

CHAPTER XVIII.—(Cont'd).

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The man looked up at the smooth masterful face, and inwardly acknowledged his opponents power.

"I'm thinking, gov'nor," he answered slowly, "you heard all there was to hear, and saw all there was to see; an' a bit more besides," he added as he thought of that precious gold watch, he had so stupidly failed to see. "Any'ow, if you're so anxious for me to go over it all again, I wanted to know the whereabouts of a niece of mine—a young girl he took to 'is 'ome some weeks ago."

Mr. Vermont's eyes gleamed and his hand shook slightly with excitement as he lit another cigar; for evidently this was the girl at whom, he remembered, Norgate had grumbled. If she could only be kept out of sight, Jasper thought he saw a way to getting his beloved friend into even deeper trouble than he had ever dreamed possible.

"You can prove it, I suppose?" he asked.

"I can," said Mr. Wilfer; though, as a matter of fact, he would have found this rather a difficulty.

Mr. Jasper put his hand into his pocket; as we have said before, he was not very generous when it came to spending his own money, but there were occasions when it was necessary to buy fresh tools, and this was one of them. He drew out some gold, which Mr. Wilfer eyed as greedily as a dog would a bone.

"Now," said Vermont, "your address?"

"Cracknell Court, Soho, gov'nor," returned the man, his manner visibly altering at the sight of money.

"Well, don't you alter it without my permission," Jasper said sternly. "You may want you to do something for me and, if so, you can get your revenge. Meanwhile, here's something to keep you out of mischief, that's to say, in drink; you'll be safer like that." He handed over the money—about three pounds. "Mind! don't go selling any more forged pictures, like the one the bond of which I hold, or you'll get caught. They make the sentences for fraud pretty heavy nowadays."

Mr. Wilfer shivered. Up to now, he himself had never been imprisoned; but other members of the gang had served various sentences, and their reminiscences were not comforting.

"I understand, gov'nor," he said; "but what of the gal?"

"All you've got to do is to wait till she comes back; or if you find her about, let me know," replied Jasper. "Now, be off, and remember I can lay my hands on you—and so can the police—any minute I like, so don't play me any tricks. Good-night."

With that, Mr. Vermont turned on his heel and strode swiftly and silently away.

Wilfer looked after him with a scowl.

"He's a clever devil," he said, as he, too, went on his way.

Clever, Mr. Vermont most undoubtedly was. His worst enemies would have denied him that virtue; but these his cleverness had overruled. It had so amused him to see his victim, that he had not even thought of his niece.