

He did not go home that afternoon, for he hated the thought of that little room of his; instead, he turned in the other direction and plunged into the heart of the City. His work was in the Law Courts. He went down Fleet Street at a break-neck pace, and on and on he strode till he found himself in Whitechapel. He had no reason for going there, only he felt he must go somewhere, and that did as well as any where else. It did not matter. Nothing mattered. What was it to anyone what he did, or where he went, or what became of him? He had no part in anybody's life, and his own was very little use. No use that he could see, and certainly no pleasure, either to himself or anybody else. What was the good of life at all? He looked about him. Squalor was here, poverty, misery, want. Look at the coarse-faced women and brutal men; look at the crowds of dirty children. How they swarmed! Look at the shops with their cheap wares and their flaring gaslights. What did those cheap wares mean? What, but cruelty? The youth and the strength of girls had gone to make them, the health of women the joy of children. Pah! It was a hard world, in which every man strove for himself, and his gain meant the loss of another. He was sick of this existence. The one thing he craved for was denied him. He was reckless as to what became of him. The world was full of human beings. How they suffered. One more or less, what did it matter? Who cared? Not he.

He went home very late, but he was not at all drunk. He was tired but, quite calm. He smiled bitterly as he went up the stairs. This was his *home*; there would be no one to greet him, no supper would be prepared for him, and he had scarcely tasted food that day and it would not matter to a soul if he stayed out all night in the cold. Ah, well! He felt the little bottle which was in his pocket, and the touch comforted him.

He had been mistaken in his surmises. There *was* some one to greet him, and there *was* supper awaiting him, and a fire, though he had not ventured to start fires yet. When he was cold in the evening he had one way of warming himself.

"Ah," said Polly cheerfully, "here you are at last."

She had her hair very well done, and she wore a pretty red dress and a holland apron, and her cheeks had a delicious colour, and her eyes shone.

"Here you are," she repeated, and she glanced wistfully at his face. "I took the liberty of lighting a fire for you, and my sweetheart must be in an excellent temper, it is burning so splendidly; and did you ever see such a beautiful chop? There!" and she popped it on the gridiron, and laid it above the red hot coals.

"I don't want anything to eat, thank you, Miss Winter," said Tom wearily.

"Nonsense," said Miss Winter emphatically. And she bustled about in a way that meant business. "You want that chop, and a cup of coffee, and some bread and butter, and I want to see you consume them."

And consume them he did before long, and Miss Winter watched him and chattered to him the while, and even made him laugh once or twice, by her funny tales. She knew what was the matter with him, bless you; she had been through it, and she was full of sympathy.

She did not rise to go till she saw some colour in his pale face and some light in his eyes; nay, she did not go even then. She waited till he began to look drowsy. Then she said: "Really, it's quite improper my staying so long. I shall have mother calling me. Good-night, Mr. Cheadle." She took his hand in her strong, warm grasp. "Good-night, Mr. Cheadle," she said again, "and—God bless you." Her words and her touch remained with him, and strengthened his heart to endurance. "Good-night, and—God bless you."

"God hasn't taken much trouble about me," he thought to himself, sadly, and he lay back in his chair; and as he watched the fire he reviewed his life drearily. It had been a life without great misfortunes, but, alas, without great joys—a colourless life—and it did not seem to him to have any guidance, or to have had any aim. He

was so occupied in dreaming over the past that he forgot the future, and for the time being he forgot, too, the little bottle, the contents of which he had meant to make use of that night. The result of his hot supper and the fire was to send him to sleep, and when he woke in the morning it was to find himself in his arm-chair, and to see the sunlight stealing in through the blinds.

He rose yawning, and wondering what it all meant, and then the recollection of last night flashed across him. Involuntarily he put his hand in his pocket, and drew out a small packet. With a steady hand he pulled off the paper, and held up the bottle before his eyes. It was labelled "Laudanum."

He flung open his window, and leant out. He was almost resolved to throw the poison far away into the street, but somehow he hesitated to do it. He glanced back into the room. In the grate were grey ashes, the remnants of last evening's meal littered the table, the gas had been burning all night, and the atmosphere, especially as contrasted with the outer air, was vitiated and oppressive. Suddenly the sound of bell from an neighbouring church smote upon his ear. They were ringing for morning service. They reminded him of other bells—wedding bells—and flinging his head up in an attitude of defiant recklessness, he strode up to his cupboard and placed the bottle on the shelf within easy reach.

He felt at peace now. He knew that when existence became unendurable there would be no need to continue it.

That morning, when he had gone to the city, the landlady's daughter came to do his room. There was a servant to do the rough work, but Miss Winter was not above helping, and she thought that Mr. Cheadle's room should have a thorough turn out, under her supervision. She was not a person to do things by halves and she gave orders that the cupboard should be cleaned. She herself took out the contents. She looked anxiously at the whiskey bottle; it was as she had seen it last. But—what was this little bottle?

Now Tom Cheadle had one good point in the matter of looks, and that was his teeth; he had particularly good, even, white teeth, and it had been his boast that he had never had the toothache in his life. So it was not probable that he intended to put this to the use for which many people keep it. No; Miss Winter had her suspicions, increased by the word above the label: "POISON," and by the recollection of the look in Tom's eyes when he came home yesterday; she knew what it meant, and she turned cold and sick.

She went through her work miserably enough, and she was so absent-minded that she did not rebuke the "general" when that lady stood upon Tom's leather chair—a personal possession—to polish the scratched glass over the mantle-piece. But she came to a certain conclusion, and it seemed to her that the end justified the means. She took the little bottle round to the chemist's at the corner, and gave it into his hands for a few minutes; and when she got back she replaced the bottle on Tom's shelf behind the big black one, just where it had been before, but she knew now which of the two was the more dangerous.

Whether it was the consciousness that he had the wherewithal to ease his heartache there is no knowing, but for some reason Tom was more cheerful for the next few weeks than he had been for a long time.

It was just before Helen Power's wedding day that the old misery came upon him. It seemed as if he had been sleeping, and that it was she who woke him up to a consciousness of his pain. She asked him to her wedding. She was so happy herself, that she could not but feel kindly disposed to all the world, and she remembered Tom Cheadle, and did not wish him to think she despised him for being poor. This was the only way she had of showing him a little attention, and she would not miss the opportunity. And how was she to know what a tumult of passion, and wrath, and misery, what visions of the unattainable, what pangs of envy, were caused by the little piece of cardboard, with the invitation in silver letters upon it? But he did not refuse what she offered him. He would spend all he possessed to buy clothes, in which he should