

Probyn, silent and fascinated. Astonishment soon gave place to alarm. The capacity of that small vessel must surely be strained to breaking point. Still Henry continued to gorge with the voracity of a famished wolf.

A solid hour had passed. Henry's hostesses still sat watching him. They were now rather pale, and their folded hands rested on the snowy cloth. They were generous to a fault, and their hospitality knew no bounds. But when at length Henry leaned back in his chair, perspiring and exhausted, and acknowledged regretfully that he could eat no more, Richenda felt it laid upon her as a matter of duty to utter a reproof.

She joined the tips of her fingers, and looking timidly at the victim of repletion, said gently: "Of course, thou knowest we are pleased to see thee enjoy thyself, Henry, but dost thou not think that thou hast rather indulged?" Henry's conscience, and his waistcoat too, told him that he had; a slow, greasy smile stole over his face, and he nodded his head. He was not a pretty sight, and the sisters, who were the essence of refinement, could not repress a feeling of repulsion, of which they felt ashamed.

"At what hour did Mary Probyn tell thee to return home, Henry?" asked Richenda.

"Before nine, Gulielma Gilling," Henry replied, not without hope that supper would be provided at about eight.

"We will try to make the time pass pleasantly till the hour comes for thee to leave," said Richenda. "I have a book containing specimens of pressed seaweed, which are very beautiful, and which I am sure thou wilt like to see."

She rose from her seat with the intention of ringing for the maid to clear the table, when an unexpected and terrifying apparition caused her to start back hurriedly. The dining-room opened upon the lawn. The French windows were thrown wide open, the evening being warm. In the doorway stood a rough, gipsy-looking man in a brown velvet jacket and a fur cap in a mangy condition. In his hand he carried a sack.

"What dost thou want?" demanded Richenda in a firm voice. "How didst thou get in? Thou shouldst have rung at the side door."

The sisters were secretly terrified. The situation of Pennington Lodge was lonely and the evening was closing in.

The man advanced into the room. "I come over the wall," he said hoarsely, "and wot I want is these, and some more after that," and he began collecting the silver spoons, sugar-bowl and cream-jug, and putting them into the sack. "You sit still, you young varmint," he said savagely to Henry, who had made a sudden movement, and producing a cudgel from his pocket, he shook it at the boy.

Henry put his hands in his pockets, leered up impudently into the thief's face, and winked, winked flagrantly.

Gulielma saw what passed, and with difficulty refrained from bursting into tears. She was grievously disappointed in Henry.

"Dost thou know how very wicked it is to steal?" said Richenda. "If thou art in want, we will willingly give thee help."

"I know you would," grinned the man, "but I happen to want more than you would be likely to give me."

"Thy way of life will assuredly lead to sorrow and misery," Richenda continued; "the day of reckoning will overtake thee."

"Not it. My pony and barrer is at the turn of the road in charge of a boy. I'll have a good start of the traps. Now then, I'll trouble you for your tickers and purses. Quick; I don't like to be kep' waitin'," and a flourish of the cudgel gave emphasis to the demand.

The watches were only silver, but fond memories were attached to them, and the sisters placed them in the man's dirty hand with sighs of regret. The long silken purses held gold and silver, but they were given up without a pang.

The man's greedy eyes ranged over the room. "There's money in that there desk," he said. "Is there or ain't there? I'm told as Quakers don't know how to lie."

"The desk contains money," said Richenda with dignity.

"Open it, then, and 'and over."

Richenda unlocked the desk, and with

an unmoved countenance saw the man take out gold and notes to a considerable amount.

"Wot I like about you is, you don't give no trouble," he said. "Blest if I ain't sorry to clean you hout; but I reckon you've got blunt put by in the bank. If my own circumstances wasn't so desperate, you see—well, that's where it is. My service to you, you hold dears."

After a long and keen look at the sisters, he went on with savage humor, "Well, if I'd 'ad a glass or two, I should think I was seein' double. A case of twins, ain't it?"

Richenda started away from him in horror. Her thoughts went back to the dusty road near her old home.

"Oh, I wouldn't 'urt you. When I'm treated fair, I'm a real gentleman. Now I want some grub. You seem to have made a clean board 'ere. Got a 'am or a cold jint in the cupboard, to eat on the way 'ome?"

"I'll show thee where the larder is," said Henry, jumping up; "I peeped in

this afternoon, and saw a beautiful pie. This way."

The sisters turned reproachful eyes on Henry, who however, took no notice of them.

The man touched his fur cap to the ladies, and followed Henry out of the room.

The sisters sat down side by side, and clasped hands. They did not shed tears, but they looked very sad and dejected. "I'm so disappointed in Henry Probyn," said Richenda; "he has taken the part of the robber against us."

"And we have tried to be kind to the boy," said Gulielma sadly. "How can we tell John and Mary Probyn of his ill behaviour?"

Their further conversation was interrupted by the sounds of furious knocking, and a muffled voice raised in violent anger.

The next moment Henry Probyn burst into the room.

"I have locked him in the larder," he said joyfully, standing on one leg, and

bringing his other foot down with a crash. "I have sent out the servant, Eliza Dunning, to bring help."

Then he jumped upon a chair, and uttered a loud hurrah.

"Come, Richenda and Gulielma Gilling, and help to pile furniture against the door. He's kicking with his thick boots, but the door is strong. Do not be frightened, I will stay with you."

Richenda took hold of one of Henry's hands, and Gulielma seized the other. "We have been unjust to thee, Henry Probyn," they said; "thou must forgive us. Thou art a brave boy."

Then they went to the kitchen, and by their united efforts a heavy table and other articles of furniture were dragged against the larder door. Meanwhile the kicking continued, and blood-curdling threats came in an unceasing stream from the imprisoned robber. But the house was old and strongly built, and the door was iron-sheeted. There was no hope of escape.

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