

—she made a movement toward Jimmy—"I'll tear your ugly face to ribbons, I will," she screamed.

"I'll wait for you downstairs," said Jimmy. "I don't wonder I'm a mahoganyist, as they call it. There's only one thing certain about a woman, and that's— No, even her temper is uncertain."

And he strolled out.

For half an hour he waited on the doorstep with perfect patience. At the end of that time Bob appeared; it was obvious that he had been crying. Jimmy said no word, but led him into the first public-house and ordered two stiff drinks.

"Got the twirls?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes."

"The jamaes?"

"Yes. Everything."

"The neddy?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I hate using the neddy."

"Of course you do. So do I. But if it comes to a rough-and-tumble you must have something to hit a man with, and I ain't got one. I ain't big enough to be violent."

"You'll do," said Bob.

They had a few more drinks, then made their way northward. Toward midnight they were trudging the Finchley lanes. A policeman caused them much trouble by following them. They had to waste an hour in shaking him off, before they could proceed to their goal. At last, however, they were quit of him, and under the windows of the house. Everything was dark and still.

"I'll just prowl around and take a' observation," said Jimmy.

"All right. Be quick," said Bob.

He stood shivering in the black shadow whilst Jimmy stole stealthily from door to door, window to window.

"We'd better try the kitchen way, I think," said Jimmy, when he returned. "It seems easiest. Hark!"

"I didn't hear nothink. What did you think it was?"

"I dunno. Fancy, I expect."

They crept softly among the flower beds.

"This is the window," said Jimmy, at last.

It was barred without and shuttered within.

"Soft as silk," said Bob, becoming interested. "I'll have to use the spreader."

He felt in his capacious pockets and drew out the implement he required. He fastened it to the bars and began to force them apart. They bent like wire under his strength, the rust falling in brown flakes upon his hands.

"That's wide enough, Bob," said Jimmy. "I can easily get through that. Now the window."

With a thin, strong knife, Bob pushed back the hasp, and began, very cautiously, to open the window.

"How about the shutters?" whispered Jimmy.

"Jest a bar-fastening, I suppose? 'Tain't likely to be anything more."

"Thunder!" cried Jimmy. "Now I come to think of it it's a new bar with a spring catch."

"Sure?"

"Sure as death."

"It'll take us half an hour to unscrew it. We'd better try a door."

Jimmy was consumed with self-reproach.

"I'll put a lemon in my mouth and sell my head to a pork-butcher," said he.

Bob attacked the door. The key had been left in the inside. Jimmy poked an oiled feather into the lock. Then Bob produced a pair of fine nippers which he inserted in the key hole. The key was gripped; he twisted it, and the door was practically open. Only two bolts and a chain remained to bar them out.

"We'll have to push the key out," said Bob. "Is the old gent a light sleeper?"



MASTER OF THE SITUATION.

OLD GENTLEMAN.—Now, boys, if I give you a penny each will you throw away those nasty cigars?

BOY.—I tell ye wot. Gi' me a penny an' Billy'll throw his away.

"It won't make no row, there's a mat," said Jimmy.

"Out it goes then," said Bob.

But the mat had evidently been removed, for the key fell with a loud jangle on the stone floor of the passage.

"Crumbs!" cried Jimmy. "That's done it!"

They waited and listened. The wind went sougling by, and an owl screamed. A moment later a window opened above them and a white head peeped out.

"Who's there?" asked a fierce voice.

"Now why don't you go back to bed?" whispered Jimmy.

"Who's there?" asked the fierce voice.

They crouched low under the bushes.

"Made sure I heard something," muttered the white head. "Sounded like a knock. Rats, perhaps."

In a minute or two the window was shut down again.

"We'll have to give the old boy a chance to drop off," remarked Jimmy. "That is, if he's going to be sensible and not come prowling downstairs. Hark!"

"No, he's gone back to bed, I think," said Bob. "We'll wait a quarter of an hour; then we'll try our luck again."

The minutes passed, intolerably long, and without any further alarms, and at last Bob got to work again. He slipped back the bolts and unhooked the chain. The work had to be done noiselessly, therefore slowly. Jimmy handed the tools as they were required, and Bob patiently manipulated them. Both sighed, relieved when the door swung open, and they were free to enter the house.

Jimmy carried the lantern. He slipped back the dark slide and allowed the light to play upon the floor and walls. There was no sound, save the occasional creaking of a loose board; but the still gloom breathed terror, and the faces of the two men, dimly discernable to one another through the darkness, were strained and white.

The room doors were unlocked. First, they entered the