

over which was the inscription, "S. Hyman, Live Stock Merchant, Dealer in Foreign Curios."

A collarless youth, with an unpleasant squint, who was smoking and lounging in the doorway, stared sharply as they entered. It was a dark, ill-smelling place, full of cages and hutches containing parrots, canaries, dogs, cats, rabbits, and a lively family of monkeys. There was a stack of empty cages in one corner, and on the other side a titter of dusty objects, evidently the foreign curio department.

A door at the back of the shop stood ajar. A tattered curtain was half-drawn across the upper glass panels. Two or three figures could be seen beyond.

Richard set down the heavy cage with relief. The youth who had entered after fixed his crooked gaze on them both.

"Votcher vant?" he said in a thick voice with a strong Ghetto accent.

"We wish to dispose of a parrot," said Miss Pontigreve, holding her black silk skirt clear of the floor.

"Boss!" bawled the youth, without relaxing his stare.

The door opened, and the proprietor of the establishment appeared. He was as unkempt as the other, with a dark, cunning face.

"Vant ter sell parrit," said the youth, with a jerk of his thumb and a private wink.

The man walked up to the cage and pulled off the wrappings. The bird swung himself excitedly, danced, and curtsied, as though he recognized an old acquaintance, contributing his part to the incessant chorus of chirps, crows, and yelps.

"Vy do you vant to sell 'eem?" asked the man, turning to Miss Pontigreve.

"To tell the truth, I find him rather too much for me as a pet," she replied. "I did not know that parrots were so noisy."

"Taint a parrit," he interrupted shortly; "it's a bare-eyed cockatoo. Screecheth orful, and thet's vy you do not vant to kip 'eem."

"He gets on better with gentlemen than with females," put in Richard, feeling that the value of the goods was being unduly depreciated.

"Does 'e, ole sport?" said the youth, with a coarse laugh, in which the man joined. Then he turned to the cage again.

"Vell, vat do you vant for 'eem? Or vill you take anoder bird for exchange?"

"Oh no," said Miss Pontigreve, hastily, "but I shall be glad to come to terms," she added. "What do you offer for him?"

The pair exchanged another wink; then the man said:

"You vish to be rid of 'eem? Dot is vot it is. You can leave 'eem 'ere fer a quid."

"A quid?"

"He means you to pay a sovereign for him to take the bird, ma'am," explained Richard in a rapid aside. "Let's try somewhere else. I know another shop."

"You von't choke 'im orf no cheaper," said the youth. "E's a screecher. Nobody von't buy a bare-eyed cockatoo if they know it."

"He was sold to me for two guineas," said the old lady. She broke off with a sudden start, and stared, as though fascinated, at the door in the background. A young woman, with a head bristling with curlers, was looking out, and behind her stood a man, half screened by the curtain.

"I 'av my beezniss. Vill you leave 'eem or take 'eem avay?" said the man in the shop.

"I will leave him," said Miss Pontigreve, decisively, taking a pound from her purse and handing it over. "Come, Richard."

With a final glance in the direction of the torn curtain, she turned to go, stumbling and almost treading on a little black object which had bounded out from somewhere, and was tugging the border of her skirt, and jumping about her feet, with ecstatic little snaps and barks. Miss Pontigreve stooped down with a cry of amazement.

"Fluffy!"

Dirty, uncombed, and collarless as the squint-eyed youth, it was Fluffy himself. His mistress picked him up with trembling hands.

"This is the dog I have lost. However came he here?"

"Dot's a nice von," said the man, roughly. "A vallable schpaniel vort five quid."

"It is my own dog," repeated Miss Pontigreve, clasping the recovered treasure tightly under her cloak.

"Oh, come, ma'am, come!" cried Richard, excitedly.

They had the advantage of being close to the doorway, and were quickly outside, followed, however, by the man and the youth. The young woman with the curlers came running out also, and a crowd gathered as if by magic.

"Hand back that dawg!" demanded the man threateningly. "It is vort five quid."

"It is my own dog, which was stolen from me," said Miss Pontigreve, endeavoring to press on.

"Dere's a revort out fer 'im, ain't dere?" said the youth. "Den p'y up ze revort."

"I have paid a pound already and left the bird and the cage."

"Det's a good 'un," said the youth, addressing the crowd. "She's a bilker, she is, comin' down 'ere in silks and settins to schvindle pore people."

There was an ugly murmur in response from the mob, who were beginning to press them in.

"Had I better try and push through and get the cabman?" whispered Richard, breathlessly.

"No—no, stay by me!" gasped his mistress, clutching Fluffy tighter.

"You don't go a step furdur till you give me back de dawg," the man said, seizing hold of her arm. The red-haired assistant thrust Richard aside. The crowd swelled and pressed tighter. Their faces began to swim before the old lady's eyes. Rough hands were pulling at her cloak, but she clutched Fluffy tighter still.

"What's all this?" cried a voice strangely familiar to her ears.

A tall young man in a long black coat, to which Richard was clinging desperately, strode into the middle of the fray.

"What's all this—? Why," in a voice of utter astonishment, "Aunt Felicia! What on earth are you doing here? What is the matter?"

"Felix!" ejaculated Miss Pontigreve, with relief and surprise. "Help me to get away. Our cab is at the corner."

"Take your hand off this lady's arm at once," said the tall young man, sternly. Hyman obeyed, but stood menacingly.

"She's got a dawg of mine under 'er cloak, vich she must p'y for."

"A dog of yours?"

"It is my own dog, Fluffy, who was stolen last week. I found him here," said his aunt.

"P'y up ze revort zen!" interposed the red-haired assistant.

"I have given him a sovereign and the parrot," returned Miss Pontigreve, pointing to the "Boss."

"The parrot?" echoed the Rev. Felix.

"I will tell you everything as soon as we are in the cab. Oh, do go on!" the poor lady urged.

"Make way at once, please," said the tall young clergyman to the crowd still hanging eagerly around them. "Now, one moment," turning to the angry man and his assistant. "You accuse this lady of taking a dog which she declares is her own property. What is your name?"

"Solomon Hyman," replied the man sullenly.

"And that is your shop, Mr. Solomon Hyman. Very well. You and I will settle this matter later on. You will find me at St. Mary's, Blackyard Lane. Now, please."

Before Miss Pontigreve would have believed it possible she found herself in the cab driving back to the station with the faithful Richard on the box, Fluffy safe in her lap, and her nephew beside her.

"I can't help thinking that the man I saw behind the door was the man who made me buy the parrot," she concluded.

"That is quite within the bounds of possibility," said the Rev. Felix.

"And that you should have happened to come up!"

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