

except a piece of crust his sharp little eyes had discovered in the gutter. He knew what hunger meant.

The child crept on until he reached the Embankment. It was midnight now, and very still. Hardly a soul was about; only a few huddled-up, ghastly-faced men and women occupied the seats; and, far away, the lights twinkled fitfully from the big houses at Chelsea. The snow still fell, covering the earth with its thick white blanket.

His quick eyes, accustomed to searching out so many things, discovered, as he crept along, a small angle in the wall. Only a little place it was, and such a shelter that a dog would have scorned, but it was better than lying on one of the benches; it was very dark, and would probably escape even the watchful policeman.

Curling his little aching limbs up, he crouched down in this desolate spot, and once more he closed his eyes and tried to sleep—there must be rest for him—but the shuddering of his bones and the pain in his side grew worse, and only his racking cough disturbed the silence.

Then feeble, faltering footsteps sounded faintly in the snow, and the thin, wasted figure of a woman stooped down and peered into the corner.

"Bless my soul! little 'un, what are yer 'ere for? Why don't yer go 'ome to yer mar? This ain't no place for a kid with a corf like your'n."

"I ain't got no 'ome," the child answered, half sulkily, and instinctively shrinking further back into the corner as if he feared a blow. "Now, don't you go and tell a bloomin' bobby about me; you jist let me be; I ain't a-doing any 'arm."

"Heaven 'elp me! I ain't a-going ter tell on yer, yer poor little innocent; but this ain't no sort of a place to be in. Ain't you got a mother?"

The boy shook his head.

"Never 'ad one."

"Nor nobody as takes care of you? Bless me, if yer ain't as bad as me. I ain't got nobody, nor no 'ome, nor nothink, either."

She took the little shivering scrap of humanity up in her arms and sank down, drawing him closer to her, and taking the poor, shabby, threadbare shawl from her own shoulders and wrapping it round him.

Under her dirty rags beat a kindly, tender, motherly heart, though, perhaps, women in the streets, as they passed her by, instinctively drew their skirts aside rather than touch her.

"'Pears to me we'd best stay 'ere together, and go ter sleep."

Closer and closer she drew him, and kissed his little, pinched, white face. The blue eyes closed with a sigh of contentment, and in a drowsy faint voice:

"You're as nice as 'avin' a mother, you are," he said, as he nestled up to the woman.

And very soon the ragged heap of woman and child were sleeping as peacefully and soundly as any of the inmates of those big houses at Chelsea on their downy beds and under their silken coverings.

And the snow continued to fall, silently, mercifully—the wind had subsided now—high up it had drifted into that silent corner covering the dark heap of rags.

It was a soft, pure pall for those two lifeless bodies.

Blanche, Lady Stinsford, lay back in the big soft chair by her bedroom fire, and the costly tea-gown of silk and chiffon that she wore made her look very beautiful indeed. The lights from the softly-shaded candles on the dressing-table shone and glistened on the many costly silver trinkets scattered about, and flickered on the shimmering satin gown that lay on the bed.

What a graceful, lovely hostess she would make to-night. She was staying at her brother's house for the big ball he was giving, which had been the only talk of the countryside for weeks past.

She was resting now before it was time to dress, but

as she gazed into the fire there was a more thoughtful look than usual on her hard, cold face. A little twinge of conscience, like the stab from a sharp stiletto, gave her pain, but the cause of it was not very serious. A little orange-coloured missive had arrived two hours before, with only a very few words:

"Come at once, Jerry is ill."

She had read it, and at first she had hurried upstairs to tell her maid to dress her for the journey at once. But then, on second thoughts, she could hardly leave her brother with no one to act as hostess for him, when the guests were almost arriving—unless it was something very serious indeed. Jerry was always ailing; it would only turn out to be some harmless, childish illness, and Nanna—faithful, staid old nurse Nanna—was there to take care of him. She would stay to-night for the ball and start off to-morrow morning—it would not make much difference—and so she dismissed the subject from her mind, and went out skating in her last elegant tailor-made gown with one of her newest adorers.

It was only now, alone in her bedroom, that those little twinges of doubt crossed and recrossed her brain. Although she was a fashionable, spoilt beauty, Jerry was her little boy after all, and supposing he were really seriously, dangerously ill! She took up the day's paper lying on the table beside her to dispel these disagreeable thoughts. Languidly she glanced down the columns, and her eyes caught the words, "Death from Exposure; Found Dead in the Snow."

She did not usually read these sordid items of news; of what interest or moment could they possibly be to a cultured, refined society beauty? But the heading somehow riveted her attention, and she read on through the little paragraph, setting forth, in the colourless, stereotyped words of the newspaper, the pitiful little tragedy.

As she read, the weary, wistful, blue child eyes rose up before her, and the memory of the pleading little voice:

"Can yer spare a copper, laidy?"

The words rang in her ears, and the vision of the child eyes remained.

She gave a mirthless little laugh.

"I wish I had given that wretched little object something yesterday; perhaps he was hungry, after all."

And then the French maid appeared to dress her mistress.

When her toilet was completed, and her hair had been dressed strictly according to the models in the hair-dresser's salon, the eyebrows had been correctly touched up, and the rouge on her cheeks had been skilfully manipulated, in her exquisite Parisienne gown, Blanche, Lady Stinsford, made a lovely picture.

It was a brilliant ball, and her beauty scored another triumph that night, but if any among that fashionable crowd had been able to read the thoughts of their beautiful hostess they would perhaps have been surprised, for a strange jumble of events chimed in her mind.

When the last guest had gone, and Lady Stinsford retired to her room, from force of habit she walked straight across to the glass, and gazed into it, but instead of the pleasing contemplation of her own lovely reflection, the big, pleading child eyes seemed to look back at her from the depths of the mirror.

"Can yer spare a copper, laidy?"

The words kept on repeating themselves, and then it was the grey eyes of her own little Jerry that looked back at her, and the two had the same pleading, longing, wistful, hungry look in them.

She turned away with a shudder, and the lines of her hard mouth were softer than usual, and tears, so foreign to those beautiful eyes, welled up, and still that little sharp pain kept stabbing at her heart.

She undressed and stepped up into the soft feathery bed, and blew out the candles, watching the little red