

convict husband. He heard her cry about the knife, saw that her hold relaxed, saw the blade flash as it struck back at her. He saw her fall, and believed the blow a mortal one. He heard the voice of Dolly wailing in the house beyond, crying out for the missing bedfellow she would never dream beside again. At least, that was his thought. And there before him was her slayer, with his wife's blood fresh upon his hands.

All the anger man can feel against the crimes of man blazed in his heart, all the resolution he can summon to avenge them knit the muscles of his face and set closer the grip upon his lip. And yet, had he been asked what was his strongest feeling at this moment, he would have answered:—"Fear!"—fear, that is, that his man, more active than himself and younger, should give him the slip, to right or to left, and get away unharmed.

But that was not the convict's thought, with that knife open in his hand. Indeed, the small space at command might have thwarted him. If, for but two seconds, he could employ those powerful fists that were on the watch for him on either side of the formidable bulk whose slow movement was his only hope, then he might pass and be safe. It would have to be quick work, with young Ikey despatched by the screaming women at Ragstroar's to call in help; either his father's from the nearest pot-house, or any police-officer, whichever came first.

Quick work it was! A gasp or two, and the man's natural flinching before the great prizefighter and his terrible reputation had to yield to the counsels of despair. It had to be done, somehow. He led with his left—so an expert tells us we should phrase it—and hoped that his greater alacrity would land a face-blow, and cause an involuntary movement of the fists to lay the body open. Then his knife, and a rip, and the thing would be done.

It might have been so, easily, had it been a turn-to with the gloves, for diversion. Then, twenty years of disuse would have had their say, and the slow paralysing powers of old age asserted themselves, quenching the swift activity of hand and eye, and making their responsive energy, that had given him victory in so many a hard-fought field, a memory of the past. But it was not so now. The tremendous tension of his heartfelt anger, when he found himself face to face with its dastardly object, made him again, for one short moment, the man that he had been in the plenitude of his early glory. Or, short of that, a near approach to it.