

him, a prisoner? I might lie here and starve to death, without a creature ever dreaming of seeking me!

At that thought I raised my voice and shouted with all my might. I shook the door and beat upon it with my fists. I took off my boots and banged away upon the walls of the room on each side. The plaster came off in patches. I had made several holes in the surface of the wall and hallooed myself hoarse before I remembered that the room was enclosed between the staircase and the larger attic. No sound I could make would travel beyond the walls of the echoing old house itself.

In despair I hurled my boots at the skylight, and as they fell back, with a shower of glass, upon the floor, I repeated my attack until nearly the whole of the panes were shattered.

But to what purpose? Had I only a chair, a box, anything to have aided me to reach nearer to that open space, so tantalising, so far above me! Liberty before my eyes, and unattainable!

Desperately I sprang up, with extended arms, of course only to fall back again bruised and trembling. I shouted again and again. My voice seemed to die away as it reached the outer air.

It was like being buried alive. I sat down beneath the shattered skylight, I was sick with hunger.

I tried to think of any way by which I might hope for help to reach me. But I could not.

Even should I be missed and a search set on foot, there was very little chance of my being found in time, I believed. What with my aching head, the want of food, and anxiety, I was already feeling a dull faintness creep over me which I imagined might be the forerunner of death.

By Tuesday morning no doubt I should be past help. Starved to death, or perhaps my brain turned by the horror of my situation.

I turned out my pockets; a few pigeon-peas I found and devoured eagerly. Now I recollected with satisfaction that I had left plenty of grain strewn on the floor of my attic. At least my birds would not want food.

To-morrow, Sunday, Harry would come. He might go up to the roof, might hear me, might seek so far.

There was a chance, and in that I found some comfort. I prayed more earnestly than, I fear, I had ever done. Then I lay down in a corner and tried to sleep, but in vain.

Cold and hunger kept me waking. How long the night seemed! Then with the morning came the renewed hope of Gates's visit.

The sun shone warm and strong above my prison. Now and again the flap of a wing and a quick passing shadow told me my pigeons were taking their morning flight.

My hunger was now something dreadful. Oh! boys, I do not suppose you ever knew what it is to feel that fearful agony of hunger, without a prospect, ever so distant, of satisfying it.

To be intensely hungry, with the anticipation of a good meal, even at a distance, that is nothing—is indeed a pleasure. But to feel the grip of starvation right in you—to know that food is within easy reach, but that you cannot get it—oh, it is indeed awful!

As the morning wore on I several times shouted at the top of my voice. I took off my socks, and rolling each into a small ball, I threw them up through the open space above me, thinking thus perhaps to attract notice.

By-and-by the bells from the different churches began to ring for service. I knew that the time for Harry's visit must be gone by, as he was to have come early, and we were to start before church time.

Then the sun passed away from the roof, and the day had turned into afternoon.

I was beyond shouting now; my voice felt, like every thing else inside me, shrivelling up; my legs and feet were full of pins and needles, as we say, and I was drowsy, yet could not sleep.

The bells rang again for evening service, and I, under the broken skylight, knelt and prayed.

Then I must have dozed, and after a bit something soft came against my face, and I put up my hands and dear old Puck nestled into them.

I do hope, boys, you won't think any the worse of me if I tell the truth, which is that I fairly cried over my pigeon as I held him there; it did seem such a comfort in my forlorn case.

I was sorry now I had eaten the few peas in my pocket. I felt again, and I did find two; one of them I gave to Puck, and then I let go of him, for I wouldn't make him a prisoner, and as he had come in by the broken skylight so he could go free again.

That night I did sleep, but my slumber was broken by dreams of food. The most delicious things, which I am certain I had never eaten of, were before me. Not that I coveted them; a bit of bread would have been luxury enough.

But all at once a thought flashed upon my mind, and I sat up quite awake and full of a new hope. Why had I not thought of it before?

I slept no more. Even the pain of hunger was lessened in the brightness of the idea which had come to me.

Daylight seemed long in coming, but at last it was there, and then I began my preparations.

Tearing a strip of calico from my shirt, I wrote on it in thick black letters with the bit of pencil in my pocket these words:

*"Mark Reed is starving in the empty house, 10, Steel Street, Merton. Help!"*

Presently the sun rose bright again. It shone warm upon the roofs, and soon came my poor pigeons over my head. They had exhausted their stock of food, and having found their master, were appealing to him in their dumb way.

They sat on the edge of the skylight, dressing their feathers and cooing softly, but Puck came boldly down and lighted on my shoulder.

Then I rolled up the bit of linen I had written on, very small, and with one of my boot-laces fastened it under his wing as well as I could.

The creature remained perfectly still while I did this, as though understanding. Then when I let him free he went up through the skylight, rose like a rocket in the air, and I lost sight of him. And my hope seemed to vanish with the bird. It had looked so promising when the idea first occurred to me. Gates had told me of the experiments he had made, and how Puck had carried messages between his friends and himself. We were to have tried it only this very holiday; but then what a slender chance there was of the bird going to any one who would understand.

Puck had never been to the new house of the Gateses, and they were now away.

*(To be continued.)*

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A vigorous old sea-captain, who had lately buried his fourth wife, was accosted on the street by a brother salt, who, unaware of his bereavement, asked, "How's the wife, cap'n?" The captain looked him squarely in the face, and gravely replied, "Well, to tell the truth, I'm kind o' out o' wives just now."