

For my part, I am always willing to donate any old clothes I may have to charity, provided some one calls at the house for them, but I do not propose to travel around with a bundle under my arm seeking some wretch to bestow it upon. But, see, it is almost seven o'clock, and I have not dressed for the ball, yet. You must really excuse me," and, with that, Julia jumped up from her seat and tripped out of the room.

"Are you not going over to Mrs. Hudson's with Julia to-night?" Mr. Fawcett asked his wife, as the door closed behind the retreating form of his daughter.

"No," replied Mrs. Fawcett, "I do not feel very well, this evening, and, as Julia was very anxious to attend, I have consented to let her go over with Mrs. Disbrow and her daughter."

"I am very sorry that you are not going," Mr. Fawcett said, "for I have to go down town again this evening, and may not return until late."

"Oh! that won't matter much, for I intend returning at once."

"Then Bess had better go to the ball with Julia. It will be lonesome remaining here alone."

"Oh! I don't care to go," said Bessie, "but, if you don't mind my walking down as far as Mrs. Denham's with you, and calling for me on your way back, I should like to spend the evening with her. Poor creature! she has been dreading this night for months past, for it is the first Christmas eve since her husband's death, and the only one that her son has been away from home. Up to yesterday she had some hopes of his return, but when I saw her to-day she was dejected and completely broken in spirits. It is a great change for her, from wealth and friends to poverty and desolation."

"Well, Bess," said her father rising from the table, "if you want to come with me you had better get ready at once, for I have an engagement to keep at half past seven."

"I won't keep you a minute," she said, hurrying off to get her wraps.

"Now, John," Mrs. Fawcett began, as soon as Bessie was out of the room, "I must say, I am rather inclined to side with Julia in condemning Bessie's conduct. It is not what one would expect from a young lady of her station."

"That makes it all the more commendable," her husband replied. "If there were more girls like Bess in the world, there would be less suffering."

It was nine o'clock. The west bound express, panting like a frightened steed, dashed round a curve and drew up at the station. A solitary passenger, wrapped in a long ulster and carrying a small valise in his hand, came out of the palace car and sprang lightly to the station platform. He was young and handsome. Anyone could see that at a glance, though his face was almost entirely hidden in the high collar of his coat. But one does not require to see a man's face to decide upon his appearance. Brain, muscle and manliness make the man. That beauty which novelists seek to describe by such attributes as "a clear complexion, a bewitching eye, ivory teeth, and golden hair," is a something belonging entirely to woman.

The new comer was evidently no stranger to the city, for, after alighting, he crossed the platform, and walked briskly up a side street, with a careless haste that showed him to be familiar with his surroundings. A few minutes' walk brought him to Brinckerhoff Avenue, along which he proceeded a short distance, when he halted in front of an imposing residence. The house was all lighted up from basement to attic, and the sweet strains of a waltz could be heard issuing from it, while, ever and anon, a shadow whirled across the window curtain. The stranger paused a moment, then, abruptly entered the house. The hall was brilliantly lighted up, but there was no one in sight. With the air of one perfectly familiar with the establishment, he proceeded down the long corridor and entered the room to the left. This room proved to be the library, dimly lighted by a half-turned gas jet. The young man cast a hasty glance about him, and, then, went over to the bell-cord to ring for a servant; but, just as he reached out to grasp it, he started back and stood as if rooted to the spot. He heard a voice in the next room, and the words that smote on his ears went to his heart like the thrust of a dagger. He was no eavesdropper, but, by a strange combination of circumstances, he was placed in that undignified position. He heard his own name spoken in scorn, and by