

"There's the room back o' this, an' yer'll want the sittin' room as well. Party only lef' it on Monday, goin' back to Ameriky."

Reedham shook his head.

"I could not pay for this meanwhile, Mary Anne, and I don't care how small the room may be. I know it will be clean and sweet, and will savour of home."

He spoke as he felt. The hunted experience of the past few days had changed his whole outlook on life, and he naturally idealised the homely woman whom in the whole hostile wilderness of London was the only one he thought he might trust. She, no less than he, knew how great was the debt under which he was laid by her readiness to help.

"The room's jes 'ere," she said, stepping back to the communicating door. "It's the honly one I've got. I'm full hup now, cep fer this. And I can't let 'em seperit. I kin afford it, sir, to let yer 'ave 'em cheap, as cheap as nuthin' maybe, till yer gits round the corner. Yer see me worst battle's over. Teddy hes earning his sixteen shillin' a week now in Goodhall's down to College street, an' likely to go hon gittin' better, for e's a clever chap wiv 'is 'ands and 'is 'ead. An' even little Tommy 'as his 'arf crown a-week fer goin' hafter a milk pram, and Tilda's to the dress-makin', an' little Annie gits that 'andy abart the 'ouse, yer can't think. Oh, me battle's hover, an' I kin eve a bite to spare fer a friend. Besides," she added fiercely, "Jes' look around, where did all this furniter come from? Hevery stick ov it were presents from you an' the missus. Where would yer come to, if not to pore old Mary Anne?"

She wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, while she hunted for the matches to light up the inner room. It was a small square apartment looking out upon the long narrow strip of garden which in summer was an astonishingly pleasant place, shut in by branching lines which would have done no discredit to a country lane. True, the rush and roar of London, the whistle and din of innumerable trains never ceased night nor

day, but these were minor discomforts, not mentioned or even noticed by the dwellers in St. Paul's-crescent.

"There yer are, an' I'll jes' clear away," she said cheerfully. "The bed's hall ready an' as clean as a new pin," she added proudly. "That wos wot them Americans said, it was a treat. Good-night, sir, when would yer like to be called in the mornin'."

"Any time, any time, I don't know how to thank you, Mary Anne, but I swear that you will come to no trouble through it, and that I will repay in full measure pressed down and running over, what you've done for me tonight."

"Don't go fer to mention it, sir," she replied hurriedly, and made her exit with considerable haste. In a minute or so she was back, however, carrying something white over her arm.

"Beggin' pardin, sir, fer the liberty; but, seein' as you ain't brought no things, would yer mind puttin' on this ere night-shirt wot belonged to poor Webber. It's bin aired. There's a 'ot water pipe wot goes through the cupboard where I keeps me linen, an' wot a godsend it is to me yer can't think."

She laid it down softly and withdrew, for the sight of her new lodger sitting with his hands before his face seriously disquieted her, and as she did not hold with exhibitions of emotion on her own account, she was glad to escape. She slept on a chair-bedstead in the kitchen herself, partly to be handy in the morning and partly because danger from marauders usually threatens from the basement, and she liked to keep an eye on everything. It was very comfortable there, however, especially of a winter evening, when the stove burned clear and bright, and all the work of the day was cleared away. Arrived in her own sanctum, Mary Anne stood still in the middle of the floor, with a troubled, perplexed air.

"Lor' a-mighty, who'd a thought it? There's something mighty queer. I don't like them eyes o' his; but he needs a friend, an' that friend's Mary Anne Webber, for sure."

Then she laid herself down and slept the sleep of the physically tired, while