

upstairs and tapped at the door of the 'first-floor-back.'

There was no answer; he opened the door, or rather tried to open it, for something was lying against it within, and it would hardly yield sufficiently to allow him to slip through.

It was Oliver, who was lying there on the floor, with deadly white face and closed eyes; a handkerchief dripping with blood hastily twisted round his arm, and a little pool of blood on the floor beside him.

Many men would have roused the house at once, but Agar Wilson had been through too many stormy scenes not to take matters coolly. He carefully shut the door behind him, lifted the young fellow from the floor, almost as if he had been a child, and laid him on the bed; then undid the handkerchief, disclosing an ugly cut on the arm, just above the wrist, from which the blood was still dropping freely. With a good deal of exertion he managed to tie the handkerchief higher up, and tight enough to stop the bleeding, or nearly so; then, after some searching, contrived to find a jug of water. By the time his collar was unfastened, and his thick, dark hair drenched with water, Oliver began slowly and painfully to come to himself; and Agar tore his own handkerchief into strips and proceeded to bandage up the cut in a business-like manner, leaving him to recover at his leisure.

After a moment Oliver looked round, vaguely and anxiously, and his lips moved.

'The knife!' he whispered impatiently. 'I was trying to pick it up. Don't let anyone see it.'

'All right. I'll see to it in a minute,' said Agar. Then, as Oliver moved restlessly, he added, 'There, lie still. I'll get it;' and, looking round, saw on the floor, near the door, a big pocket-knife, such as sailors carry, with the largest blade open and snapped off at the point.

The attempt to lift his head had nearly made Oliver faint again, and his friend was obliged to have recourse once more to the water-jug, after hurriedly snatching up the knife and putting it into his pocket.

'You'd better have let me alone,' the patient muttered presently, in anything but grateful tones.

'I think you would have bled to death if I had,' answered Agar, not in the least surprised or put out.

'I know. I felt as if I was dying, and I wish I had! It would have been much better.'

He spoke petulantly enough, and yet in despairing earnest, turning his face a little away from the light. But Agar only went on imperturbably with his bandaging.

'Aye, these young ones,' he said, half aloud. 'They always think it so easy to die and have done with it all. But there's a deal to be done before you come to that, my lad.'

Oliver said no more, and Agar was quite content to have him lie still and silent. He had strapped up the wound by this time neatly and safely enough, and next turned his attention to the room, which was in woeful disorder. His capable sailor-hands put things to rights in a very few minutes, so that it was, at any rate, possible to move about more easily; and, hurrying up to his own room, he brought down a blanket to lay over his patient, who seemed to be falling asleep, or at least was too tired to move or speak.

But in ten minutes or so Oliver looked up and spoke in a tone more like himself.

'You're very good,' Oliver said; 'but perhaps you'd better not stay. If he comes back he might be angry if he found you here.'

'Then he must be,' said Agar quietly. 'I'm not going to leave you to face him by yourself. How did this happen just now?'

'He'd been drinking—and he was mad, as usual,' said Oliver wearily, shutting his eyes. 'Not with me specially, but with Hutchins, till I tried to stop him going out to look for the chap with a knife. Then he turned on me; but I don't think he meant it. Thank God! I wasn't angry—I didn't strike him! But I wish this had been the end of it. It might have been.'