivated lady. Personal marks--two little moles, close together, on the left side of the neck. Mark on the under-clothing--'Magdalen Vanstone.' Is supposed to have joined, or attempted to join, under an assumed name, a theatrical company now performing at York. Had, when she left London, one black box, and no other luggage. Whoever will give such information as will restore her to her friends shall receive the above Reward. Apply at the office of Mr. Harkness, solicitor, Coney Street, York. Or to Messrs. Wyatt, Pendril, and Gwilt, Serle Street, Lincoln's Inn, London."

Accustomed as Captain Wragge was to keep the completest possession of himself in all hum an emergencies, his own profound astonishment, when the course of his reading brought him to the mark on the linen of the missing young lady, betrayed him into an exclamation of surprise which even startled the ferryman. The traveler was less observant; his whole attention was fixed on the opposite bank of the river, and he left the boat hastily the moment it touched the landing-place. Captain Wragge recovered himself, pocketed the handbill, and followed his leader for the second time.

The stranger directed his steps to the nearest street which ran down to the river, compared a note in his pocketbook with the numbers of the houses on the left-hand side, stopped at one of them, and rang the bell. The captain went on to the next house; affected to ring the bell, in his turn, and stood with his back to the traveler--in appearance, waiting to be let in; in reality, listening with all his might for any scraps of dialogue which might reach his ears on the opening of the door behind him.

The door was answered with all due alacrity, and a sufficiently instructive interchange of question and answer on the threshold rewarded the dexterity of Captain Wragge.

"Does Mr. Huxtable live here?" asked the traveler.

"Yes, sir," was the answer, in a woman's voice.

"Is he at home?"

"Not at home now, sir; but he will be in again at eight to-night."

"I think a young lady called here early in the day, did she not?"

"Yes; a young lady came this afternoon."

"Exactly; I come on the same business. Did she see Mr. Huxtable?"

"No, sir; he has been away all day. The young lady told me she would come back at eight o'clock."

"Just so. I will call and see Mr. Huxtable at the same time."

"Any name, sir?"

"No; say a gentleman called on theatrical business--that will be enough. Wait one minute, if you please. I am a stranger in York; will you kindly tell me which is the way to Coney Street?"

The woman gave the required information, the door closed, and the stranger hastened away in the direction of Coney Street.

On this occasion Captain Wragge made no attempt to follow him. The handbill revealed plainly enough that the man's next object was to complete the necessary arrangements with the local solicitor on the subject of the promised reward.

Having seen and heard enough for his immediate purpose, the captain retraced his steps down the street, turned to the right, and entered on the Esplanade, which, in that quarter of the city, borders the river-side between the swimming-baths and Lendal Tower. "This is a family matter," said Captain Wragge to himself, persisting, from sheer force of habit, in the old assertion of his relationship to Magdalen's mother; "I must consider it in all its bearings." He tucked the umbrella under his arm, crossed his hands behind him, and lowered himself gently into the abyss of his own reflections. The order and propriety observable in the captain's shabby garments accurately typified the order and propriety which distinguished the operations of the captain's mind. It was his habit always to see his way before him through a neat succession of alternatives--and so he saw it now.

Three courses were open to him in connection with the remarkable discovery which he had just made. The first course was to do nothing in the matter at all. Inadmissible, on family grounds: equally inadmissible on pecuniary grounds: rejected accordingly. The second course was to deserve the gratitude of the young lady's friends, rated at fifty pounds. The third course was, by a timely warning to deserve the gratitude of the young lady herself, rated--at an unknown figure. Between these two last alternatives the wary

Wragge hesitated; not from doubt of Magdalen's pecuniary resources--for he was totally ignorant of the circumstances which had deprived the sisters of their inheritance--but from doubt whether an obstacle in the shape of an undiscovered gentleman might not be privately connected with her disappearance from home. After mature reflection, he determined to pause, and be guided by circumstances. In the meantime, the first consideration was to be beforehand with the messenger from London, and to lay hands securely on the young lady herself.

"I feel for this misguided girl," mused the captain, solemnly strutting backward and forward by the lonely river-side. "I always have looked upon her--I always shall look upon her--in the light of a niece."

Where was the adopted relative at that moment? In other words, how was a young lady in Magdalen's critical position likely to while away the hours until Mr. Huxtable 's return? If there was an obstructive gentleman in the background, it would be mere waste of time to pursue the question. But if the inference which the handbill suggested was correct--if she was really alone at that moment in the city of York--where was she likely to be?

Not in the crowded thoroughfares, to begin with. Not viewing the objects of interest in the Minster, for it was now past the hour at which the cathedral could be seen. Was she in the waiting-room at the railway? She would hardly run that risk. Was she in one of the hotels? Doubtful, considering that she was entirely by herself. In a pastry-cook's shop? Far more likely. Driving about in a cab? Possible, certainly; but no more. Loitering away the time in some quiet locality, out-of-doors? Likely enough, again, on that fine autumn evening. The captain paused, weighed the relative claims on his attention of the quiet locality and the pastry-cook's shop; and decided for the first of the two. There was time enough to find her at the pastry-cook's, to inquire after her at the principal hotels, or, finally, to intercept her in Mr. Huxtable's immediate neighborhood from seven to eight. While the light lasted, the wise course was to use it in looking for her out-of-doors. Where? The Esplanade was a quiet locality; but she was not there--not on the lonely road beyond, which ran back by the Abbey Wall. Where next? The captain stopped, looked across the river, brightened under the influence of a new idea, and suddenly hastened back to the ferry.

"The Walk on the Walls," thought this judicious man, with a twinkle of his party-colored eyes. "The quietest place in York; and the place that every stranger goes to see."

In ten minutes more Captain Wragge was exploring the new field of search.

He mounted to the walls (which inclose the whole western portion of the city) by the North Street Postern, from which the walk winds round until it ends again at its southernly extremity in the narrow passage of Rosemary Lane. It was then twenty minutes to seven. The sun had set more than half an hour since; the red light lay broad and low in the cloudless western heaven; all visible objects were softening in the tender twilight, but were not darkening yet. The first few lamps lit in the street below looked like faint little specks of yellow light, as the captain started on his walk through one of the most striking scenes which England can show.

On his right hand, as he set forth, stretched the open country beyond the walls--the rich green meadows, the boundary-trees dividing them, the broad windings of the river in the distance, the scattered buildings nearer to view; all wrapped in the evening stillness, all made beautiful by the evening peace. On his left hand, the majestic west front of York Minster soared over the city and caught the last brightest light of heaven on the summits of its lofty towers. Had this noble prospect tempted the lost girl to linger and look at it? No; thus far, not a sign of her. The captain looked round him attentively, and walked on.

He reached the spot where the iron course of the railroad strikes its way through arches in the old wall. He paused at this place--where the central activity of a great railway enterprise beats, with all the pulses of its loud-clanging life, side by side with the dead majesty of the past, deep under the old historic stones which tell of fortified York and the sieges of two centuries since--he stood on this spot, and searched for her again, and searched in vain. Others were looking idly down at the desolate activity on the wilderness of the iron rails; but she was not among them. The captain glanced doubtfully at the darkening sky, and walked on.

He stopped again where the postern of Micklegate still stands, and still strengthens the city wall as of old. Here the paved walk descends a few steps, passes through the dark stone guardroom of the ancient gate, ascends again, and continues its course southward until the walls reach the river once more. He paused, and peered anxiously into the dim inner corners of the old guard-room. Was she waiting there for the darkness to come, and hide her from prying eyes? No: a solitary workman loitered through the stone chamber; but no other living creature stirred in the place. The captain mounted the steps which led out from the postern and walked on.

He advanced some fifty or sixty yards along the paved footway; the outlying suburbs of York on one side of him, a rope-walk and some patches of

kitchen garden occupying a vacant strip of ground on the other. He advanced with eager eyes and quickened step; for he saw before him the lonely figure of a woman, standing by the parapet of the wall, with her face set toward the westward view. He approached cautiously, to make sure of her before she turned and observed him. There was no mistaking that tall, dark figure, as it rested against the parapet with a listless grace. There she stood, in her long black cloak and gown, the last dim light of evening falling tenderly on her pale, resolute young face. There she stood--not three months since the spoiled darling of her parents; the priceless treasure of the household, never left unprotected, never trusted alone--there she stood in the lovely dawn of her womanhood, a castaway in a strange city, wrecked on the world!

Vagabond as he was, the first sight of her staggered even the dauntless assurance of Captain Wragge. As she slowly turned her face and looked at him, he raised his hat, with the nearest approach to respect which a long life of unblushing audacity had left him capable of making.

"I think I have the honor of addressing the younger Miss Vanstone?" he began. "Deeply gratified, I am sure--for more reasons than one."

She looked at him with a cold surprise. No recollection of the day when he had followed her sister and herself on their way home with Miss Garth rose in her memory, while he now confronted her, with his altered manner and his altered dress.

"You are mistaken," she said, quietly. "You are a perfect stranger to me."

"Pardon me," replied the captain; "I am a species of relation. I had the pleasure of seeing you in the spring of the present year. I presented myself on that memorable occasion to an honored preceptress in your late father's family. Permit me, under equally agreeable circumstances, to present myself to you. My name is Wragge."

By this time he had recovered complete possession of his own impudence; his party-colored eyes twinkled cheerfully, and he accompanied his modest announcement of himself with a dancing-master's bow.

Magdalen frowned, and drew back a step. The captain was not a man to be daunted by a cold reception. He tucked his umbrella under his arm and jocosely spelled his name for her further enlightenment. "W, R, A, double G, E--Wragge," said the captain, ticking off the letters persuasively on his fingers.

"I remember your name," said Magdalen. "Excuse me for leaving you abruptly. I have an engagement."

She tried to pass him and walk on northward toward the railway. He instantly met the attempt by raising both hands, and displaying a pair of darned black gloves outspread in polite protest.

"Not that way," he said; "not that way, Miss Vanstone, I beg and entreat!"

"Why not?" she asked haughtily.

"Because," answered the captain, "that is the way which leads to Mr. Huxtable's."

In the ungovernable astonishment of hearing his reply she suddenly bent forward, and for the first time looked him close in the face. He sustained her suspicious scrutiny with every appearance of feeling highly gratified by it. "H, U, X--Hux," said the captain, playfully turning to the old joke: "T, A--ta, Huxta; B, L, E--ble; Huxtable."

"What do you know about Mr. Huxtable?" she asked. "What do you mean by mentioning him to me?"

The captain's curly lip took a new twist upward. He immediately replied, to the best practical purpose, by producing the handbill from his pocket.

"There is just light enough left," he said, "for young (and lovely) eyes to read by. Before I enter upon the personal statement which your flattering inquiry claims from me, pray bestow a moment's attention on this Document."

She took the handbill from him. By the last gleam of twilight she read the lines which set a price on her recovery--which published the description of her in pitiless print, like the description of a strayed dog. No tender consideration had prepared her for the shock, no kind word softened it to her when it came. The vagabond, whose cunning eyes watched her eagerly while she read, knew no more that the handbill which he had stolen had only been prepared in anticipation of the worst, and was only to be publicly used in the event of all more considerate means of tracing her being tried in vain--than she knew it. The bill dropped from her hand; her face flushed deeply. She turned away from Captain Wragge, as if all idea of his existence had passed out of her mind.

"Oh, Norah, Norah!" she said to herself, sorrowfully. "After the letter I wrote you--after the hard struggle I had to go away! Oh, Norah, Norah!"

"How is Norah?" inquired the captain, with the utmost politeness.

She turned upon him with an angry brightness in her large gray eyes. "Is this thing shown publicly?" she asked, stamping her foot on it. "Is the mark on my neck described all over York?"

"Pray compose yourself," pleaded the persuasive Wragge. "At present I have every reason to believe that you have just perused the only copy in circulation. Allow me to pick it up."

Before he could touch the bill she snatched it from the pavement, tore it into fragments, and threw them over the wall.

"Bravo!" cried the captain. "You remind me of your poor dear mother. The family spirit, Miss Vanstone. We all inherit our hot blood from my maternal grandfather."

"How did you come by it?" she asked, suddenly.

"My dear creature, I have just told you," remonstrated the captain. "We all come by it from my maternal grandfather."

"How did you come by that handbill?" she repeated, passionately.

"I beg ten thousand pardons! My head was running on the family spirit.--How did I come by it? Briefly thus." Here Captain Wragge entered on his personal statement; taking his customary vocal exercise through the longest words of the English language, with the highest elocutionary relish. Having, on this rare occasion, nothing to gain by concealment, he departed from his ordinary habits, and, with the utmost amazement at the novelty of his own situation, permitted himself to tell the unmitigated truth.

The effect of the narrative on Magdalen by no means fulfilled Captain Wragge's anticipations in relating it. She was not startled; she was not irritated; she showed no disposition to cast herself on his mercy, and to seek his advice. She looked him steadily in the face; and all she said, when he had neatly rounded his last sentence, was--"Go on."

"Go on?" repeated the captain. "Shocked to disappoint you, I am sure; but the fact is, I have done."

"No, you have not," she rejoined; "you have left out the end of your story. The end of it is, you came here to look for me; and you mean to earn the fifty pounds reward."

Those plain words so completely staggered Captain Wragge that for the moment he stood speechless. But he had faced awkward truths of all sorts far too often to be permanently disconcerted by them. Before Magdalen could pursue her advantage, the vagabond had recovered his balance: Wragge was himself again.

"Smart," said the captain, laughing indulgently, and drumming with his umbrella on the pavement. "Some men might take it seriously. I'm not easily offended. Try again."

Magdalen looked at him through the gathering darkness in mute perplexity. All her little experience of society had been experience among people who possessed a common sense of honor, and a common responsibility of social position. She had hitherto seen nothing but the successful human product from the great manufactory of Civilization. Here was one of the failures, and, with all her quickness, she was puzzled how to deal with it.

"Pardon me for returning to the subject," pursued the captain. "It has just occurred to my mind that you might actually have spoken in earnest. My poor child! how can I earn the fifty pounds before the reward is offered to me? Those handbills may not be publicly posted for a week to come. Precious as you are to all your relatives (myself included), take my word for it, the lawyers who are managing this case will not pay fifty pounds for you if they can possibly help it. Are you still persuaded that my needy pockets are gaping for the money? Very good. Button them up in spite of me with your own fair fingers. There is a train to London at nine forty-five to-night. Submit yourself to your friend's wishes and go back by it."

"Never!" said Magdalen, firing at the bare suggestion, exactly as the captain had intended she should. "If my mind had not been made up before, that vile handbill would have decided me. I forgive Norah," she added, turning away and speaking to herself, "but not Mr. Pendril, and not Miss Garth."

"Quite right!" said Captain Wragge. "The family spirit. I should have done the same myself at your age. It runs in the blood. Hark! there goes the clock again--half-past seven. Miss Vanstone, pardon this seasonable abruptness! If you are to carry out your resolution--if you are to be your own mistress much longer, you must take a course of some kind before eight o'clock. You

are young, you are inexperienced, you are in imminent danger. Here is a position of emergency on one side--and here am I, on the other, with an uncle's interest in you, full of advice. Tap me."

"Suppose I choose to depend on nobody, and to act for myself?" said Magdalen. "What then?"

"Then," replied the captain, "you will walk straight into one of the four traps which are set to catch you in the ancient and interesting city of York. Trap the first, at Mr. Huxtable's house; trap the second, at all the hotels; trap the third, at the railway station; trap the fourth, at the theater. That man with the handbills has had an hour at his disposal. If he has not set those four traps (with the assistance of the local solicitor) by this time, he is not the competent lawyer's clerk I take him for. Come, come, my dear girl! if there is somebody else in the background, whose advice you prefer to mine--"

"You see that I am alone," she interposed, proudly. "If you knew me better, you would know that I depend on nobody but myself."

Those words decided the only doubt which now remained in the captain's mind--the doubt whether the course was clear before him. The motive of her flight from home was evidently what the handbills assumed it to be--a reckless fancy for going on the stage. "One of two things," thought Wragge to himself, in his logical way. "She's worth more than fifty pounds to me in her present situation, or she isn't. If she is, her friends may whistle for her. If she isn't, I have only to keep her till the bills are posted." Fortified by this simple plan of action, the captain returned to the charge, and politely placed Magdalen between the two inevitable alternatives of trusting herself to him, on the one hand, or of returning to her friends, on the other.

"I respect independence of character wherever I find it," he said, with an air of virtuous severity. "In a young and lovely relative, I more than respect--I admire it. But (excuse the bold assertion), to walk on a way of your own, you must first have a way to walk on. Under existing circumstances, where is your way? Mr. Huxtable is out of the question, to begin with."

"Out of the question for to-night," said Magdalen; "but what hinders me from writing to Mr. Huxtable, and making my own private arrangements with him for to-morrow?"

"Granted with all my heart--a hit, a palpable hit. Now for my turn. To get to to-morrow (excuse the bold assertion, once more), you must first pass through to-night. Where are you to sleep?"

"Are there no hotels in York?"

"Excellent hotels for large families; excellent hotels for single gentlemen. The very worst hotels in the world for handsome young ladies who present themselves alone at the door without male escort, without a maid in attendance, and without a single article of luggage. Dark as it is, I think I could see a lady's box, if there was anything of the sort in our immediate neighborhood."

"My box is at the cloak-room. What is to prevent my sending the ticket for it?"

"Nothing--if you want to communicate your address by means of your box--nothing whatever. Think; pray think! Do you really suppose that the people who are looking for you are such fools as not to have an eye on the cloakroom? Do you think they are such fools--when they find you don't come to Mr. Huxtable's at eight to-night--as not to inquire at all the hotels? Do you think a young lady of your striking appearance (even if they consented to receive you) could take up her abode at an inn without becoming the subject of universal curiosity and remark? Here is night coming on as fast as it can. Don't let me bore you; only let me ask once more--Where are you to sleep?"

There was no answer to that question: in Magdalen's position, there was literally no answer to it on her side. She was silent.

"Where are you to sleep?" repeated the captain. "The reply is obvious--under my roof. Mrs. Wragge will be charmed to see you. Look upon her as your aunt; pray look upon her as your aunt. The landlady is a widow, the house is close by, there are no other lodgers, and there is a bedroom to let. Can anything be more satisfactory, under all the circumstances? Pray observe, I say nothing about to-morrow--I leave to-morrow to you, and confine myself exclusively to the night. I may, or may not, command theatrical facilities, which I am in a position to offer you. Sympathy and admiration may, or may not, be strong within me, when I contemplate the dash and independence of your character. Hosts of examples of bright stars of the British drama, who have begun their apprenticeship to the stage as you are beginning yours, may, or may not, crowd on my memory. These are topics for the future. For the present, I confine myself within my strict range of duty. We are within five minutes' walk of my present address. Allow me to offer you my arm. No? You hesitate? You distrust me? Good heavens! is it possible you can have heard anything to my disadvantage?"

"Quite possible," said Magdalen, without a moment's flinching from the answer.

"May I inquire the particulars?" asked the captain, with the politest composure. "Don't spare my feelings; oblige me by speaking out. In the plainest terms, now, what have you heard?"

She answered him with a woman's desperate disregard of consequences when she is driven to bay--she answered him instantly,

"I have heard you are a Rogue."

"Have you, indeed?" said the impenetrable Wragge. "A Rogue? Well, I waive my privilege of setting you right on that point for a fitter time. For the sake of argument, let us say I am a Rogue. What is Mr. Huxtable?"

"A respectable man, or I should not have seen him in the house where we first met."

"Very good. Now observe! You talked of writing to Mr. Huxtable a minute ago. What do you think a respectable man is likely to do with a young lady who openly acknowledges that she has run away from her home and her friends to go on the stage? My dear girl, on your own showing, it's not a respectable man you want in your present predicament. It's a Rogue--like me."

Magdalen laughed, bitterly.

"There is some truth in that," she said. "Thank you for recalling me to myself and my circumstances. I have my end to gain--and who am I, to pick and choose the way of getting to it? It is my turn to beg pardon now. I have been talking as if I was a young lady of family and position. Absurd! We know better than that, don't we, Captain Wragge? You are quite right. Nobody's child must sleep under Somebody's roof--and why not yours?"

"This way," said the captain, dexterously profiting by the sudden change in her humor, and cunningly refraining from exasperating it by saying more himself. "This way."

She followed him a few steps, and suddenly stopped.

"Suppose I am discovered?" she broke out, abruptly. "Who has any authority

over me? Who can take me back, if I don't choose to go? If they all find me to-morrow, what then? Can't I say No to Mr. Pendril? Can't I trust my own courage with Miss Garth?"

"Can you trust your courage with your sister?" whispered the captain, who had not forgotten the references to Norah which had twice escaped her already.

Her head drooped. She shivered as if the cold night air had struck her, and leaned back wearily against the parapet of the wall.

"Not with Norah," she said, sadly. "I could trust myself with the others. Not with Norah."

"This way," repeated Captain Wragge. She roused herself; looked up at the darkening heaven, looked round at the darkening view. "What must be, must," she said, and followed him.

The Minster clock struck the quarter to eight as they left the Walk on the Wall and descended the steps into Rosemary Lane. Almost at the same moment the lawyer's clerk from London gave the last instructions to his subordinates, and took up his own position, on the opposite side of the river, within easy view of Mr. Huxtable's door.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN WRAGGE stopped nearly midway in the one little row of houses composing Rosemary Lane, and let himself and his guest in at the door of his lodgings with his own key. As they entered the passage, a care-worn woman in a widow's cap made her appearance with a candle. "My niece," said the captain, presenting Magdalen; "my niece on a visit to York. She has kindly consented to occupy your empty bedroom. Consider it let, if you please, to my niece--and be very particular in airing the sheets? Is Mrs. Wragge upstairs? Very good. You may lend me your candle. My dear girl, Mrs. Wragge's boudoir is on the first floor; Mrs. Wragge is visible. Allow me to show you the way up."

As he ascended the stairs first, the care-worn widow whispered, piteously, to Magdalen, "I hope you'll pay me, miss. Your uncle doesn't."

The captain threw open the door of the front room on the first floor, and disclosed a female figure, arrayed in a gown of tarnished amber-colored satin, seated solitary on a small chair, with dingy old gloves on its hands, with a tattered old book on its knees, and with one little bedroom candle by its side. The figure terminated at its upper extremity in a large, smooth, white round face--like a moon--encircled by a cap and green ribbons, and dimly irradiated by eyes of mild and faded blue, which looked straightforward into vacancy, and took not the smallest notice of Magdalen's appearance, on the opening of the door.

"Mrs. Wragge!" cried the captain, shouting at her as if she was fast asleep. "Mrs. Wragge!"

The lady of the faded blue eyes slowly rose to an apparently interminable height. When she had at last attained an upright position, she towered to a stature of two or three inches over six feet. Giants of both sexes are, by a wise dispensation of Providence, created, for the most part, gentle. If Mrs. Wragge and a lamb had been placed side by side, comparison, under those circumstances, would have exposed the lamb as a rank impostor.

"Tea, captain?" inquired Mrs. Wragge, looking submissively down at her husband, whose head, when he stood on tiptoe, barely reached her shoulder.

"Miss Vanstone, the younger," said the captain, presenting Magdalen. "Our

fair relative, whom I have met by fortunate accident. Our guest for the night. Our guest!" reiterated the captain, shouting once more as if the tall lady was still fast asleep, in spite of the plain testimony of her own eyes to the contrary.

A smile expressed itself (in faint outline) on the large vacant space of Mrs. Wragge's countenance. "Oh?" she said, interrogatively. "Oh, indeed? Please, miss, will you sit down? I'm sorry--no, I don't mean I'm sorry; I mean I'm glad--" she stopped, and consulted her husband by a helpless look.

"Glad, of course!" shouted the captain.

"Glad, of course," echoed the giantess of the amber satin, more meekly than ever.

"Mrs. Wragge is not deaf," explained the captain. "She's only a little slow. Constitutionally torpid--if I may use the expression. I am merely loud with her (and I beg you will honor me by being loud, too) as a necessary stimulant to her ideas. Shout at her--and her mind comes up to time. Speak to her--and she drifts miles away from you directly. Mrs. Wragge!"

Mrs. Wragge instantly acknowledged the stimulant. "Tea, captain?" she inquired, for the second time.

"Put your cap straight!" shouted her husband. "I beg ten thousand pardons," he resumed, again addressing himself to Magdalen. "The sad truth is, I am a martyr to my own sense of order. All untidiness, all want of system and regularity, cause me the acutest irritation. My attention is distracted, my composure is upset; I can't rest till things are set straight again. Externally speaking, Mrs. Wragge is, to my infinite regret, the crookedest woman I ever met with. More to the right!" shouted the captain, as Mrs. Wragge, like a well-trained child, presented herself with her revised head-dress for her husband's inspection.

Mrs. Wragge immediately pulled the cap to the left. Magdalen rose, and set it right for her. The moon-face of the giantess brightened for the first time. She looked admiringly at Magdalen's cloak and bonnet. "Do you like dress, miss?" she asked, suddenly, in a confidential whisper. "I do."

"Show Miss Vanstone her room," said the captain, looking as if the whole house belonged to him. "The spare-room, the landlady's spare-room, on the third floor front. Offer Miss Vanstone all articles connected with the toilet of which she may stand in need. She has no luggage with her. Supply the

deficiency, and then come back and make tea."

Mrs. Wragge acknowledged the receipt of these lofty directions by a look of placid bewilderment, and led the way out of the room; Magdalen following her, with a candle presented by the attentive captain. As soon as they were alone on the landing outside, Mrs. Wragge raised the tattered old book which she had been reading when Magdalen was first presented to her, and which she had never let out of her hand since, and slowly tapped herself on the forehead with it. "Oh, my poor head!" said the tall lady, in meek soliloquy; "it's Buzzing again worse than ever!"

"Buzzing?" repeated Magdalen, in the utmost astonishment.

Mrs. Wragge ascended the stairs, without offering any explanation, stopped at one of the rooms on the second floor, and led the way in.

"This is not the third floor," said Magdalen. "This is not my room, surely?"

"Wait a bit," pleaded Mrs. Wragge. "Wait a bit, miss, before we go up any higher. I've got the Buzzing in my head worse than ever. Please wait for me till I'm a little better again."

"Shall I ask for help?" inquired Magdalen. "Shall I call the landlady?"

"Help?" echoed Mrs. Wragge. "Bless you, I don't want help! I'm used to it. I've had the Buzzing in my head, off and on--how many years?" She stopped, reflected, lost herself, and suddenly tried a question in despair. "Have you ever been at Darch's Dining-rooms in London?" she asked, with an appearance of the deepest interest.

"No," replied Magdalen, wondering at the strange inquiry.

"That's where the Buzzing in my head first began," said Mrs. Wragge, following the new clew with the deepest attention and anxiety. "I was employed to wait on the gentlemen at Darch's Dining-rooms--I was. The gentlemen all came together; the gentlemen were all hungry together; the gentlemen all gave their orders together--" She stopped, and tapped her head again, despondently, with the tattered old book.

"And you had to keep all their orders in your memory, separate one from the other?" suggested Magdalen, helping her out. "And the trying to do that confused you?"

"That's it!" said Mrs. Wragge, becoming violently excited in a moment. "Boiled pork and greens and pease-pudding, for Number One. Stewed beef and carrots and gooseberry tart, for Number Two. Cut of mutton, and quick about it, well done, and plenty of fat, for Number Three. Codfish and parsnips, two chops to follow, hot-and-hot, or I'll be the death of you, for Number Four. Five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Carrots and gooseberry tart--pease-pudding and plenty of fat--pork and beef and mutton, and cut 'em all, and quick about it--stout for one, and ale for t'other--and stale bread here, and new bread there--and this gentleman likes cheese, and that gentleman doesn't--Matilda, Tilda, Tilda, Tilda, fifty times over, till I didn't know my own name again--oh lord! oh lord!! oh lord!!! all together, all at the same time, all out of temper, all buzzing in my poor head like forty thousand million bees--don't tell the captain! don't tell the captain!" The unfortunate creature dropped the tattered old book, and beat both her hands on her head, with a look of blank terror fixed on the door.

"Hush! hush!" said Magdalen. "The captain hasn't heard you. I know what is the matter with your head now. Let me cool it."

She dipped a towel in water, and pressed it on the hot and helpless head which Mrs. Wragge submitted to her with the docility of a sick child.

"What a pretty hand you've got!" said the poor creature, feeling the relief of the coolness and taking Magdalen's hand, admiringly, in her own. "How soft and white it is! I try to be a lady; I always keep my gloves on--but I can't get my hands like yours. I'm nicely dressed, though, ain't I? I like dress; it's a comfort to me. I'm always happy when I'm looking at my things. I say--you won't be angry with me?--I should so like to try your bonnet on."

Magdalen humored her, with the ready compassion of the young. She stood smiling and nodding at herself in the glass, with the bonnet perched on the top of her head. "I had one as pretty as this, once," she said--"only it was white, not black. I wore it when the captain married me."

"Where did you meet with him?" asked Magdalen, putting the question as a chance means of increasing her scanty stock of information on the subject of Captain Wragge.

"At the Dining-rooms," said Mrs. Wragge. "He was the hungriest and the loudest to wait upon of the lot of 'em. I made more mistakes with him than I did with all the rest of them put together. He used to swear--oh, didn't he use to swear! When he left off swearing at me he married me. There was others wanted me besides him. Bless you, I had my pick. Why not? When

you have a trifle of money left you that you didn't expect, if that don't make a lady of you, what does? Isn't a lady to have her pick? I had my trifle of money, and I had my pick, and I picked the captain--I did. He was the smartest and the shortest of them all. He took care of me and my money. I'm here, the money's gone. Don't you put that towel down on the table--he won't have that! Don't move his razors--don't, please, or I shall forget which is which. I've got to remember which is which to-morrow morning. Bless you, the captain don't shave himself! He had me taught. I shave him. I do his hair, and cut his nails--he's awfully particular about his nails. So he is about his trousers. And his shoes. And his newspaper in the morning. And his breakfasts, and lunches, and dinners, and teas--" She stopped, struck by a sudden recollection, looked about her, observed the tattered old book on the floor, and clasped her hands in despair. "I've lost the place!" she exclaimed helplessly. "Oh, mercy, what will become of me! I've lost the place."

"Never mind," said Magdalen; "I'll soon find the place for you again."

She picked up the book, looked into the pages, and found that the object of Mrs. Wragge's anxiety was nothing more important than an old-fashioned Treatise on the Art of Cookery, reduced under the usual heads of Fish, Flesh, and Fowl, and containing the customary series of recipes. Turning over the leaves, Magdalen came to one particular page, thickly studded with little drops of moisture half dry. "Curious!" she said. "If this was anything but a cookery-book, I should say somebody had been crying over it."

"Somebody?" echoed Mrs. Wragge, with a stare of amazement. "It isn't somebody--it's Me. Thank you kindly, that's the place, sure enough. Bless you, I'm used to crying over it. You'd cry, too, if you had to get the captain's dinners out of it. As sure as ever I sit down to this book the Buzzing in my head begins again. Who's to make it out? Sometimes I think I've got it, and it all goes away from me. Sometimes I think I haven't got it, and it all comes back in a heap. Look here! Here's what he's ordered for his breakfast to-morrow: 'Omelette with Herbs. Beat up two eggs with a little water or milk, salt, pepper, chives, and parsley. Mince small.'--There! mince small! How am I to mince small when it's all mixed up and running? 'Put a piece of butter the size of your thumb into the frying-pan.'--Look at my thumb, and look at yours! whose size does she mean? 'Boil, but not brown.'--If it mustn't be brown, what color must it be? She won't tell me; she expects me to know, and I don't. 'Pour in the omelette.'--There! I can do that. 'Allow it to set, raise it round the edge; when done, turn it over to double it.'--Oh, the number of times I turned it over and doubled it in my head, before you came in to-night! 'Keep it soft; put the dish on the frying-pan, and turn it over.' Which

am I to turn over--oh, mercy, try the cold towel again, and tell me which--the dish or the frying-pan?"

"Put the dish on the frying-pan," said Magdalen; "and then turn the frying-pan over. That is what it means, I think."

"Thank you kindly," said Mrs. Wragge, "I want to get it into my head; please say it again."

Magdalen said it again.

"And then turn the frying-pan over," repeated Mrs. Wragge, with a sudden burst of energy. "I've got it now! Oh, the lots of omelettes all frying together in my head; and all frying wrong! Much obliged, I'm sure. You've put me all right again: I'm only a little tired with talking. And then turn the frying-pan, then turn the frying-pan, then turn the frying-pan over. It sounds like poetry, don't it?"

Her voice sank, and she drowsily closed her eyes. At the same moment the door of the room below opened, and the captain's mellifluous bass notes floated upstairs, charged with the customary stimulant to his wife's faculties.

"Mrs. Wragge!" cried the captain. "Mrs. Wragge!"

She started to her feet at that terrible summons. "Oh, what did he tell me to do?" she asked, distractedly. "Lots of things, and I've forgotten them all!"

"Say you have done them when he asks you," suggested Magdalen. "They were things for me--things I don't want. I remember all that is necessary. My room is the front room on the third floor. Go downstairs and say I am coming directly."

She took up the candle and pushed Mrs. Wragge out on the landing. "Say I am coming directly," she whispered again--and went upstairs by herself to the third story.

The room was small, close, and very poorly furnished. In former days Miss Garth would have hesitated to offer such a room to one of the servants at Combe-Raven. But it was quiet; it gave her a few minutes alone; and it was endurable, even welcome, on that account. She locked herself in and walked mechanically, with a woman's first impulse in a strange bedroom, to the rickety little table and the dingy little looking-glass. She waited there for a

moment, and then turned away with weary contempt. "What does it matter how pale I am?" she thought to herself. "Frank can't see me--what does it matter now!"

She laid aside her cloak and bonnet, and sat down to collect herself. But the events of the day had worn her out. The past, when she tried to remember it, only made her heart ache. The future, when she tried to penetrate it, was a black void. She rose again, and stood by the uncurtained window--stood looking out, as if there was some hidden sympathy for her own desolation in the desolate night.

"Norah!" she said to herself, tenderly; "I wonder if Norah is thinking of me? Oh, if I could be as patient as she is! If I could only forget the debt we owe to Michael Vanstone!"

Her face darkened with a vindictive despair, and she paced the little cage of a room backward and forward, softly. "No: never till the debt is paid!" Her thoughts veered back again to Frank. "Still at sea, poor fellow; further and further away from me; sailing through the day, sailing through the night. Oh, Frank, love me!"

Her eyes filled with tears. She dashed them away, made for the door, and laughed with a desperate levity, as she unlocked it again.

"Any company is better than my own thoughts," she burst out, recklessly, as she left the room. "I'm forgetting my ready-made relations--my half-witted aunt, and my uncle the rogue." She descended the stairs to the landing on the first floor, and paused there in momentary hesitation. "How will it end?" she asked herself. "Where is my blindfolded journey taking me to now? Who knows, and who cares?"

She entered the room.

Captain Wragge was presiding at the tea-tray with the air of a prince in his own banqueting-hall. At one side of the table sat Mrs. Wragge, watching her husband's eye like an animal waiting to be fed. At the other side was an empty chair, toward which the captain waved his persuasive hand when Magdalen came in. "How do you like your room?" he inquired; "I trust Mrs. Wragge has made herself useful? You take milk and sugar? Try the local bread, honor the York butter, test the freshness of a new and neighboring egg. I offer my little all. A pauper's meal, my dear girl--seasoned with a gentleman's welcome."

"Seasoned with salt, pepper, chives and parsley," murmured Mrs. Wragge, catching instantly at a word in connection with cookery, and harnessing her head to the omelette for the rest of the evening.

"Sit straight at the table!" shouted the captain. "More to the left, more still--that will do. During your absence upstairs," he continued, addressing himself to Magdalen, "my mind has not been unemployed. I have been considering your position with a view exclusively to your own benefit. If you decide on being guided to-morrow by the light of my experience, that light is unreservedly at your service. You may naturally say: 'I know but little of you, captain, and that little is unfavorable.' Granted, on one condition--that you permit me to make myself and my character quite familiar to you when tea is over. False shame is foreign to my nature. You see my wife, my house, my bread, my butter, and my eggs, all exactly as they are. See me, too, my dear girl, while you are about it."

When tea was over, Mrs. Wragge, at a signal from her husband, retired to a corner of the room, with the eternal cookery-book still in her hand. "Mince small," she whispered, confidentially, as she passed Magdalen. "That's a teaser, isn't it?"

"Down at heel again!" shouted the captain, pointing to his wife's heavy flat feet as they shuffled across the room. "The right shoe. Pull it up at heel, Mrs. Wragge--pull it up at heel! Pray allow me," he continued, offering his arm to Magdalen, and escorting her to a dirty little horse-hair sofa. "You want repose--after your long journey, you really want repose." He drew his chair to the sofa, and surveyed her with a bland look of investigation--as if he had been her medical attendant, with a diagnosis on his mind.

"Very pleasant! very pleasant!" said the captain, when he had seen his guest comfortable on the sofa. "I feel quite in the bosom of my family. Shall we return to our subject--the subject of my rascally self? No! no! No apologies, no protestations, pray. Don't mince the matter on your side--and depend on me not to mince it on mine. Now come to facts; pray come to facts. Who, and what am I? Carry your mind back to our conversation on the Walls of this interesting City, and let us start once more from your point of view. I am a Rogue; and, in that capacity (as I have already pointed out), the most useful man you possibly could have met with. Now observe! There are many varieties of Rogue; let me tell you my variety, to begin with. I am a Swindler."

His entire shamelessness was really super-human. Not the vestige of a blush varied the sallow monotony of his complexion; the smile wreathed his curly lips as pleasantly as ever his party-colored eyes twinkled at Magdalen

with the self-enjoying frankness of a naturally harmless man. Had his wife heard him? Magdalen looked over his shoulder to the corner of the room in which she was sitting behind him. No the self-taught student of cookery was absorbed in her subject. She had advanced her imaginary omelette to the critical stage at which the butter was to be thrown in--that vaguely-measured morsel of butter, the size of your thumb. Mrs. Wragge sat lost in contemplation of one of her own thumbs, and shook her head over it, as if it failed to satisfy her.

"Don't be shocked," proceeded the captain; "don't be astonished. Swindler is nothing but a word of two syllables. S, W, I, N, D--swind; L, E, R--ler; Swindler. Definition: A moral agriculturist; a man who cultivates the field of human sympathy. I am that moral agriculturist, that cultivating man. Narrow-minded mediocrity, envious of my success in my profession, calls me a Swindler. What of that? The same low tone of mind assails men in other professions in a similar manner--calls great writers scribblers--great generals, butchers--and so on. It entirely depends on the point of view. Adopting your point, I announce myself intelligibly as a Swindler. Now return the obligation, and adopt mine. Hear what I have to say for myself, in the exercise of my profession.--Shall I continue to put it frankly?"

"Yes," said Magdalen; "and I'll tell you frankly afterward what I think of it."

The captain cleared his throat; mentally assembled his entire army of words--horse, foot, artillery, and reserves; put himself at the head; and dashed into action, to carry the moral intrenchments of Society by a general charge.

"Now observe," he began. "Here am I, a needy object. Very good. Without complicating the question by asking how I come to be in that condition, I will merely inquire whether it is, or is not, the duty of a Christian community to help the needy. If you say No, you simply shock me; and there is an end of it; if you say Yes, then I beg to ask, Why am I to blame for making a Christian community do its duty? You may say, Is a careful man who has saved money bound to spend it again on a careless stranger who has saved none? Why of course he is! And on what ground, pray? Good heavens! on the ground that he has got the money, to be sure. All the world over, the man who has not got the thing, obtains it, on one pretense or another, of the man who has--and, in nine cases out of ten, the pretense is a false one. What! your pockets are full, and my pockets are empty; and you refuse to help me? Sordid wretch! do you think I will allow you to violate the sacred obligations of charity in my person? I won't allow you--I say, distinctly, I won't allow you. Those are my principles as a moral

agriculturist. Principles which admit of trickery? Certainly. Am I to blame if the field of human sympathy can't be cultivated in any other way? Consult my brother agriculturists in the mere farming line--do they get their crops for the asking? No! they must circumvent arid Nature exactly as I circumvent sordid Man. They must plow, and sow, and top-dress, and bottom-dress, and deep-drain, and surface-drain, and all the rest of it. Why am I to be checked in the vast occupation of deep-draining mankind? Why am I to be persecuted for habitually exciting the noblest feelings of our common nature? Infamous!--I can characterize it by no other word--infamous! If I hadn't confidence in the future, I should despair of humanity--but I have confidence in the future. Yes! one of these days (when I am dead and gone), as ideas enlarge and enlightenment progresses, the abstract merits of the profession now called swindling will be recognized. When that day comes, don't drag me out of my grave and give me a public funeral; don't take advantage of my having no voice to raise in my own defense, and insult me by a national statue. No! do me justice on my tombstone; dash me off, in one masterly sentence, on my epitaph. Here lies Wragge, embalmed in the tardy recognition of his species: he plowed, sowed, and reaped his fellow-creatures; and enlightened posterity congratulates him on the uniform excellence of his crops."

He stopped; not from want of confidence, not from want of words--purely from want of breath. "I put it frankly, with a dash of humor," he said, pleasantly. "I don't shock you--do I?" Weary and heart-sick as she was--suspicious of others, doubtful of herself--the extravagant impudence of Captain Wragge's defense of swindling touched Magdalen's natural sense of humor, and forced a smile to her lips. "Is the Yorkshire crop a particularly rich one just at present?" she inquired, meeting him, in her neatly feminine way, with his own weapons.

"A hit--a palpable hit," said the captain, jocosely exhibiting the tails of his threadbare shooting jacket, as a practical commentary on Magdalen's remark. "My dear girl, here or elsewhere, the crop never fails--but one man can't always gather it in. The assistance of intelligent co-operation is, I regret to say, denied me. I have nothing in common with the clumsy rank and file of my profession, who convict themselves, before recorders and magistrates, of the worst of all offenses--incurable stupidity in the exercise of their own vocation. Such as you see me, I stand entirely alone. After years of successful self-dependence, the penalties of celebrity are beginning to attach to me. On my way from the North, I pause at this interesting city for the third time; I consult my Books for the customary references to past local experience; I find under the heading, 'Personal position in York,' the initials, T. W. K., signifying Too Well Known. I refer to my Index, and turn to the

surrounding neighborhood. The same brief marks meet my eye. 'Leeds. T. W. K.--Scarborough. T. W. K.--Harrowgate. T. W. K.'--and so on. What is the inevitable consequence? I suspend my proceedings; my resources evaporate; and my fair relative finds me the pauper gentleman whom she now sees before her."

"Your books?" said Magdalen. "What books do you mean?"

"You shall see," replied the captain. "Trust me, or not, as you like--I trust you implicitly. You shall see."

With those words he retired into the back room. While he was gone, Magdalen stole another look at Mrs. Wragge. Was she still self-isolated from her husband's deluge of words? Perfectly self-isolated. She had advanced the imaginary omelette to the last stage of culinary progress; and she was now rehearsing the final operation of turning it over--with the palm of her hand to represent the dish, and the cookery-book to impersonate the frying-pan. "I've got it," said Mrs. Wragge, nodding across the room at Magdalen. "First put the frying-pan on the dish, and then tumble both of them over."

Captain Wragge returned, carrying a neat black dispatch-box, adorned with a bright brass lock. He produced from the box five or six plump little books, bound in commercial calf and vellum, and each fitted comfortably with its own little lock.

"Mind!" said the moral agriculturist, "I take no credit to myself for this: it is my nature to be orderly, and orderly I am. I must have everything down in black and white, or I should go mad! Here is my commercial library: Daybook, Ledger, Book of Districts, Book of Letters, Book of Remarks, and so on. Kindly throw your eye over any one of them. I flatter myself there is no such thing as a blot, or a careless entry in it, from the first page to the last. Look at this room--is there a chair out of place? Not if I know it! Look at me. Am I dusty? am I dirty? am I half shaved? Am I, in brief, a speckless pauper, or am I not? Mind! I take no credit to myself; the nature of the man, my dear girl--the nature of the man!"

He opened one of the books. Magdalen was no judge of the admirable correctness with which the accounts inside were all kept; but she could estimate the neatness of the handwriting, the regularity in the rows of figures, the mathematical exactness of the ruled lines in red and black ink, the cleanly absence of blots, stains, or erasures. Although Captain Wragge's inborn sense of order was in him--as it is in others--a sense too inveterately mechanical to exercise any elevating moral influence over his actions, it had

produced its legitimate effect on his habits, and had reduced his rogueries as strictly to method and system as if they had been the commercial transactions of an honest man.

"In appearance, my system looks complicated?" pursued the captain. "In reality, it is simplicity itself. I merely avoid the errors of inferior practitioners. That is to say, I never plead for myself; and I never apply to rich people--both fatal mistakes which the inferior practitioner perpetually commits. People with small means sometimes have generous impulses in connection with money--rich people, never. My lord, with forty thousand a year; Sir John, with property in half a dozen counties--those are the men who never forgive the genteel beggar for swindling them out of a sovereign; those are the men who send for the mendicity officers; those are the men who take care of their money. Who are the people who lose shillings and sixpences by sheer thoughtlessness? Servants and small clerks, to whom shillings and sixpences are of consequence. Did you ever hear of Rothschild or Baring dropping a fourpenny-piece down a gutter-hole? Fourpence in Rothschild's pocket is safer than fourpence in the pocket of that woman who is crying stale shrimps in Skeldergate at this moment. Fortified by these sound principles, enlightened by the stores of written information in my commercial library, I have ranged through the population for years past, and have raised my charitable crops with the most cheering success. Here, in book Number One, are all my Districts mapped out, with the prevalent public feeling to appeal to in each: Military District, Clerical District, Agricultural District; et cetera, et cetera. Here, in Number Two, are my cases that I plead: Family of an officer who fell at Waterloo; Wife of a poor curate stricken down by nervous debility; Widow of a grazier in difficulties gored to death by a mad bull; et cetera, et cetera. Here, in Number Three, are the people who have heard of the officer's family, the curate's wife, the grazier's widow, and the people who haven't; the people who have said Yes, and the people who have said No; the people to try again, the people who want a fresh case to stir them up, the people who are doubtful, the people to beware of; et cetera, et cetera. Here, in Number Four, are my Adopted Handwritings of public characters; my testimonials to my own worth and integrity; my Heartrending Statements of the officer's family, the curate's wife, and the grazier's widow, stained with tears, blotted with emotion; et cetera, et cetera. Here, in Numbers Five and Six, are my own personal subscriptions to local charities, actually paid in remunerative neighborhoods, on the principle of throwing a sprat to catch a herring; also, my diary of each day's proceedings, my personal reflections and remarks, my statement of existing difficulties (such as the difficulty of finding myself T. W. K. in this interesting city); my outgivings and incomings; wind and weather; politics and public events; fluctuations in my own health; fluctuations in Mrs. Wragge's head;

fluctuations in our means and meals, our payments, prospects, and principles; et cetera, et cetera. So, my dear girl, the Swindler's Mill goes. So you see me exactly as I am. You knew, before I met you, that I lived on my wits. Well! have I, or have I not, shown you that I have wits to live on?"

"I have no doubt you have done yourself full justice," said Magdalen, quietly.

"I am not at all exhausted," continued the captain. "I can go on, if necessary, for t he rest of the evening.--However, if I have do ne myself full justice, perhaps I may leave the remaining points in my character to develop themselves at future opportunities. For the present, I withdraw myself from notice. Exit Wragge. And now to business! Permit me to inquire what effect I have produced on your own mind? Do you still believe that the Rogue who has trusted you with all his secrets is a Rogue who is bent on taking a mean advantage of a fair relative?"

"I will wait a little," Magdalen rejoined, "before I answer that question. When I came down to tea, you told me you had been employing your mind for my benefit. May I ask how?"

"By all means," said Captain Wragge. "You shall have the net result of the whole mental process. Said process ranges over the present and future proceedings of your disconsolate friends, and of the lawyers who are helping them to find you. Their present proceedings are, in all probability, assuming the following form: the lawyer's clerk has given you up at Mr. Huxtable's, and has also, by this time, given you up, after careful inquiry, at all the hotels. His last chance is that you may send for your box to the cloak-room--you don't send for it--and there the clerk is to-night (thanks to Captain Wragge and Rosemary Lane) at the end of his resources. He will forthwith communicate that fact to his employers in London; and those employers (don't be alarmed!) will apply for help to the detective police. Allowing for inevitable delays, a professional spy, with all his wits about him, and with those handbills to help him privately in identifying you, will be here certainly not later than the day after tomorrow--possibly earlier. If you remain in York, if you attempt to communicate with Mr. Huxtable, that spy will find you out. If, on the other hand, you leave the city before he comes (taking your departure by other means than the railway, of course) you put him in the same predicament as the clerk--you defy him to find a fresh trace of you. There is my brief abstract of your present position. What do you think of it?"

"I think it has one defect," said Magdalen. "It ends in nothing."

"Pardon me," retorted the captain. "It ends in an arrangement for your safe

departure, and in a plan for the entire gratification of your wishes in the direction of the stage. Both drawn from the resources of my own experience, and both waiting a word from you, to be poured forth immediately in the fullest detail."

"I think I know what that word is," replied Magdalen, looking at him attentively.

"Charmed to hear it, I am sure. You have only to say, 'Captain Wragge, take charge of me'--and my plans are yours from that moment."

"I will take to-night to consider your proposal," she said, after an instant's reflection. "You shall have my answer to-morrow morning."

Captain Wragge looked a little disappointed. He had not expected the reservation on his side to be met so composedly by a reservation on hers.

"Why not decide at once?" he remonstrated, in his most persuasive tones. "You have only to consider--"

"I have more to consider than you think for," she answered. "I have another object in view besides the object you know of."

"May I ask--?"

"Excuse me, Captain Wragge--you may not ask. Allow me to thank you for your hospitality, and to wish you good-night. I am worn out. I want rest."

Once more the captain wisely adapted himself to her humor with the ready self-control of an experienced man.

"Worn out, of course!" he said, sympathetically. "Unpardonable on my part not to have thought of it before. We will resume our conversation to-morrow. Permit me to give you a candle. Mrs. Wragge!"

Prostrated by mental exertion, Mrs. Wragge was pursuing the course of the omelette in dreams. Her head was twisted one way, and her body the other. She snored meekly. At intervals one of her hands raised itself in the air, shook an imaginary frying-pan, and dropped again with a faint thump on the cookery-book in her lap. At the sound of her husband's voice, she started to her feet, and confronted him with her mind fast asleep, and her eyes wide open.

"Assist Miss Vanstone," said the captain. "And the next time you forget yourself in your chair, fall asleep straight--don't annoy me by falling asleep crooked."

Mrs. Wragge opened her eyes a little wider, and looked at Magdalen in helpless amazement.

"Is the captain breakfasting by candle-light?" she inquired, meekly. "And haven't I done the omelette?"

Before her husband's corrective voice could apply a fresh stimulant, Magdalen took her compassionately by the arm and led her out of the room.

"Another object besides the object I know of?" repeated Captain Wragge, when he was left by himself. "Is there a gentleman in the background, after all? Is there mischief brewing in the dark that I don't bargain for?"

CHAPTER III.

TOWARD six o'clock the next morning, the light pouring in on her face awoke Magdalen in the bedroom in Rosemary Lane.

She started from her deep, dreamless repose of the past night with that painful sense of bewilderment, on first waking, which is familiar to all sleepers in strange beds. "Norah!" she called out mechanically, when she opened her eyes. The next instant her mind roused itself, and her senses told her the truth. She looked round the miserable room with a loathing recognition of it. The sordid contrast which the place presented to all that she had been accustomed to see in her own bed-chamber--the practical abandonment, implied in its scanty furniture, of those elegant purities of personal habit to which she had been accustomed from her childhood--shocked that sense of bodily self-respect in Magdalen which is a refined woman's second nature. Contemptible as the influence seemed, when compared with her situation at that moment, the bare sight of the jug and basin in a corner of the room decided her first resolution when she woke. She determined, then and there, to leave Rosemary Lane.

How was she to leave it? With Captain Wragge, or without him?

She dressed herself, with a dainty shrinking from everything in the room which her hands or her clothes touched in the process, and then opened the window. The autumn air felt keen and sweet; and the little patch of sky that she could see was warmly bright already with the new sunlight. Distant voices of bargemen on the river, and the chirping of birds among the weeds which topped the old city wall, were the only sounds that broke the morning silence. She sat down by the window; and searched her mind for the thoughts which she had lost, when weariness overcame her on the night before.

The first subject to which she returned was the vagabond subject of Captain Wragge.

The "moral agriculturist" had failed to remove her personal distrust of him, cunningly as he had tried to plead against it by openly confessing the impostures that he had practiced on others. He had raised her opinion of his abilities; he had amused her by his humor; he had astonished her by his assurance; but he had left her original conviction that he was a Rogue exactly where it was when he first met with her. If the one design then in her

mind had been the design of going on the stage, she would, at all hazards, have rejected the more than doubtful assistance of Captain Wragge on the spot.

But the perilous journey on which she had now adventured herself had another end in view--an end, dark and distant--an end, with pitfalls hidden on the way to it, far other than the shallow pitfalls on the way to the stage. In the mysterious stillness of the morning, her mind looked on to its second and its deeper design, and the despicable figure of the swindler rose before her in a new view.

She tried to shut him out--to feel above him and beyond him again, as she had felt up to this time.

After a little trifling with her dress, she took from her bosom the white silk bag which her own hands had made on the farewell night at Combe-Raven. It drew together at the mouth with delicate silken strings. The first thing she took out, on opening it, was a lock of Frank's hair, tied with a morsel of silver thread; the next was a sheet of paper containing the extracts which she had copied from her father's will and her father's letter; the last was a closely-folded packet of bank-notes, to the value of nearly two hundred pounds--the produce (as Miss Garth had rightly conjectured) of the sale of her jewelry and her dresses, in which the servant at the boarding-school had privately assisted her. She put back the notes at once, without a second glance at them, and then sat looking thoughtfully at the lock of hair as it lay on her lap. "You are better than nothing," she said, speaking to it with a girl's fanciful tenderness. "I can sit and look at you sometimes, till I almost think I am looking at Frank. Oh, my darling! my darling!" Her voice faltered softly, and she put the lock of hair, with a languid gentleness, to her lips. It fell from her fingers into her bosom. A lovely tinge of color rose on her cheeks, and spread downward to her neck, as if it followed the falling hair. She closed her eyes, and let her fair head droop softly. The world passed from her; and, for one enchanted moment, Love opened the gates of Paradise to the daughter of Eve.

The trivial noises in the neighboring street, gathering in number as the morning advanced, forced her back to the hard realities of the passing time. She raised her head with a heavy sigh, and opened her eyes once more on the mean and miserable little room.

The extracts from the will and the letter--those last memorials of her father, now so closely associated with the purpose which had possession of her mind--still lay before her. The transient color faded from her face, as she

spread the little manuscript open on her lap. The extracts from the will stood highest on the page; they were limited to those few touching words in which the dead father begged his children's forgiveness for the stain on their birth, and implored them to remember the untiring love and care by which he had striven to atone for it. The extract from the letter to Mr. Pendril came next. She read the last melancholy sentences aloud to herself: "For God's sake come on the day when you receive this--come and relieve me from the dreadful thought that my two darling girls are at this moment unprovided for. If anything happened to me, and if my desire to do their mother justice ended (through my miserable ignorance of the law) in leaving Norah and Magdalen disinherited, I should not rest in my grave!" Under these lines again, and close at the bottom of the page, was written the terrible commentary on that letter which had fallen from Mr. Pendril's lips: "Mr. Vanstone's daughters are Nobody's Children, and the law leaves them helpless at their uncle's mercy."

Helpless when those words were spoken--helpless still, after all that she had resolved, after all that she had sacrificed. The assertion of her natural rights and her sister's, sanctioned by the direct expression of her father's last wishes; the recall of Frank from China; the justification of her desertion of Norah--all hung on her desperate purpose of recovering the lost inheritance, at any risk, from the man who had beggared and insulted his brother's children. And that man was still a shadow to her! So little did she know of him that she was even ignorant at that moment of his place of abode.

She rose and paced the room with the noiseless, negligent grace of a wild creature of the forest in its cage. "How can I reach him in the dark?" she said to herself. "How can I find out--?" She stopped suddenly. Before the question had shaped itself to an end in her thoughts, Captain Wragge was back in her mind again.

A man well used to working in the dark; a man with endless resources of audacity and cunning; a man who would hesitate at no mean employment that could be offered to him, if it was employment that filled his pockets--was this the instrument for which, in its present need, her hand was waiting? Two of the necessities to be met, before she could take a single step in advance, were plainly present to her--the necessity of knowing more of her father's brother than she knew now; and the necessity of throwing him off his guard by concealing herself personally during the process of inquiry. Resolutely self-dependent as she was, the inevitable spy's work at the outset must be work delegated to another. In her position, was there any ready human creature within reach but the vagabond downstairs? Not one. She thought of it anxiously, she thought of it long. Not one! There the choice

was, steadily confronting her: the choice of taking the Rogue, or of turning her back on the Purpose.

She paused in the middle of the room. "What can he do at his worst?" she said to herself. "Cheat me. Well! if my money governs him for me, what then? Let him have my money!" She returned mechanically to her place by the window. A moment more decided her. A moment more, and she took the first fatal step downward-she determined to face the risk, and try Captain Wragge.

At nine o'clock the landlady knocked at Magdalen's door, and informed her (with the captain's kind compliments) that breakfast was ready.

She found Mrs. Wragge alone, attired in a voluminous brown holland wrapper, with a limp cape and a trimming of dingy pink ribbon. The ex-waitress at Darch's Dining-rooms was absorbed in the contemplation of a large dish, containing a leathery-looking substance of a mottled yellow color, profusely sprinkled with little black spots.

"There it is!" said Mrs. Wragge. "Omelette with herbs. The landlady helped me. And that's what we've made of it. Don't you ask the captain for any when he comes in--don't, there's a good soul. It isn't nice. We had some accidents with it. It's been under the grate. It's been spilled on the stairs. It's scalded the landlady's youngest boy--he went and sat on it. Bless you, it isn't half as nice as it looks! Don't you ask for any. Perhaps he won't notice if you say nothing about it. What do you think of my wrapper? I should so like to have a white one. Have you got a white one? How is it trimmed? Do tell me!"

The formidable entrance of the captain suspended the next question on her lips. Fortunately for Mrs. Wragge, her husband was far too anxious for the promised expression of Magdalen's decision to pay his customary attention to questions of cookery. When breakfast was over, he dismissed Mrs. Wragge, and merely referred to the omelette by telling her that she had his full permission to "give it to the dogs."

"How does my little proposal look by daylight?" he asked, placing chairs for Magdalen and himself. "Which is it to be: 'Captain Wragge, take charge of me?' or, 'Captain Wragge, good-morning?'"

"You shall hear directly," replied Magdalen. "I have something to say first. I told you, last night, that I had another object in view besides the object of earning my living on the stage--"

"I beg your pardon," interposed Captain Wragge. "Did you say, earning your living?"

"Certainly. Both my sister and myself must depend on our own exertions to gain our daily bread."

"What!!!" cried the captain, starting to his feet. "The daughters of my wealthy and lamented relative by marriage reduced to earn their own living? Impossible--wildly, extravagantly impossible!" He sat down again, and looked at Magdalen as if she had inflicted a personal injury on him.

"You are not acquainted with the full extent of our misfortune," she said, quietly. "I will tell you what has happened before I go any further." She told him at once, in the plainest terms she could find, and with as few details as possible.

Captain Wragge's profound bewilderment left him conscious of but one distinct result produced by the narrative on his own mind. The lawyer's offer of Fifty Pounds Reward for the missing young lady ascended instantly to a place in his estimation which it had never occupied until that moment.

"Do I understand," he inquired, "that you are entirely deprived of present resources?"

"I have sold my jewelry and my dresses," said Magdalen, impatient of his mean harping on the pecuniary string. "If my want of experience keeps me back in a theater, I can afford to wait till the stage can afford to pay me."

Captain Wragge mentally appraised the rings, bracelets, and necklaces, the silks, satins, and laces of the daughter of a gentleman of fortune, at--say, a third of their real value. In a moment more, the Fifty Pounds Reward suddenly sank again to the lowest depths in the deep estimation of this judicious man.

"Just so," he said, in his most business-like manner. "There is not the least fear, my dear girl, of your being kept back in a theater, if you possess present resources, and if you profit by my assistance."

"I must accept more assistance than you have already offered--or none," said Magdalen. "I have more serious difficulties before me than the difficulty of leaving York, and the difficulty of finding my way to the stage."

"You don't say so! I am all attention; pray explain yourself!"

She considered her next words carefully before they passed her lips.

"There are certain inquiries," she said, "which I am interested in making. If I undertook them myself, I should excite the suspicion of the person inquired after, and should learn little or nothing of what I wish to know. If the inquiries could be made by a stranger, without my being seen in the matter, a service would be rendered me of much greater importance than the service you offered last night."

Captain Wragge's vagabond face became gravely and deeply attentive.

"May I ask," he said, "what the nature of the inquiries is likely to be?"

Magdalen hesitated. She had necessarily mentioned Michael Vanstone's name in informing the captain of the loss of her inheritance. She must inevitably mention it to him again if she employed his services. He would doubtless discover it for himself, by a plain process of inference, before she said many words more, frame them as carefully as she might. Under these circumstances, was there any intelligible reason for shrinking from direct reference to Michael Vanstone? No intelligible reason--and yet she shrank.

"For instance," pursued Captain Wragge, "are they inquiries about a man or a woman; inquiries about an enemy or a friend--?"

"An enemy," she answered, quickly.

Her reply might still have kept the captain in the dark--but her eyes enlightened him. "Michael Vanstone!" thought the wary Wragge. "She looks dangerous; I'll feel my way a little further."

"With regard, now, to the person who is the object of these inquiries," he resumed. "Are you thoroughly clear in your own mind about what you want to know?"

"Perfectly clear," replied Magdalen. "I want to know where he lives, to begin with."

"Yes. And after that?"

"I want to know about his habits; about who the people are whom he associates with; about what he does with his money--" She considered a

little. "And one thing more," she said; "I want to know whether there is any woman about his house--a relation, or a housekeeper--who has an influence over him."

"Harmless enough, so far," said the captain. "What next?"

"Nothing. The rest is my secret."

The clouds on Captain Wragge's countenance began to clear away again. He reverted, with his customary precision, to his customary choice of alternatives. "These inquiries of hers," he thought, "mean one of two things--Mischief, or Money! If it's Mischief, I'll slip through her fingers. If it's Money, I'll make myself useful, with a view to the future."

Magdalen's vigilant eyes watched the progress of his reflections suspiciously. "Captain Wragge," she said, "if you want time to consider, say so plainly."

"I don't want a moment," replied the captain. "Place your departure from York, your dramatic career, and your private inquiries under my care. Here I am, unreservedly at your disposal. Say the word--do you take me?"

Her heart beat fast; her lips turned dry--but she said the word.

"I do."

There was a pause. Magdalen sat silent, struggling with the vague dread of the future which had been roused in her mind by her own reply. Captain Wragge, on his side, was apparently absorbed in the consideration of a new set of alternatives. His hands descended into his empty pockets, and prophetically tested their capacity as receptacles for gold and silver. The brightness of the precious metals was in his face, the smoothness of the precious metals was in his voice, as he provided himself with a new supply of words, and resumed the conversation.

"The next question," he said, "is the question of time. Do these confidential investigations of ours require immediate attention--or can they wait?"

"For the present, they can wait," replied Magdalen. "I wish to secure my freedom from all interference on the part of my friends before the inquiries are made."

"Very good. The first step toward accomplishing that object is to beat our retreat--excuse a professional metaphor from a military man--to beat our

retreat from York to-morrow. I see my way plainly so far; but I am all abroad, as we used to say in the militia, about my marching orders afterward. The next direction we take ought to be chosen with an eye to advancing your dramatic views. I am all ready, when I know what your views are. How came you to think of the theater at all? I see the sacred fire burning in you; tell me, who lit it?"

Magdalen could only answer him in one way. She could only look back at the days that were gone forever, and tell him the story of her first step toward the stage at Evergreen Lodge. Captain Wragge listened with his usual politeness; but he evidently derived no satisfactory impression from what he heard. Audiences of friends were audiences whom he privately declined to trust; and the opinion of the stage-manager was the opinion of a man who spoke with his fee in his pocket and his eye on a future engagement.

"Interesting, deeply interesting," he said, when Magdalen had done. "But not conclusive to a practical man. A specimen of your abilities is necessary to enlighten me. I have been on the stage myself; the comedy of the Rivals is familiar to me from beginning to end. A sample is all I want, if you have not forgotten the words--a sample of 'Lucy,' and a sample of 'Julia.'"

"I have not forgotten the words," said Magdalen, sorrowfully; "and I have the little books with me in which my dialogue was written out. I have never parted with them; they remind me of a time--" Her lip trembled, and a pang of the heart-ache silenced her.

"Nervous," remarked the captain, indulgently. "Not at all a bad sign. The greatest actresses on the stage are nervous. Follow their example, and get over it. Where are the parts? Oh, here they are! Very nicely written, and remarkably clean. I'll give you the cues--it will all be over (as the dentists say) in no time. Take the back drawing-room for the stage, and take me for the audience. Tingle goes the bell; up runs the curtain; order in the gallery, silence in the pit--enter Lucy!"

She tried hard to control herself; she forced back the sorrow--the innocent, natural, human sorrow for the absent and the dead--pleading hard with her for the tears that she refused. Resolutely, with cold, clinched hands, she tried to begin. As the first familiar words passed her lips, Frank came back to her from the sea, and the face of her dead father looked at her with the smile of happy old times. The voices of her mother and her sister talked gently in the fragrant country stillness, and the garden-walks at Combe-Raven opened once more on her view. With a faint, wailing cry, she dropped into a chair; her head fell forward on the table, and she burst passionately

into tears.

Captain Wragge was on his feet in a moment. She shuddered as he came near her, and waved him back vehemently with her hand. "Leave me!" she said; "leave me a minute by myself!" The compliant Wragge retired to the front room; looked out of the window; and whistled under his breath. "The family spirit again!" he said. "Complicated by hysterics."

After waiting a minute or two he returned to make inquiries.

"Is there anything I can offer you?" he asked. "Cold water? burned feathers? smelling salts? medical assistance? Shall I summon Mrs. Wragge? Shall we put it off till to-morrow?"

She started up, wild and flushed, with a desperate s elf-command in her face, with an angry resolution in her manner.

"No!" she said. "I must harden myself--and I will! Sit down again and see me act."

"Bravo!" cried the captain. "Dash at it, my beauty--and it's done!"

She dashed at it, with a mad defiance of herself--with a raised voice, and a glow like fever in her cheeks. All the artless, girlish charm of the performance in happier and better days was gone. The native dramatic capacity that was in her came, hard and bold, to the surface, stripped of every softening allurement which had once adorned it. She would have saddened and disappointed a man with any delicacy of feeling. She absolutely electrified Captain Wragge. He forgot his politeness, he forgot his long words. The essential spirit of the man's whole vagabond life burst out of him irresistibly in his first exclamation. "Who the devil would have thought it? She can act, after all!" The instant the words escaped his lips he recovered himself, and glided off into his ordinary colloquial channels. Magdalen stopped him in the middle of his first compliment. "No," she said; "I have forced the truth out of you for once. I want no more."

"Pardon me," replied the incorrigible Wragge. "You want a little instruction; and I am the man to give it you."

With that answer, he placed a chair for her, and proceeded to explain himself.

She sat down in silence. A sullen indifference began to show itself in her

manner; her cheeks turned pale again; and her eyes looked wearily vacant at the wall before her. Captain Wragge noticed these signs of heart-sickness and discontent with herself, after the effort she had made, and saw the importance of rousing her by speaking, for once, plainly and directly to the point. She had set a new value on herself in his mercenary eyes. She had suggested to him a speculation in her youth, her beauty, and her marked ability for the stage, which had never entered his mind until he saw her act. The old militia-man was quick at his shifts. He and his plans had both turned right about together when Magdalen sat down to hear what he had to say.

"Mr. Huxtable's opinion is my opinion," he began. "You are a born actress. But you must be trained before you can do anything on the stage. I am disengaged--I am competent--I have trained others--I can train you. Don't trust my word: trust my eye to my own interests. I'll make it my interest to take pains with you, and to be quick about it. You shall pay me for my instructions from your profits on the stage. Half your salary for the first year; a third of your salary for the second year; and half the sum you clear by your first benefit in a London theater. What do you say to that? Have I made it my interest to push you, or have I not?"

So far as appearances went, and so far as the stage went, it was plain that he had linked his interests and Magdalen's together. She briefly told him so, and waited to hear more.

"A month or six weeks' study," continued the captain, "will give me a reasonable idea of what you can do best. All ability runs in grooves; and your groove remains to be found. We can't find it here--for we can't keep you a close prisoner for weeks together in Rosemary Lane. A quiet country place, secure from all interference and interruption, is the place we want for a month certain. Trust my knowledge of Yorkshire, and consider the place found. I see no difficulties anywhere, except the difficulty of beating our retreat to-morrow."

"I thought your arrangements were made last night?" said Magdalen.

"Quite right," rejoined the captain. "They were made last night; and here they are. We can't leave by railway, because the lawyer's clerk is sure to be on the lookout for you at the York terminus. Very good; we take to the road instead, and leave in our own carriage. Where the deuce do we get it? We get it from the landlady's brother, who has a horse and chaise which he lets out for hire. That chaise comes to the end of Rosemary Lane at an early hour to-morrow morning. I take my wife and my niece out to show them the beauties

of the neighborhood. We have a picnic hamper with us, which marks our purpose in the public eye. You disfigure yourself in a shawl, bonnet, and veil of Mrs. Wragge's; we turn our backs on York; and away we drive on a pleasure trip for the day--you and I on the front seat, Mrs. Wragge and the hamper behind. Good again. Once on the highroad, what do we do? Drive to the first station beyond York, northward, southward, or eastward, as may be hereafter determined. No lawyer's clerk is waiting for you there. You and Mrs. Wragge get out--first opening the hamper at a convenient opportunity. Instead of containing chickens and Champagne, it contains a carpet-bag, with the things you want for the night. You take your tickets for a place previously determined on, and I take the chaise back to York. Arrived once more in this house, I collect the luggage left behind, and send for the woman downstairs. 'Ladies so charmed with such and such a place (wrong place of course), that they have determined to stop there. Pray accept the customary week's rent, in place of a week's warning. Good day.' Is the clerk looking for me at the York terminus? Not he. I take my ticket under his very nose; I follow you with the luggage along your line of railway--and where is the trace left of your departure? Nowhere. The fairy has vanished; and the legal authorities are left in the lurch."

"Why do you talk of difficulties?" asked Magdalen. "The difficulties seem to be provided for."

"All but ONE," said Captain Wragge, with an ominous emphasis on the last word. "The Grand Difficulty of humanity from the cradle to the grave--Money." He slowly winked his green eye; sighed with deep feeling; and buried his insolvent hands in his unproductive pockets.

"What is the money wanted for?" inquired Magdalen.

"To pay my bills," replied the captain, with a touching simplicity. "Pray understand! I never was--and never shall be--personally desirous of paying a single farthing to any human creature on the habitable globe. I am speaking in your interest, not in mine."

"My interest?"

"Certainly. You can't get safely away from York to-morrow without the chaise. And I can't get the chaise without money. The landlady's brother will lend it if he sees his sister's bill receipted, and if he gets his day's hire beforehand--not otherwise. Allow me to put the transaction in a business light. We have agreed that I am to be remunerated for my course of dramatic instruction out of your future earnings on the stage. Very good. I merely

draw on my future prospects; and you, on whom those prospects depend, are naturally my banker. For mere argument's sake, estimate my share in your first year's salary at the totally inadequate value of a hundred pounds. Halve that sum; quarter that sum--"

"How much do you want?" said Magdalen, impatiently.

Captain Wragge was sorely tempted to take the Reward at the top of the handbills as his basis of calculation. But he felt the vast future importance of present moderation; and actually wanting some twelve or thirteen pounds, he merely doubled the amount, and said, "Five-and-twenty."

Magdalen took the little bag from her bosom, and gave him the money, with a contemptuous wonder at the number of words which he had wasted on her for the purpose of cheating on so small a scale. In the old days at Combe-Raven, five-and-twenty pounds flowed from a stroke of her father's pen into the hands of any one in the house who chose to ask for it.

Captain Wragge's eyes dwelt on the little bag as the eyes of lovers dwell on their mistresses. "Happy bag!" he murmured, as she put it back in her bosom. He rose; dived into a corner of the room; produced his neat dispatch-box; and solemnly unlocked it on the table between Magdalen and himself.

"The nature of the man, my dear girl--the nature of the man," he said, opening one of his plump little books bound in calf and vellum. "A transaction has taken place between us. I must have it down in black and white." He opened the book at a blank page, and wrote at the top, in a fine mercantile hand: "Miss Vanstone, the Younger: In account with Horatio Wragge, late o f the Royal Militia. Dr.--Cr. Sept. 24th, 1846. Dr.: To estimated value of H. Wragge's interest in Miss V.'s first year's salary--say--200 pounds. Cr. By paid on account, 25 pounds." Having completed the entry--and having also shown, by doubling his original estimate on the Debtor side, that Magdalen's easy compliance with his demand on her had not been thrown away on him--the captain pressed his blotting-paper over the wet ink, and put away the book with the air of a man who had done a virtuous action, and who was above boasting about it.

"Excuse me for leaving you abruptly," he said. "Time is of importance; I must make sure of the chaise. If Mrs. Wragge comes in, tell her nothing--she is not sharp enough to be trusted. If she presumes to ask questions, extinguish her immediately. You have only to be loud. Pray take my authority into your own hands, and be as loud with Mrs. Wragge as I am!"

He snatched up his tall hat, bowed, smiled, and tripped out of the room.

Sensible of little else but of the relief of being alone; feeling no more distinct impression than the vague sense of some serious change having taken place in herself and her position, Magdalen let the events of the morning come and go like shadows on her mind, and waited wearily for what the day might bring forth. After the lapse of some time, the door opened softly. The giant figure of Mrs. Wragge stalked into the room, and stopped opposite Magdalen in solemn astonishment.

"Where are your Things?" asked Mrs. Wragge, with a burst of incontrollable anxiety. "I've been upstairs looking in your drawers. Where are your night-gowns and night-caps? and your petticoats and stockings? and your hair-pins and bear's grease, and all the rest of it?"

"My luggage is left at the railway station," said Magdalen.

Mrs. Wragge's moon-face brightened dimly. The ineradicable female instinct of Curiosity tried to sparkle in her faded blue eyes--flickered piteously--and died out.

"How much luggage?" she asked, confidentially. "The captain's gone out. Let's go and get it!"

"Mrs. Wragge!" cried a terrible voice at the door.

For the first time in Magdalen's experience, Mrs. Wragge was deaf to the customary stimulant. She actually ventured on a feeble remonstrance in the presence of her husband.

"Oh, do let her have her Things!" pleaded Mrs. Wragge. "Oh, poor soul, do let her have her Things!"

The captain's inexorable forefinger pointed to a corner of the room--dropped slowly as his wife retired before it--and suddenly stopped at the region of her shoes.

"Do I hear a clapping on the floor!" exclaimed Captain Wragge, with an expression of horror. "Yes; I do. Down at heel again! The left shoe this time. Pull it up, Mrs. Wragge! pull it up!--The chaise will be here to-morrow morning at nine o'clock," he continued, addressing Magdalen. "We can't possibly venture on claiming your box. There is note-paper. Write down a list of the necessaries you want. I will take it myself to the shop, pay the bill

for you, and bring back the parcel. We must sacrifice the box--we must, indeed."

While her husband was addressing Magdalen, Mrs. Wragge had stolen out again from her corner, and had ventured near enough to the captain to hear the words "shop" and "parcel." She clapped her great hands together in ungovernable excitement, and lost all control over herself immediately.

"Oh, if it's shopping, let me do it!" cried Mrs. Wragge. "She's going out to buy her Things! Oh, let me go with her--please let me go with her!"

"Sit down!" shouted the captain. "Straight! more to the right--more still. Stop where you are!"

Mrs. Wragge crossed her helpless hands on her lap, and melted meekly into tears.

"I do so like shopping," pleaded the poor creature; "and I get so little of it now!"

Magdalen completed her list; and Captain Wragge at once left the room with it. "Don't let my wife bore you," he said, pleasantly, as he went out. "Cut her short, poor soul--cut her short!"

"Don't cry," said Magdalen, trying to comfort Mrs. Wragge by patting her on the shoulder. "When the parcel comes back you shall open it."

"Thank you, my dear," said Mrs. Wragge, meekly, drying her eyes; "thank you kindly. Don't notice my handkerchief, please. It's such a very little one! I had a nice lot of them once, with lace borders. They're all gone now. Never mind! It will comfort me to unpack your Things. You're very good to me. I like you. I say--you won't be angry, will you? Give us a kiss."

Magdalen stooped over her with the frank grace and gentleness of past days, and touched her faded cheek. "Let me do something harmless!" she thought, with a pang at her heart--"oh let me do something innocent and kind for the sake of old times!"

She felt her eyes moistening, and silently turned away.

That night no rest came to her. That night the roused forces of Good and Evil fought their terrible fight for her soul--and left the strife between them still in suspense when morning came. As the clock of York Minster struck

nine, she followed Mrs. Wragge to the chaise, and took her seat by the captain's side. In a quarter of an hour more York was in the distance, and the highroad lay bright and open before them in the morning sunlight.

THE END OF THE SECOND SCENE.