

off if you pull the proper strings, I expect."

The constable's features puckered as if he were amused as well as satisfied. He didn't seem to notice the growing disturbance on Eneas's forehead and lips. The latter had a little trembling fit. His brow was wrinkled like a centenarian's.

The constable raised his foot to proceed.

"No," whispered Eneas, hoarsely. He held the constable's left arm with both his hands. "It's a little girl," he whispered on.

The sound as of a kiss drifted down.

"Mind its pain don't pizen you," said Josh Bell's voice, severely. And then the other voice sang out like a melodious soprano in a church.

"Josh," it cried, "why are you so good to me? I'm only a little lame girl what can't walk, and—"

"You just drop talking like that," exclaimed Josh Bell, as if he were threatening. "Of course you're lame. Nobody can't help that, and a howling old shame it is! I got it for you because I love you—strike me if I

don't—and you're the only living thing on the earth what I do love, so there!"

"You dear, dear old Josh!" said the other voice. There was deep content in it; just a little melancholy besides, though not enough to be saddening.

"Yes, and always will be—to you, s'long as I live." This defiantly.

But the constable had had quite enough of it by this time, including Eneas's tightening grip on his authoritative arm.

"Just loose me, Mr. Riddle," he said, quietly, yet insistently. He tried to free his coat-sleeve.

"No," said Eneas. "You shan't. I tell you, you shan't."

He clung to the officer tighter than before, and had the art to curl one leg round the iron balustrade of the stairs to strengthen his hold.

"Upon my word, Mr. Riddle, what are you at thinking of?" demanded the constable, forgetting everything except that he was being obstructed in the performance of his duty. Then there was an answering cry, a shuffle of feet above, and a wild, young face looked down at them.

"Coppers!" it shouted. It disappeared suddenly, and a clatter of feet told of Josh Bell's rapid flight.

Thus stimulated by the very view-hallo of his quarry, Constable Jameson was too much for Eneas. He burst from the preposterous old shop-keeper, and went up the stairs two and three at a time. The open door on the landing was nothing to him. He had no concerns with a pale-faced, lame girl, and he meant to do the parish a real service that afternoon.

Eneas gasped from exertion and distress of mind, and followed slowly.

But he did not pass that open door. His eyes fastened on the doll in an instant, then on the little girl in bed who held the doll and gazed at him as if he were an ogre. It was as mean a room as Eneas had set foot in for many a year, with broken window-panes, dirty floor, and only a consumptive apology for a fire in the grate, the broken window notwithstanding. But the room itself made little mark on his mind, comparatively. The child was all.

"What has he done, sir?" the child whispered, eagerly, yet with a sob in every word.

"Nothing," said Eneas, stoutly. "It's all—right, my dear. The doll's yours, and all that's on it—that I swear, before all the lawyers in the land."

He folded his arms and beamed, and, though the fright in the child's eyes seemed loth to disappear, it lost the intensity which had wounded Eneas himself worse than a blow.

"Tell me your name, my dear!" Eneas proceeded, gently.

"Lottie Craven, sir. But please don't let him ketch Josh!" There were tears in her eyes, and one of them began to roll.

"He'd better dare, that's all," said Eneas; and then, with a look of gratification which puzzled the child, he glanced about the room. "So you live here, my dear, do you?" he asked.

"Ye—s, sir!"

"With you father and mother, I daresay."

"No, sir; there's only old Molly—and me."

"Indeed!" said Eneas. He rubbed his hands as if his enjoyment was increasing. "And who is old Molly, my dear?"

"She's no one in particular, sir. She adopted me because I'm all alone, sir. She hasn't anyone but me, and I've only her—and Josh!"

"Oh, indeed. It's like that, is it? And what does she do for a living?"

Eneas felt ashamed as soon as he had asked the question. A living, forsooth! Why, all the articles in the room would not have tempted a ten-shilling bid from a broker, bed included. They weren't worth ten shillings, either, except the child herself and the doll.

Eneas cooed in his throat as he thought of the blessed anomaly of that doll amid such surroundings.

"She chars, sir," said the child.

But even while she said it her eyes strained towards the door and her tears broke loose. "Please, sir, what does he want Josh for?"

Then Eneas bent over the child with a strange yearning.

"My pretty," he said, stroking the thin, little hand that lay exposed to him, "he wants him just for a fancy of his own. He's a fool; that's what he is. Don't let it upset you. I swear by—everything—that he can't do a thing to the boy. And, my goodness, if ever I did see such a nice frock on a doll. May I just look at it?"

The doll was pushed towards him indifferently. Lottie's interests were still centred in the landing outside.

"Why did he run away like that, then?" she asked miserably.

"Boys are all fond of running, my dear. When I was his age I used to run just for the fun of it. I really did, though you wouldn't suppose it." He was picking fast at his own stitches, with fingers that trembled.

He pulled the five-pound note from its sheath.

"Well, if I ever did!" he exclaimed. "And see here—there's writing on it. A Christmas present! Why, my dear little creature, it's Father Claus; no, Father Christmas—Santa Claus, they call him, don't they?—oh, it's him that's sent you this. A five-pound note! Well, if I ever! And if you'll take my advice, you'll give it to your Molly and ask her to buy things to make you comfortable—both of you."

This said, clumsily enough, Eneas stumbled from the room. He was in a whirl of rapture at the success of his great plan after all. If he had schemed and worked for a month he could not have steered his benefaction better.

"Well, Miss Hankinson!" he said, eagerly, when he was again among his toys and lucky-bags, packages of sixpenny and shilling chocolate-boxes and dolls for the Whitechapel plutocrats.

Miss Hankinson sneezed and sneezed again. Recovering her breath, she made it plain that she had not worried herself into a fever during his absence.

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"Isn't it dreadful weather, Mr. Riddle?" she said over her handkerchief. "I'm sure one can't wonder we're doing so badly."

Eneas retreated to his parlour blithely. Badly, indeed! Why, he had never done better since he was born. It was the Christmas of his lifetime. And there and then he set to work and wrote the most troublesome letter he had ever yet written. He tore it up after all, and wrote another as follows:—

"Mr. Riddle, of the shop where you got the doll, sends you five shillings in a postal order enclosed. He wanted the doll to find a proper home, and is glad you took it to that little girl. But, my dear lad, you shouldn't have stole it. Not that I'm angry in the least, and if you will call on him at the shop, and wish to be honest, he will do all he can for you. I am,

"Yours sincerely,  
"Eneas Riddle.

"P.S.—Wishing you and Lottie a very happy Christmas. The five shillings is to help."

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