

JACK.



EARLY in March a bitter frost set in. The pavements were thick with ice, and the snow in the streets was trodden into cakes by the beating of the horses' hoofs upon it. Every here and there there was a crossing, almost more slippery than the rest of the street, for the under surface of the snow had melted and frozen again, and melted and frozen again, until it was impossible to keep a foothold.

Jack and his mother, standing at the corner of the street with a basket from which only two bunches of violets had as yet disappeared, caught sight of a lady on the other side who often bought of them. She did not see them, and turned to go down another way.

"Here, give me two bunches, and I'll go over and catch her!" cried Jack, pulling two out of the basket, and running off as fast as his feet could carry him.

The crossing was dangerous enough—one mass of slippery, uneven ice—but he managed to get safely enough to the "island" in the middle. He had just started on the second half of his journey when a hansom, coming sharply round the corner, swerved suddenly aside to avoid a great dray.

What need to describe what followed? A hundred such things happen every year—a little, ragged boy knocked down and run over; a tall, black figure darting in among the staggering horses and heavy waggons, and bearing the child out again; its face white as death, its soiled, ragged clothes staining the fine black cloth on the strong arms that held it tenderly the violets, crushed and dirty, still held in the one little hand that was whole; a woman, weeping and wringing her hands, following. This is what the world saw. "Poor child! but boys are always so foolhardy, and are always in the way," it said.

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It was a comfortable room on the third floor, with a window looking over the smoky chimneys

to the west, where they laid poor little Jack. The tall pale-faced minister, whom he heard that memorable night, offered to carry him to the nearest hospital, but the woman pleaded against it.

"They took my man away to one, sir," she said, and I couldn't see him but once a week, and he died when I wasn't there one night,—and we couldn't never even say good-by. Don't take him there, sir: let me be with him, he's all I have!" The fiery, earnest eyes of the minister softened. "Very well," he said, simply.

So Jack was taken to a room such as he had never entered in his life before.

The minister was poor enough himself. He had just managed to save enough out of his scanty stipend to hire rooms a little better than those in which he lived at present, which were in a noisy thoroughfare, and looked out on a tan-yard. But he set aside the idea at once when he heard the woman speak. She must be with her child to the last. So he laid the little, mangled form gently on a soft bed in one of the better class of lodgings, and went out to get a doctor, leaving them together.

For the greater part of the time Jack was unconscious. The fever ran high, and he talked incessantly. Sometimes he fancied he was selling violets, and would say, pitifully, in his little, broken voice, "Please, lady, buy; oh, do buy! mother and me hain't nothing to eat!" At other times he would think that he was shivering in the keen, east wind, although there was a warm fire burning in the grate. "Ain't you a little bit of shawl for me, mother? Why do them people in that window have such a blazin' fire, and we be out here in the cold?" For Jack was always of an inquiring turn of mind, even in delirium.

The minister came often to see them both, but never, save once, found Jack conscious. He was standing, one day, by the bedside, watching the child, when suddenly Jack opened his eyes, with a ray of recognition in them. His face grew pinched and eager with the desire to make himself understood. He reached up his one little hand, and pulled the minister down to him. "The King," he said, excitedly, "the beautiful King—where the big gates—