

with the intake of air. Every mind's eye in that fear-sick group leaped afar and drew a picture of the thing that was happening — then! At that very instant it was happening!

"Oh!" groaned some one, half aloud.

"It's after twelve," muttered another thickly.

"The jig's up wid Diek, kids. Blacky ought to be here wid de extry. Wot's a keepin' him?" said the first speaker, glaring over his shoulder in the direction of the door.

"Twelve sharp, that's wot it says," shuddered a small, pinched thief. "He's a-swingin' now."

Suddenly a wild, appalling shriek arose from the corner behind them. As one man, they whirled. Their gaze fell upon the cowering figure over there, now groveling on the floor in the agony of a terror that severed all the restraining bonds that had held his tongue so long.

They shrank back as their minds began to grasp the words he was shrieking in his madness.

He was sobbing out the thing that each man there had suspected from the first!

For many minutes they listened to his ravings, stupefied, aghast. Then a stealthy glance swept round the circle as if inspired by one central intelligence. It crept out of the corners of rattish eyes, reading as it ran the sinister circle, and hurried back to its intense, malevolent business of transfixing the quarry in the corner.

A hand reached down and grasped the leg of a short, heavy stool. Another went lower and clutched a long, murderous bar of iron that served as a poker. Savage eyes went in quest of deadly things, and purposeful hands obeyed the common impulse.

Then they advanced. . . .