

such speedy satisfaction. The yacht had to coal, take on supplies, and pick up two or three extra men for the crew. A Sunday came in and threw everything back a day. Lastly the sailing-master's wife, whom Mr. Carstairs was sending along to take charge of Mary on the homeward trip, chanced to be down with an influenza.

As the details of getting ready multiplied about him, Varney's interest in his novel undertaking imperceptibly grew. The thing had come upon him so unexpectedly that it had not yet by any means lost its strangeness. To the old friend of his mother's girlhood, Elbert Carstairs, he was sincerely devoted, though knowing him for an indulgent man whose indulgences were chiefly of himself. But when, responding to his excited summons that night, he had sat and listened while Mr. Carstairs unfolded his mad little domestic plot, he had been first utterly amazed and then utterly repelled. And it was not until a final sense of the old man's genuine need was borne in upon him, of his loneliness, his helplessness, and his entire dependence upon him, Varney, that he had consented to undertake the extraordinary commission.

In a sense, it was all simply preposterous. Here was he, Laurence Varney, in sane mind, of law-abiding habits and hitherto of tolerable standing in the community, solemnly pledged to go and steal the person of a child, in defiance and contempt of the statutes of all known nations. And the place where this lawless deed was to be done was not Ruritania or the hazy dominions of Prince Otto, but a commonplace, hum-