

the cat ran out into the passage before him.

XVI

### THE RAT TO THE RESCUE

Marco walked through the passage and into the kitchen part of the basement. The doors were all locked, and they were solid doors. He ran up the flagged steps and found the door at the top shut and bolted also, and that too was a solid door. His jailers had plainly made sure that it should take time enough for him to make his way into the world, even after he got out of the wine-cellar.

The cat had run away to some part of the place where mice were plentiful. Marco was by this time rather gnawingly hungry himself. If he could get into the kitchen, he might find some fragments of food left in a cupboard; but there was no moving the locked door. He tried the outlet into the area, but that was immovable. Then he saw near it a smaller door. It was evidently the entrance to the coal-cellar under the pavement. This was proved by the fact that trodden coal-dust marked the flagstones, and near it stood a scuttle with coal in it.

This coal-scuttle was the thing which might help him! Above the area door was a small window which was supposed to light the entry. He could not reach it, and, if he reached it, he could not open it. He could throw pieces of coal at the glass and break it, and then he could shout for help when people passed by. They might not notice or understand where the shouts came from at first, but, if he kept them up, some one's attention would be attracted in the end.

He picked a large-sized solid piece of coal out of the heap in the scuttle, and threw it with all his force against the grimy glass. It smashed through and left a big hole. He threw another, and the entire pane was splintered and fell outside into the area. Then he saw it was broad daylight, and guessed that he had been shut up a good many hours. There was plenty of coal in the scuttle, and he had a strong arm and a good aim. He smashed pane after pane, until only the framework remained. When he shouted, there would be nothing between his voice and the street. No one could see him, but if he could do something which would make people slacken their pace to listen, then he could call out that he was in the basement of the house with the broken window.

"Hallo!" he shouted. "Hallo! Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!"

But vehicles were passing in the street, and the passers-by were absorbed in their own business. If they heard a sound, they did not stop to inquire into it.

"Hallo! Hallo! I am locked in!" yelled Marco, at the topmost power of his lungs. "Hallo! Hallo!"

After half an hour's shouting, he began to think that he was wasting his strength.

"They only think it is a boy shouting," he said. "Some one will notice in time. At night, when the streets are quiet, I might make a policeman hear. But my father does not know where I am. He will be trying to find me--so will Lazarus--so will The Rat. One of them might pass through this very street, as I did. What can I do!"

A new idea flashed light upon him.

"I will begin to sing a Samavian song, and I will sing it very loud. People nearly always stop a moment to listen to music and find out where it comes from. And if any of my own people came near, they would stop at once--and now and then I will shout for help."

Once when they had stopped to rest on Hampstead Heath, he had sung a valiant Samavian song for The Rat. The Rat had wanted to hear how he would sing when they went on their secret journey. He wanted him to sing for the Squad some day, to make the thing seem real. The Rat had been greatly excited, and had begged for the song often. It was a stirring martial thing with a sort of trumpet call of a chorus. Thousands of Samavians had sung it together on their way to the battle-field,

hundreds of years ago.

He drew back a step or so, and, putting his hands on his hips, began to sing, throwing his voice upward that it might pass through the broken window. He had a splendid and vibrant young voice, though he knew nothing of its fine quality. Just now he wanted only to make it loud.

In the street outside very few people were passing. An irritable old gentleman who was taking an invalid walk quite jumped with annoyance when the song suddenly trumpeted forth. Boys had no right to yell in that manner. He hurried his step to get away from the sound. Two or three other people glanced over their shoulders, but had not time to loiter. A few others listened with pleasure as they drew near and passed on.

"There's a boy with a fine voice," said one.

"What's he singing?" said his companion. "It sounds foreign."

"Don't know," was the reply as they went by. But at last a young man who was a music-teacher, going to give a lesson, hesitated and looked about him. The song was very loud and spirited just at this moment. The music-teacher could not understand where it came from, and paused to find out. The fact that he stopped attracted the attention of the next comer, who also paused.

"Who's singing?" he asked. "Where is he singing?"

"I can't make out," the music-teacher laughed. "Sounds as if it came out of the ground."

And, because it was queer that a song should seem to be coming out of the ground, a costermonger stopped, and then a little boy, and then a workingwoman, and then a lady.

There was quite a little group when another person turned the corner of the street. He was a shabby boy on crutches, and he had a frantic look on his face.

And Marco actually heard, as he drew near to the group, the tap-tap-tap of crutches.

"It might be," he thought. "It might be!"

And he sang the trumpet-call of the chorus as if it were meant to reach the skies, and he sang it again and again. And at the end of it shouted, "Hallo! Hallo! Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!"

The Rat swung himself into the group and looked as if he had gone crazy. He hurled himself against the people.

"Where is he! Where is he!" he cried, and he poured out some breathless

words; it was almost as if he sobbed them out.

"We've been looking for him all night!" he shouted. "Where is he! Marco! Marco! No one else sings it but him. Marco! Marco!" And out of the area, as it seemed, came a shout of answer.

"Rat! Rat! I'm here in the cellar--locked in. I'm here!" and a big piece of coal came hurtling through the broken window and fell crashing on the area flags. The Rat got down the steps into the area as if he had not been on crutches but on legs, and banged on the door, shouting back:

"Marco! Marco! Here I am! Who locked you in? How can I get the door open?"

Marco was close against the door inside. It was The Rat! It was The Rat! And he would be in the street again in a few minutes. "Call a policeman!" he shouted through the keyhole. "The people locked me in on purpose and took away the keys."

Then the group of lookers-on began to get excited and press against the area railings and ask questions. They could not understand what had happened to cause the boy with the crutches to look as if he were crazy with terror and relief at the same time.

And the little boy ran delightedly to fetch a policeman, and found one in the next street, and, with some difficulty, persuaded him that it was

his business to come and get a door open in an empty house where a boy who was a street singer had got locked up in a cellar.

## XVII

"IT IS A VERY BAD SIGN"

The policeman was not so much excited as out of temper. He did not know what Marco knew or what The Rat knew. Some common lad had got himself locked up in a house, and some one would have to go to the landlord and get a key from him. He had no intention of laying himself open to the law by breaking into a private house with his truncheon, as The Rat expected him to do.

"He got himself in through some of his larks, and he'll have to wait till he's got out without smashing locks," he growled, shaking the area door. "How did you get in there?" he shouted.

It was not easy for Marco to explain through a keyhole that he had come in to help a lady who had met with an accident. The policeman thought this mere boy's talk. As to the rest of the story, Marco knew that it could not be related at all without saying things which could not be