

It was growing dusk, and Mr. Blakeford struck a match and lit a gas-jet over the fireplace, just in front of a yellow-looking almanack; and now I could see that the place was one litter of papers, parchments, and dust, save at the end, which was occupied by a bookcase full of great volumes all bound in leather about the colour of Mr. Rowle's skin.

"Sit down there," he said shortly, and he pointed to one of the tall stools by the great desk; and as I climbed upon it he picked up the bag I had placed upon the desk, threw it upon the table, and walked out of the place.

"Like a man—take it like a man," I said to myself as I recalled Mr. Rowle's words; and, pressing my teeth tightly and clenching my fists, I sat there fighting down the depressing feelings that came upon me in a flood, and wondering what I should have to do.

My musings were interrupted by the loud entry at the end of about half an hour of a cross-looking servant-girl, who banged a small tray containing a mug and a plate of bread and butter down before me.

"There's your tea," she said roughly; "and look here, I'm not going to wait on you. Bring the mug to the kitchen when you've done, and you'll have to fetch it in future."

I looked up at her very wistfully as she scowled at me, but I did not speak.

"Sulky, eh?" she said. "You'll soon get that taken out of you here, I can tell you."

With these words she whisked herself out of the office, the swing-door creaked dismally and banged behind her, and I was left to enjoy my meal.

At first I felt that I could not touch it, but I was faint and hungry, and after a few mouthfuls a boy's young healthy appetite asserted itself, and I drank all the mean thin tea and finished the bread and butter.

Then I remembered that I was to take the things back to the kitchen. Where was the kitchen, and dare I leave that stool without Mr. Blakeford's orders?

I felt that I dare not, and therefore sat there patiently gazing about the room, my eyes resting longest on those bills which told of sales of furniture, as I wondered whether those who had belonged to the furniture had died and left a son alone in the world, as I seemed to be just then.

There was a clock, I found, in one corner—an old Dutch clock—that ticked away in a very silent, reserved fashion, giving further every hour a curious running-down noise, as if it were about to strike; but though I watched it patiently as the minute-hand passed on, it never fulfilled the expectations given, but confined itself to its soft subdued *tick, tick, tick, tick*, hour after hour.