

THE TOSS OF A BALL.

(Concluded.)

In the corridor they encountered Mr. Sweetapple searching for his daughter. Consigning Clemency to his care, Ralf pursued Algernon Duckett, whose motions suggested those of some hunted creature doubling to its form. Suddenly he shot ahead, and was lost to view. But, guided more by instinct than knowledge, Ralf, still following, found himself presently confronted by a strange, weird spectacle.

Before him was a wide, low room, round the roof of which long tongues of flames were licking. In one corner a red-hot furnace added to the heat and glare; and moving to and fro were men with scared faces and set teeth, endeavoring desperately to hide, or remove, a heterogeneous assemblage of implements and material.

In a glance Ralf took in its meaning. The blazing furnace; the heaped raw metal; the table strewn with odd tools, moulds and dies; yet, as he gazed, a strange pity filled his heart.

"Trapped, by Jove!" a voice at his elbow proclaimed triumphantly. "Exactly what I thought. Come on, my men, we have 'em at last!"

It was Dean, the overseer, transformed into an officer of police with his myrmidons at his back.

Ralf comprehended all. The dies; the metal, the lavish expenditure; the large bank deposit. And Algernon and Clemency were lovers!

He pushed the police official aside, dragged his rival, almost by main force, through the confusion of smoke and flame, and hurried him out into the night and falling rain.

"Go," he cried, pointing out into the shadows. "Escape while yet you may. Here," he tore a leaf from his pocket book, and hastily wrote thereon a few words, "go to this address—you will be safe there until I come Go!"

"My father," exclaimed the young man with a generosity that did him credit; "I cannot leave him to bear the blow alone."

"Your remaining can avail him nothing; he is already secured," Ralf said coldly. "He is old with his sins behind him. You may yet have time to redeem and to atone."

Why had he done it? He scarcely knew. For Clemency's sake? Did Clemency love this man? And, if so, how would she bear—how must he break to her the knowledge of his disgrace.

He went back wearily to where he had left her and her father, resigning the doomed west wing and its nest of coiners to their inevitable fate.

Already rumors had flown amongst the excited guests. Thunder still rumbled, rain fell, but less heavily, and most were now departing as might be. The fire in the west wing was almost extinguished—the place a ruin.

Ralf drew Clemency's hand again within his arm.

"Dear," he said simply, "we will go home—the feast is ended."

Then bending his head so low that none but herself could hear his words:

"But your lover is safe. Ah me, sweetheart—your lover!"

"Nay, I am well pleased he of whom you speak should escape; but, Ralf—my lover?"

Clemency's clear tones faltered and broke. The eyes she uplifted to Ralf's were humid with reproach.

Meeting their shy appeal, at last Ralf understood. Although the childish heart had vibrated on fancy's pivot, true as the needle it reverted to Love's pole.

THE END.

A DETECTIVE SUCCESS.

CHAPTER I.

A few years ago I lost my situation as clerk and occasionally traveller in a large London house—from no fault of my own, as the firm failed; but it was a sad blow to me, as I had but few friends, none who could help me in getting employment, and, which was almost the most painful part of the catastrophe, I was about to be married. Now I felt obliged to postpone the event, although I had been looking forward to and hoping for it for the last eighteen months, and had been saving every possible sixpence with a view to starting a real home of my own. I believe—I am sure, indeed—that Bella would have married me, braving all risks of poverty and hardships, but I was not quite so selfish as to allow this. So she went on with her work—she was a board school teacher a few miles out of London—and I looked out for a situation.

I moved from my then lodgings, which were in an out-of-the-way quarter, and took a couple of rooms in a more central spot. These were good large rooms, and cheap, but one room would have been enough for me, had it not been for my having bought some little stock of furniture, which I was bound to store somewhere.

So I took this parlor floor, and then set to work to advertise, to answer advertisements, to call at counting-houses, to loiter about the city, and, in short, to live the life which has always been led by myriads of unlucky clerks and shopmen, and which must be, I should suppose, in actual misery, decidedly worse than penal servitude or slavery.

This had not lasted long, yet I had already experienced one or two sickening disappointments, had been just too late, and so forth, when, as I was seated, dejectedly enough, in my parlor one evening, a double knock was heard at the street door. This was followed by a strange voice asking for

"Mr. Jones," and then the little servant tapped at the door, saying, "A gentleman wants to see you, sir."

Of course I gave the usual reply, and in a moment had run over half-a-dozen possibilities connected with my recent pilgrimages, and had decided which was the most likely to furnish my present visitor; then he entered.

"Mr. Jones, I believe!" he said. I confirmed his conjecture, and invited him to be seated. "Your time is no doubt valuable, Mr. Jones," he began, "so I will speak plainly at once. I wish you to undertake a business which may be difficult, and which is so painful that it requires the utmost delicacy in its management. I need hardly say that I have the utmost confidence in you."

"I am much pleased, although I must own surprised, to hear you say so," I replied. It was a half-mumbled reply, for I was really taken aback by the tone of our conversation.

"Ah, that is the way with you all!" exclaimed my visitor, with a most familiar smile; "but when I tell you that Alderman Wallerson sent me to you, you will no longer be surprised. Am I right?"

"I am much obliged to that gentleman," I returned, "but I have not the honor of his acquaintance, so do not know—"

"Oh, come, come!" interrupted the stranger; "you do not mean to tell me that you never heard of the Alderman—who lives at Hampstead, you know?"

"I own I have heard of him," I commenced.

"Ah, that will do," again interrupted my visitor. "I suppose I must not expect more from a gentleman of your profession. Well, my name is Fyles—you know my place on Tower Hill, I daresay?"

"I do," I returned, getting more and more confused as the interview went on.

"No doubt you know everybody," continued the stranger, repeating his curious smile. "Well, Mr. Jones, I wish you—I can hardly, even now, make up my mind to tell you—I—I wish you to watch my wife."

"To watch your wife!" I exclaimed.

"I cannot wonder at your surprise," he went on. "We are no longer young people; the time of life at which you have been used to and expect such things is past with us; we are each nearer fifty than forty years of age. Yet I cannot resist my information, which in some respects I have tested, and so, as I always have been master in my own household, and as I will not endure any trickery, I am resolved to probe this matter to the bottom, come what may of it."

"But what am I to do?" I naturally asked. "I do not know Mrs. Fyles, and, besides—"

"I will take care that you see her," said my visitor. "You will come to my office to-morrow and say that you have applied for the position of temporary clerk, you could manage to do some straightforward, easy clerk's work if required, no doubt. But I will take care to arrange for your absence during the first week, at any rate."

"If I can do nothing else I can do clerk's work," I returned. "And if your friend, Alderman What's his name, knows me—"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Fyles impatiently; "he told me you were employed in a counting-house when he first knew you. Very well, you shall see Mrs. Fyles, and you must keep her in sight when she goes out. Ask for Mr. Stamps, to-morrow, he is my head clerk. I need not say how important silence is in such an affair, as you must know better than I do what is wanted. Here are ten pounds, you will not find me illiberal at the end of your work. Good evening."

And with this brief leave-taking he went out.

It would have seemed all a dream but that before my eyes, and within my touch, there lay on the table the ten glittering pieces of gold he had placed there, and these were a potent argument as to the reality of the interview! Who ever heard of the like? What could have made Mr. Fyles pick me out for such work, and still more wonderful, what could have induced his friend, the Alderman to recommend me? The more I thought about the matter the more puzzled I grew, and the more unpleasantly prominent grew the fact that I had not the least idea how I should go about the work to which I was in a manner pledged, and in trying to execute which I should be sure to display egregious incapacity.

I resolved to take a stroll in the cool evening air and think the matter over, but as I opened the door I met, just entering, the only one of my fellow lodgers—the house was a large one, and had a host of inmates—with whom I had made the slightest approach to intimacy. This was a young fellow out of a situation like myself, it appeared, but I doubted whether he would ever get, or, at any rate, hold another, for he looked like a man in the early stage of decline. He was a good-looking, gentlemanly young fellow, but too slight; his eyes were too bright, his voice too hollow, and there was a little, troublesome hacking cough which I was sorry to hear in so young a man.

"Mr. Jones! How fortunate!" he exclaimed. "You are the very person I was in search of. I have orders for the theatre, and I thought you might like to go with me. Can you come?"

This was just what I could have wished. It was not the way to get a long cool vein of reflection over my puzzle, but in reality I was glad to avoid thinking about it, so I immediately consented, and then as we usually asked of each other, I inquired if he had any luck during the day.

"No; that is to say, not of the right sort," he returned with a laugh, which was only his cough disguised; "yet I have heard something which makes me think I shall go abroad again."

"Again!" I echoed. "I did not know you had ever lived abroad."

"I thought everyone knew that," he said; "but my going and staying were nothing to boast of, so perhaps I did not tell you. How have you fared to-day?"

I actually opened my lips to tell him of my odd adventure, but as I did