

After calming himself sufficiently he returned to the fire, and kissing Helen he said quietly:

"There, we won't trouble ourselves more, but you will leave me now, as I have business to attend to."

No business for Conlon that night, for there was a struggle going on in his soul. A vivid picture kept flashing before his eyes. He saw two forces arrayed against each other. On one side were the sweet faces of his wife and daughter, praying, ever praying for his return. On the opposite side he saw the world, with its cruel countenance and sneering smile, and a scornful finger pointed at him, a weakling, who could not withstand the tears of those whom he loved.

"What a wretched state I am in," he muttered, as he threw himself into the chair before the fire. "How long will this torture last?"

He could feel the waves of remorse slowly rising and threatening to overcome his resolution. At last, with his head buried in his hands, he dropped into a troubled sleep.

*
* *

As the gray dawn of the approaching day was diffusing itself over heaven and earth, and the stars, as if ashamed of their feeble light, were fast retreating, Conlon awoke with a start, cramped and sore from his uncomfortable position. Passing his hand across his brow he rose to his feet and began to walk up and down the library.

Whilst he was thus engaged the library door opened softly, and Helen, bright and cheerful this happy morn, came toward him with a glad cry of "Merry Christmas!" on her lips.

"How kind of you, father," she said, "to be up so early and ready to accompany us to mass. We must hurry or we shall be late."

A firm voice urging him on, but his weak resolve held him back. But there stood Helen at the door, waiting for him, there was the pleading look upon her face and the yearning love in her eyes.