

The moment they were gone she drew her chair to the fire, and crouched over it. She had a nasty way of muttering to herself when unduly excited.

"Yes, yes," she cried, "I'll sell him, if I die for it. He has beaten me like a dog, sold me as he would a beast, driven the very soul out of my body, and now I'll turn upon him. That poor flat was kind to me; he didn't care for me, but he was kind to me, and they shan't ruin him, for I'll sell the lot of them."

In her fury she almost screamed.

Then getting up from her chair, she took a small key from her pocket, and opened the box from which Jackson had extracted the papers.

"Here it is," she continued, "Deed of assignment between Andrew Macfarlane on the one part, gentleman, and Joseph Isaacs on the other part, merchant. Now for a blaze!"

Seating herself once more, she held the paper over the fire, and glanced over its contents.

With the lithe, noiseless step of a tiger when he crouches on his prey, Jackson crept into the room, his eyes gleaming with unnatural ferocity; his right hand clutched a billiard cue, and the nervous twitching of his countenance told of the passion that was working within him.

Bella's hand was poised over the fire, when there came a blow, a crash, a wild, despairing shriek, and the hapless woman fell senseless across the fender.

"By heavens, I've done for her!"

First taking the papers and putting them carefully into the box, he and the two Jews, who had entered the room, turned their attention to the victim of his violence.

She lay without symptom of life, her face crushed in by the terrible blow that had been dealt her. They carried her into an adjoining chamber and laid her on a bed. They chafed her hands, and poured brandy down her throat, and then they looked eagerly and anxiously into each other's faces, and Jackson, pale and horror-stricken, muttered "She's dead!"

The two Jews, trembling in every limb, implored him to act at once with decision. So assuring themselves that Bella was absolutely dead, they locked up the room and adjourned to the parlour, where, having carefully removed every trace of the scuffle, they began to devise the best means of escape and concealment.

"Oh, tear, oh, tear, this is a terrible bad job," sighed Mr. Abrahams ruefully, "vot vill become of you I don't know, Gus Jackson, indeed I don't."

"Become of us, you mean," said Jackson savagely, "don't think to shirk out of your share, for we shall all sink or swim together."

The Jews looked in no way comforted by this assurance. "Let us buy some petroline, get some shavings, and when all the customers are gone to-night, set fire to the place." The suggestion was Isaacs'.

"No, no," said Jackson, "that will never do. When a man wants to burn a house down, the fire, curse it, won't do its work; wood won't burn, paper won't blaze, and if it failed it would only cause the quicker discovery of the body."