

assistant, a good-tempered country girl, had made up a bed on the couch. I hardly knew him, rosy and white from his tub, his hair close to his head, his wonderful eyes flashing light. He sat by the fire and warmed his toes, and in a little while became more friendly. Then, exhausted by excitement and his bath, he fell asleep. I sat watching him for a long time; and when I, too, sought my couch, it was to dream that Gwynneth and I—estranged no longer, parted no more—walked hand in hand beside a summer sea.

#### CHAPTER II.

Some three years went by. Dicky, dearer, surely, than many sons to many fathers, still lived with me. No one knew more than that I had adopted him—he himself knew that for his mother's sake I had taken him from his life in the London streets. He never forgot that life; nor did I desire particularly that he should. When we met any pallid, sad-eyed child, vending little wares in the street, it was as a man and a brother that Dicky hailed him. His pockets were usually heavy with pennies hoarded on the behalf of those whose life he had once shared, and whose hardships still inspired his sympathy. (I have known him, however, to be less strictly impartial than I could have wished: he kept the bright coins always for two especial favorites.)

It must not be imagined that I had let these years pass without making strenuous efforts to find Gwynneth; but she had gone "below the surface," as Mr. Baring-Gould would say. I kept her memory as green as I could in Dicky's heart. In his little room was a picture of his young mother as I had known her. It was copied from a miniature in my possession. His father's whereabouts I knew, unfortunately, only too well. He kept one of the most reputable public houses in London. I feared so much a chance meeting with him that I often thought

seriously of leaving London. The tiny imp who had thrust his fading flowers into my hand on that stormy March night had grown up into a princely and beautiful child, but like—so like—to Gwynneth. Those large, light, haunting eyes alone would have betrayed his parentage to any one who had known her.

It was a soft April evening—even in London, spring sights, spring sounds, spring scents met us. My day's work was over. Dicky and I were sitting at a first floor window that overlooked Kensington Gardens. His bed-time was drawing very near, but, his nurse having gone for a walk with a "cousin in the army," Dicky took advantage of her absence to postpone the dreaded hour. He had just thrown a penny down to a little dark-eyed, elfin-looking match-seller, with whom he was on more intimate terms than with any of the others, and had been thinking silently, his chin upon his hand, his face upturned to the evening sky.

"Will some one take them *all* away some day, as you did me?" he questioned, suddenly.

"Some day," I replied.

"Who will?" persisted Dicky.

"God will," I answered, "or He will tell some one to do it for Him."

"Why did you only take me?" said Dicky, in a dissatisfied tone; "there are so many more—could you only take one?"

"I could not have more than one now, Dicky," I said, a little conscience-stricken. "When I am a rich man, and you have grown up and can work, we will build a big house and have as many as it will hold."

Dicky was not satisfied. He looked out into the crowded streets in silence for some time, and then pressed his hand hard on my knee, as he leant against me.

"Uncle," he said, speaking with an effort so evident that I expected to hear the confession of some childish peccadillo, "suppose we took it in turns?"