

bolt of the outer door was withdrawn. The huge flue must have acted like a telephone, for I heard every sound with fearful distinctness. First there was a pause by the door of the sitting room, then breathing in it, then whispering.

"I heard Thomas distinctly, when he said :

"She isn't here; she's gone to bed; but the money is in the library."

"Be cautious," advised a strange voice, "and we may not have to hurt her."

"They carefully retreated, and my heart struck off the seconds against my ribs in a way that was suffocating, for I knew that their search would soon be over, and what then ?

"In less than two minutes they were whispering in the room again.

"Cofound her!" aspirated Thomas, "she took the money with her."

"Then we'll have it if—"

"The pause meant all that words could convey.

"The cold sweat was coming out of every pore of my body. The dust of the creosote had penetrated my mouth and nostrils, and I had to take one hand from the rope in their absence and place a finger upon my lips to prevent sneezing.

"Come hurry," was the angry watchword exchanged between them, and I heard the stairs creaking as they ascended to my chamber. Thomas was familiar with all the house.

"Why did I not drop down and escape outside ?

"First, then, they had locked the outside door and withdrawn the key to prevent a surprise from without. Second, there might be a third confederate outside. But the most important reason of all was, it seemed to me, that I never could get out of the aperture that had allowed me entrance into the chimney. I ran the risk of discovery and death in any case.

"Oh why did not my father and his companion return ? It might be hours first.

"They had found me absent from my chamber and the adjoining rooms. They no longer used extreme caution. They hurried from one apartment to the other. I could feel the jar of moving furniture, and closet doors were opened hastily. The upper part of the house was ransacked, and then they came down stairs upon the run. Time was precious to them now. With dreadful oaths they rummaged the lower floors, and finally returned to the sitting-room.

"I saw the light here last," said Thomas, moving with his lamp across the room, "and here is the lamp on the table."

"She must have got out."

"No; I watched for her, and every window is fastened on the inside." Then he continued; "Curse her! she's a witch!" and baffled they stood and poured oaths after me. "I'd like to catch her now," he ground it out between his teeth.

"Shall we search more?"

"It's no use; we've turned over everything under which a mouse could hide."

"What, then? Shall we waylay the old man and fix him?"

"They haven't the money; it was left here."

"The cellar," suggested the voice.

"Once more they dashed out only to return in hot haste now; for there was the trot and rumble of a horse and carriage on the bridge between us and the city.

"Stay," urged the stranger, "trump up some kind of a story, and we may secure the money yet."

"I would," returned Thomas, "but the girl's a witch, and I'm just sure that she is somewhere near us all the time, and would hand me over to justice!"

"There was a scamper outside, and the sound of feet running toward the river came down the wide mouth at the top of the chimney. Father and Captain Boswell drove into the yard and up to the door, just as the clock struck twelve.

"Boswell," said he, "we certainly saw a light here when we came down the hill."

"Quick, Jason," said the captain, "there has been foul play here."

"Foul play? My God! my poor little girl."

"Father," I strove to call, but the first attempt, choked in dust and soot, ended in a hysterical cough.

"Where is that? What is it?" called my distracted father, and both men dashed for the library.

"I now strove to descend, but the movement brought down bushels of mortar and broken bricks from all sides, and closed up the flue. I bethought me of the rope, and by sticking my toes in here and there I went up the chimney hand over hand.

"Agile as a cat, when I reached the top of the low chimney I sprang down upon the roof and began calling loudly for father.

"You should have heard them run through the house and halloo before they located my voice. At last the Captain came out of doors.

"Will you get me a ladder, please," said I, "I want to get down from here."

"A ladder, Jason," shouted the Captain, "the little girl is on the roof."

"For the love of Heaven, girl, how came you there?" said my father, as I landed upon the ground and began shaking the soot from my clothes.

"I went up there through the chimney, papa. But you had better put up the horse—you will have to groom him yourself to-night—and then I will tell you all about it.

"The captain led me into the house, for I was trembling violently.

"Now," said father, being absent only a moment or two, without letting me have time to mop the smut from my face and hands; "now tell us what this means—my little girl climbing the ridge pole like a cat at midnight?"

"In a few moments matters were explained.

"Thomas, the villain!" ejaculated my father; "I'll have him if I have to hunt the two continents for him, and he shall have his deserts."

"He kept his word. Thomas got a term in the State prison.

"When I gave the Captain his money I should have burst out into hysterical sobbing only I remembered the soot in time to prevent shading myself in black crayon; and Captain Boswell believed that, statue and bulk were not always certificates of the best materials, and—"

"And," finished Dan, our jester, "it may be said, that you actually flue to his arms."

She smiled and bowed as the sonorous tones of the driver came in among us:

"Stage ready, gentlemen."

As they who, for every slight infirmity, take physic to repair their health, do rather impair it; so they who, for every trifle are eager to vindicate their character, do rather weaken it.—Burke.