

know," said Jane, addressing me spitefully. "You don't suppose as I've took them away?"

She looked at me angrily, while I felt as if I had been accusing her unjustly.

"Oh no, my dear, of course not!" said Mr. Rowle. "You're too highly respectable a girl to do such a thing; but where I was once there was a housemaid as stole a little bronze pen-tray out of the study, and she was found out about it, and given into custody of the police, and got three months."

Jane looked fiercely at him and whisked out of the room.

"Please, Mr. Rowle," I said, "the little pen-tray that mamma gave poor papa has—has——"

I could say no more, for the recollection of that birthday present, towards which I had subscribed some of my pocket-money, caused such a choking sensation that I was ready to break down once more, and I had to strive hard to keep it back.

"Gone out of the study, young un? Oh no, not it. You fancy as it has."

"I'm sure it has gone, sir," I said eagerly. "I was looking for it yesterday."

"Ah, well, you'll see when we get downstairs," said Mr. Rowle, and he went on from room to room, always sending a few puffs of smoke into each, till we went downstairs, meeting Jane on the way, looking very hot and indignant as she carried up the little china candlesticks, and sure enough, to my great surprise, on entering the study, there was the pen-tray in its familiar place.

"There; what did I tell you?" said Mr. Rowle, laughing. "It was underneath some papers, or p'raps Jane took it down to give it a rub or two."

"That must have been it, sir," I said; and I went out to have a walk round the garden. But somehow everything looked so different: the grass had not been cut for days, the beds were rapidly growing weedy, and the flowers and fruit looked so different, or seemed to look so different, that I was glad to go back into the house, where I found another stranger, a little dapper, red-faced man, who nodded to me familiarly, and then resumed a conversation with Mr. Rowle.

"My clerk will be here directly," I heard him say, "and we'll soon run over the inventory."

"The sooner the better, I say, Mr. Jevins, sir," said Mr. Rowle. "and then we shall know what we're at."

"You don't mean——" began the newcomer.

"No, sir, I don't, because I've had too sharp a hve on 'em; but there's one young lady here as wouldn't take nothing out of her reach, and if I was Mr. Blakeford I'd make a clean sweep out, and the sooner the better."

The little man drew a silver pencil-case out of his pocket, slid