

I am aware that "bolted" is not an elegant word, indeed, I very much doubt if you will find it in Johnson's or Webster's dictionaries, in the sense in which I have used it, but it is expressive, if not strictly correct, and it was correct in so far that Ben went off like a shot from a gun.

Not alone, however.

After him went the artist, crying "Ben, Ben!" and entreating a friend he met on the stairs to help him in the pursuit.

Down the street went Ben, the two gentlemen following in the pursuit.

More than once the dog paused until they almost got up to him, looked towards them, wagged its tail, seemed to dance and frolic about, and then was off again faster than ever.

"Five shillings for whoever stops him!" cried the artist, whose anxiety was momentarily increasing, and the pursuing party was swelled by this offer, from two to a dozen.

Still the dog kept on in advance of the crowd at its heels, and at last, finding the game of pausing and wagging his tail somewhat dangerous to his prolonged liberty, he gave it up, and finding the matter both serious and earnest, ran through courts, passages, and doubled round corners, until the very foremost of his pursuers completely lost sight of him.

"It's of no use," said Leinster, wearily, and conscious for the first time of the ridiculous figure he must cut. "I must offer a reward for the dog. No doubt before night he will be found and brought back again."

So without further delay, he went into a printer's, ordered some hundreds of handbills to be struck off, then distributed all over Manchester, describing the dog, offering a very handsome reward to any person that would restore it.

The day passed, however.

Ben was still absent, and the longer the artist thought of his loss, of the great store that was laid upon the dog, the more nervously anxious he became.

What would Garston the cotton-spinner say, when he heard that the dog he valued so highly was lost?

Would he not consider it wilful neglect, and be furious at it?

What would pretty Mary Garston say, when she heard that her dear brother's pet was lost through his apparent carelessness?

He could not tell, could not work, and he walked about his studio restlessly, listening to the sounds in the street, the footsteps on the stairs; but day closed, and he had to go back to his lodgings with Ben's whereabouts still a mystery.

Saturday came and went in the same way, Sunday passed over, Monday came, and still the dog was missing, and no amount of offered reward seemed able to bring it back again.

What should he do?

The next day the carrier would come to take it home again.

Once he thought of going to Oldham, proclaiming his loss, and asking its owner's advice as to what could be done.

But he shrank from this.

Something might turn up to render his confession unnecessary.

A full day of grace still remained.

He would trust to chance and fortune to help him out of the scrape into which he had fallen. Tuesday morning came, and his feelings were far from enviable.

Hark! there is a footstep on the stair, a heavy footstep.

It is too early for the carrier.

Yes, it comes higher and higher, and there is a whistle as though calling a dog.

Surely it must be Ben returned at last, and the artist springs to his feet, as though it were a child that was being restored to him.

But he remembers the reward. "A very handsome reward" the handbills had promised. If he showed too much eagerness, the finder might expect too much.

He would not rush to the door as he had done several times before, only to be disappointed, and so thinking, he sat down to his work again.

The heavy tread came to the door, paused, and knocked.

"Come in!" said the artist, affecting to be busily occupied.

"Want any chips?" asked a rough voice, and Leinster could scarcely forbear from throwing a cast, or the first thing his hand could rest upon, at him, so infuriated did he feel.

At length the dreaded carrier arrived.

Slowly he toiled up the stairs, knocked at the door, and walked in.

"Eight, maister, thee's making that pictur' bonny; the dog's fine. Hast done with it?"

The thought entered the artist's head to say he must keep it a few days longer, but this was useless, and he replied very reluctantly—

"Well, no, I haven't quite done with it."

"Oh, the maister thawt thee had done with it, as thee sent it whoam on Saturday."

"Sent it home!" exclaimed Leinster, with a gasp of relief. "Then it is at home? Oh, I am so thankful. How did it get there?"

"Guess it walked," replied the man. "Anyhow, it come scratching at the door on Saturday morning, 'fore they was up, and made the spinner get up and come out with it; and dog's found summat, as Maister Garston says he thanks thee for, but you's to go to Oldham yo'rself, and then thee'll know what 'tis."

"Found something! what could the dog find?" asked the artist, curiously.

"That's just what thee's got to find out when thee gets thar," was the sturdy rejoinder. "But

since yo's not done with the dog, mayhap you'll like it back again?"

"No, thank you; I have had quite enough of Master Ben and his sagacity. If I am obliged to have another sitting, I will come to Oldham for it."

"Aye, yo'd better. Maister Garston told me to ask you to come on to-day, and see what Ben found."

"I suppose it was nothing of mine that the dog found, was it?"

"Thee knows best about that theessen, mon," was the half-grinning reply. "It's alive, leastways, it war when I come from Oldham this morning."

"Alive!" repeated the wondering artist. "What can it be? Come, man, you may as well tell me at once."

"Na," was the grinning reply; "thee lost the dog, and though its maister be glad o' what's found, yo's to come and see't for theessen."

"Well, if you won't tell me, I suppose I must restrain my curiosity, but I cannot go to Oldham to-day. I will do so to-morrow; tell Mr. Garston so. I suppose Miss Mary has not returned?"

"But she have then. She comed whoam yesterday, and a fine tak' on she be in; so be all Garston's gals. I think they'd ha' put you and the dog in the mill pond, afore yo' should ha' lost un, to find what he did."

"But what could the dog's discovery have to do with them?"

"Thee'll know that soon enough, mon, when thee gets there, and thee'dst best go to-day."

And so saying the carrier departed, while the artist muttered—

"He is right. I will go to-day."

#### CHAPTER V.

##### FRANK GRESHAM'S GIFT.

The girl who called herself Florence Carr was something of an enigma to everyone she came in contact with.

Not wilfully or intentionally, for she would far rather have been like those around her—rough, ignorant, and uncouth—than have to encounter the curious suspicious glances, and questions that were continually asked or directed towards her.

Her soft, delicate hands, her quiet, refined ladylike ways, her speech and pronunciation, and the superior education which it was evident she had received, all tended to give significance to the question which in various forms was often asked—How was it that with these advantages she had sunk so low as to be almost destitute, glad of the shelter of Moll Arkshaw's home, and willing also to work in a factory as a common mill hand to gain a livelihood?

The charity of the world is such, that any degree of mystery concerning a person is always taken as a certain evidence of sin or disgrace.

On this point, however, opinions regarding Florence Carr were divided, the men declaring that no really bad woman with such a face as hers would work and lead the life of poverty and hardship she did, the women being equally positive that only a bad woman could have sunk so low as to be obliged to do it.

Meanwhile, the subject of this gossip had a very simple and apparently straightforward account to give of herself.

Her father, she said, had been the captain of a ship in the merchant service, but had died little more than a year before.

From that time her mother and herself had tried to make a living by keeping a school, but this had failed; her mother had sickened and died.

Being now alone in the world, she had sold everything left and started for Manchester, hoping to get some work she could do, and by which she could earn a living there, and failing that, intending to go on to Liverpool and emigrate to America, where some of her mother's relatives resided.

Misfortune, however, pursued her.

On the very day of her arrival in Manchester, her pocket was picked, her purse lost or stolen, and only a few shillings, fortunately in another pocket, remained of her store. In this extremity she knew not what to do; the great town stunned, frightened, and bewildered her, and not knowing, scarcely caring, what way or where she went—or, indeed, what became of her—she walked on in the direction of Oldham, wandering out of the way a great deal, and reaching it scarcely a quarter of an hour before she met Moll, with the other mill hands, coming from their work.

Such was her story.

Some of it no doubt was true, but whether it was all the truth remained still open to question; it was plausible and possible, it explained her superior education and present poverty and destitution, and though some envious persons declared it too well told to be true, there were others who accepted it without a doubt, and of these Moll Arkshaw was the foremost.

A week passed from that night when young Gresham met and tried to walk home with her, and though they had met several times, the girl's eyes always drooped when he came near, as though she would not look at him, and she seemed to cling, almost as though for protection, to the side of Moll.

It was very annoying for the young man, at least, he thought so, still more so because his love affairs had never troubled him at the commencement; it was the closing, not the opening, of an account on Cupid's bank that had usually bothered him most.

Opposition, however, only increased his determination to succeed.

Plucking fruit that grew common on every hedgerow was no sport at all in comparison with the wonderful peach that hung so high on the wall, that it was almost as much as a man's life was worth to climb up and possess himself of it.

But any thing worth having is worth climbing for; the prize we have to strain every muscle to possess is always most eagerly sought after, and Frank Gresham, finding the fruit did not fall at his bidding, determined, at any risk or consequence, to scramble up to and possess it.

For several days he had tried to meet the girls when work was over, and once he had succeeded.

Noticing his approach, however, Florence had begged Moll to keep with her, and the young man, despite his ready assurance, found his wit and impudence scarcely equal to the fire of words which came upon him from the two pretty girls whom he so persistently followed.

"Do you always go out together?" he asked, a little impatiently, after two or three vain attempts to talk to Florence alone.

"Awful when we beent apart," replied Moll, saucily.

"I should have thought two such pretty girls would have had a sweetheart each to separate them," continued the cotton-spinner.

"Would yo'?" said Moll. "Mayhap we have, but yo're skeering them awa; moy Willie will be rest mad when he sees me."

"And what will your sweetheart say to you, Miss Flo?" inquired Gresham, evidently indifferent to Willie's anger, and bending down to try to catch a glimpse of the velvety, grey lingering eyes.

"I don't know," was the low reply.

"Then you have a sweetheart?" said the young man, in a tone of vexation.

The girl addressed made no reply, except to droop her head a little lower, in the vain hope of hiding her blushes.

"Sweetheart; to be sure she has," laughed Moll, coming to the rescue; "the men of Oldham beent blind nor fools, but it doan't do us no good to be seen wi' yo', maister, and here we are to our own door, so good night to yo'."

And so saying, she took Florence by the hand and led her in, nodding good-night to the young man.

"May I not come in?" he asked, still standing at the garden gate.

"No, not yo'," was the reply, as the house door was somewhat unceremoniously closed in his face.

The night was quite dark, for December had set in, and the lane in which stood Gretty's Cottages, could boast of but one lamp, which simply made the darkness around seem more deep and impenetrable.

Through the blind in the tiny parlour, the ruddy light of a fire and more steady flame of a candle were distinctly visible, and the young man who could count his wealth by thousands stood in the dark muddy lane, with the keen wind of December blowing upon him, watching for every shadow which fell on the blind of that small window.

There was the girl who had made such an impression on his fickle heart.

He could not see the colour of her hair, but he knew it well by memory, every gleaming dusky shade of it; and each curl and wave as it was reflected on the white calico which revealed and yet hid her from him, showed how perfect in line and feature was her face and figure.

Moll passed between the light and the window several times, so did a short crooked figure which Gresham fancied he had seen before, yet could not tell where.

"I must get hold of that young person," he thought, as he saw Jem's face, exaggerated by light and shadow upon the curtain; "she will take letters from me. Not a bad idea; I will go home and write one at once."

He was about to turn away, when a sound fell upon his ear, which for the moment chained him to the spot.

It was a piano, played with no mean skill, and by no ordinary player.

Moll Arkshaw's fingers could never have wrung out such wonderful pathos and feeling from that old half worn out instrument, and the visitor asked himself with something like an oath, who that strange beautiful girl could be, for that she was the musician he was fully convinced.

Presently, the performer began to sing a simple English ballad, which one would almost think she selected in very mockery at her own desolation.

The song was "Home, Sweet Home," and the pure soprano voice faltered, and seemed as though it would break down as it went through that heart-stirring melody.

But it did not yield—it went through it all, as though forcing itself to do penance for some imaginary fault, and it was not until the voice ceased and the last note died away, that the young man roused himself from the spell that had fallen over him, and turned to depart.

As he did so, the cottage door opened and Jem, who had been sent on some trifling errand, came out into the lane.

"Hist!" said the young man, noticing from whence she came.

The girl started and paused.

"Hist!" he continued. "Wouldst like to earn a crown?"

"Ees, if thee'll tell me how," was the reply. "That is easy enough. You must give a letter which I will write, to the young woman called Florence Carr. Will you do it?"

"Aye, mon, an' thee'll give me the brass,"

"I'll do that; but you musn't let Moll Arkshaw know of it."

"Eigh, moa, I beant such a fool."

"Very well. Meet me here to-morrow at ten in the morning, and you shall have the money and the letter; I'll pay you well if you help me. I suppose you know me."

"Eigh, aye, mon; yo's Frank o' Mearys. I knows thee, so do all the folks in Oldham."

"Not much use may trying to disguise myself, it seems," muttered the young man with a laugh. "Never mind, meet me here to-morrow, and there's a shilling to buy a new ribbon with."

"Thankee," said the girl as she took the coin; then she muttered under her breath, as the cotton spinner walked off with rapid strides, "Granny war reet, she'll go to the bad wi'out any charm or spell to tak' her thar."

A conclusion that seemed to afford her great satisfaction.

The next day when she and Moll returned home to dinner, Florence was surprised at Jem's behaviour, for no sooner had Moll left the room for a moment, than the cripple, with a mysterious face, pushed a small white packet that seemed like a thick letter into her hand, and whispered—

"Hide it away; don't let Moll see it."

She then continued her work of putting the dinner on the table.

Instinctively the girl obeyed, thrusting the curious parcel into her pocket, and managing to slip away alone for a minute or two before the dinner hour was over, opened and examined its contents.

There was a letter and a pair of earrings in the packet, the latter very pretty in design, and worth two or three pounds.

The girl looked at them for a moment, smiled bitterly, even contemptuously. They had no charm for her, and she put them back in their case indifferently, without a lingering thought or care.

She was most interested in the letter.

Twice she read it over, carefully and critically; it expressed great admiration and love for her fair self, and entreated her acceptance of the enclosed trifle as an earnest of his sincerity, ending in a postscript, that if she wished for or desired anything, she had only to express it, and to the extent of his fortune it should be hers.

As I have said, she read the letter over twice, as though to impress it upon her memory, then deliberately tore it into shreds, stuffed the pieces of paper into the jeweller's case with the earrings, and folding it up in a piece of paper, sealed and directed it.

"You will find the answer under my pillow," she said in a low tone to Jem, and then she went off with Moll once more to work.

"Rather surprise him, I fancy," she thought more than once, as the cotton-spinner's chagrin occurred to her mind. "He will come to woo me in a very different style and manner before I listen to him."

And then a sad, pained, thoughtful look came over her fair young face, a look which seemed to add a dozen years to it in age as well as in suffering.

They had not quite reached the mill, the strange look was still on her face, when the cry of a child was heard, and a baby, who had been carelessly held in the arms of a small girl, fell to the ground.

It was not a serious accident, but the strange mill girl stopped, picked it up, looked eagerly into its face, tried to soothe it, and then pressing a kiss on its small face, gave it back to the girl without a word.

Her face was pale, however; there was trouble as well as tears in her eyes, and she said to Moll, who had been scolding the careless young nurse—

"The baby reminds me of my little sister, and she is dead."

"Pure lassie, thee's had grief enough, but the baby's in heaven with the angels; don't go to fret yersen."

Something like a low sob was the reply.

But Florence Carr was not one to yield to any expression of emotion. For one so young she had great self-command, and she forced back the tears and sobs now, and walked into the mill with tearless eyes, and a face not more than usually pale.

"Wonder what she's rit (written) to him," muttered Jem, as she turned the small packet over and examined it, not daring to break the seal.

"I thort he sent her a gift, but she's sent back the box it war in if he did."

It never occurred to the cripple that the present, whatever it was, would be returned to the giver, such notions of independence and honor being exceedingly rare in the class and among the persons to which she belonged, or with whom she came in contact.

Neither did Frank Gresham expect it; whether his proposals and questionable attentions were accepted or not, he had not a shadow of a doubt but that his present would be.

Never had a present been returned to him before from any girl to whom he had made it.

It was beyond his conception why this one—he had bribed the poor cripple to place it in the hands of Florence—should be rejected by her.

His favor was created with a cool, calm, scornful return which fairly surprised him—him, the rich mill owner, whose smile had been so often courted by those poor moths whom the glitter of his gold had fascinated and drawn towards him, only to find—too late—that the dazzle could destroy, and light the way to destruction.

(To be continued.)