

Peter said nothing. Varney feared that he looked rather bored.

"At first," he went on promptly, "I'll confess that I did n't see so much in the thing. But the more I've thought of it the more its unique charm has appealed to me. It is nothing more nor less than a novel, piquant little adventure. Exactly the sort of thing to attract a man who likes to take a sporting chance. Look at the difficulties of it. Go to a strange town where there are thousands and millions of strange children, locate Mary, isolate her, make friends with her, coax her to the yacht—captivate her, capture her! How are we to do all that, you ask? I reply, the Lord knows. That is where the sport comes in. We are forbidden to use force. We are forbidden to use Mrs. Carstairs or bring her into it in any way. We are forbidden, of course, to let the child know who we are. Everything must be done by almost diabolical craft, while dodging suspicion at every step. Can you beat it for a fascinating little expedition?"

Peter relit his pipe and meditatively dropped the match on the floor. "How old is Mary?"

"Old?" said Varney, surprised at the question, "Oh, I don't know. The separation took place—h'm—say eight years ago, and my guess is that she was about four at the time. From this and the way Uncle Elbert spoke of her, I daresay twelve would hit it fair and square. A grand age for kidnapping, what?"

"On the contrary," said Peter, "it makes it mere baby-work. Turn it over as you will, it all boils down to spanking a naughty child."