

"You must go to Coot's brewery tomorrow morning, and finish that chimney," the foreman told me. He gave me a few more directions besides, and then went his way, while I went mine, not very well pleased at the prospect before me.

I suppose I never ought to have followed the trade, for though I'd gained myself a good character as a steady workman, I had never been able to overcome a horror at being perched at any great height. In the country were the buildings were low, I managed well enough, but in this great city here were roofs on which I could not stand without this dread oppressing me, nor look down without feeling as though something below was tempting me to fling myself over and end at once the miserable sensation which no effort of mine could shake off.

The huge chimney the foreman had ordered me to finish was reckoned one of the highest and best built shafts in London. We were all proud of the job, which had been carried on so far without a single mishap; but I had earnestly been hoping that I might not be sent to it, and it wasn't till the workmen had almost got to the top that I began to breathe a bit more freely, and trust that it would be finished without any help of mine.

Once at home with the youngsters' merry prattle in my ears, I forgot my uneasy feelings about the morrow's job, but the moment I dozed off to sleep it came back upon me in a hideous dream. I thought I was falling down, down! and just as the crash of my body striking the earth seemed inevitable, I awoke up with a start to find myself bathed in a cold perspiration, and trembling in every limb.

No more settled sleep visited my pillow that night, and it was a relief when the booming of the clocks dispelled my frightful visions, and warned me that it was time to face a reality.

The morning was bitterly cold and boisterous, scarcely a soul was to be seen in the deserted streets at that early hour, and the dull thud of my footsteps sounded mournfully in the stillness reigning around. At last the great chimney loomed in sight, and, gazing up at its immense height, I shivered at the thought of being on top of it, and forced to look down on the sickening depths below.

If it had not been for the name of the thing I should have gone back; but the thought of Bessie and the children spurred me on; so buttoning my jacket tightly around me, I began to ascend the staging. In my journey upward I passed many costly curtained windows, and remember thinking, rather enviously, how nice it must be to be rich and sheltered on such a morning from the biting cold in a warmly-furnished bedroom.

Some fellows wouldn't mind it the least bit if they were perched on the top of St. Paul's on the coldest of mornings, provided you supplied them well with beer; but I wasn't over strong-limbed, any more than I could pretend to be strong-minded; so what to them was nothing, to me was almost death itself.

The higher I went the more intense the cold appeared to be, and my fingers became quite numb by the hoar-frost that was clinging to the sides and spokes of the ladders. After a while I stood on the few boards forming the stage on the summit of the shaft, and, giving one glance downward, my blood turned colder than it was already as I realized the immense depth to the yard beneath.

Giving myself a shake, to get rid of the dizzy sensation that came over me, and unhooking from the pully the tub of mortar which my mate, waiting below, had sent up, I at once began my solitary work.