

XIX.

Then Mr. Hoopdriver returned to the little room with the lead-framed windows where he had dined, and where the bed was now comfortably made,

sat down on the box under the window, stared at the moon rising on the shining vicarage roof, and tried to collect his thoughts. How they whirled at first! It was past ten, and most of Midhurst was tucked away in bed, some one up the street was learning the violin, at rare intervals a belated inhabitant hurried home and woke the echoes, and a corncrake kept up a busy churning in the vicarage garden. The sky was deep blue, with a still luminous afterglow along the black edge of the hill, and the white moon overhead, save for a couple of yellow stars, had the sky to herself.

At first his thoughts were kinetic, of deeds and not relationships. There was this malefactor, and his victim, and it had fallen on Mr. Hoopdriver to take a hand in the game. HE was married. Did she know he was married? Never for a moment did a thought of evil concerning her cross Hoopdriver's mind. Simple-minded people see questions of morals so much better than superior persons--who have read and thought themselves complex to impotence. He had heard her voice, seen the frank light in her eyes, and she had been weeping--that sufficed. The rights of the case he hadn't properly grasped. But he would. And that smirking--well, swine was the mildest for him. He recalled the exceedingly unpleasant incident of the railway bridge. "Thin we won't detain yer, thenks,"

said Mr. Hoopdriver, aloud, in a strange, unnatural, contemptible voice, supposed to represent that of Bechamel. "Oh, the BEGGAR! I'll be level with him yet. He's afraid of us detectives--that I'll SWEAR." (If Mrs. Wardor should chance to be on the other side of the door within earshot, well and good.)

For a space he meditated chastisements and revenges, physical impossibilities for the most part,--Bechamel staggering headlong from the impact of Mr. Hoopdriver's large, but, to tell the truth, ill supported fist, Bechamel's five feet nine of height lifted from the ground and quivering under a vigorously applied horsewhip. So pleasant was such dreaming, that Mr. Hoopdriver's peaked face under the moonlight was transfigured. One might have paired him with that well-known and universally admired triumph, 'The Soul's Awakening,' so sweet was his ecstasy. And presently with his thirst for revenge glutted by six or seven violent assaults, a duel and two vigorous murders, his mind came round to the Young Lady in Grey again.

She was a plucky one too. He went over the incident the barmaid at the Angel had described to him. His thoughts ceased to be a torrent, smoothed down to a mirror in which she was reflected with infinite clearness and detail. He'd never met anything like her before. Fancy that bolster of a barmaid being dressed in that way! He whuffed a contemptuous laugh. He compared her colour, her vigour, her voice, with the Young Ladies in Business with whom his lot had been cast. Even in tears she was beautiful, more beautiful indeed to him, for it made her

seem softer and weaker, more accessible. And such weeping as he had seen before had been so much a matter of damp white faces, red noses, and hair coming out of curl. Your draper's assistant becomes something of a judge of weeping, because weeping is the custom of all Young Ladies in Business, when for any reason their services are dispensed with. She could weep--and (by Gosh!) she could smile. HE knew that, and reverting to acting abruptly, he smiled confidentially at the puckered pallor of the moon.

It is difficult to say how long Mr. Hoopdriver's pensiveness lasted. It seemed a long time before his thoughts of action returned. Then he remembered he was a 'watcher'; that to-morrow he must be busy. It would be in character to make notes, and he pulled out his little note-book. With that in hand he fell a-thinking again. Would that chap tell her the 'tecks were after them? If so, would she be as anxious to get away as HE was? He must be on the alert. If possible he must speak to her. Just a significant word, "Your friend--trust me!"--It occurred to him that to-morrow these fugitives might rise early to escape. At that he thought of the time and found it was half-past eleven. "Lord!" said he, "I must see that I wake." He yawned and rose. The blind was up, and he pulled back the little chintz curtains to let the sunlight strike across to the bed, hung his watch within good view of his pillow, on a nail that supported a kettle-holder, and sat down on his bed to undress. He lay awake for a little while thinking of the wonderful possibilities of the morrow, and thence he passed gloriously into the wonderland of dreams.