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chose. She packed up her boxes, not without an ill-natured sneer from Nicholas, who told her that she "went out richer than she came," and arranged that they should go by carrier's cart from the "Fleetwood Arms" to Burley, upon a certain day. But before she absolutely left the place she had arranged to sleep two nights at the house of Jane Carfax, an old friend of hers who lived in the little hamlet of Fleetwood, and who treated Margaret almost as if she were a kinswoman of her own. She was rather startled to find that Nicholas had dismissed Sally the maid the day before.

"But you will be left without a servant in the house, Nicholas," she said.

"I don't want womenfolk," he answered her, morosely. "There is Bill Barley can come in and clean up, and I shall cook my own food. As I told you before, I am going to sell the whole place as soon as I can find anyone to take it off my hands. I am closing tonight."

"I am very sorry," said Margaret, almost under her breath; but Nicholas' look of sour incredulity made her resolve to say no more. "Good-bye, Nicholas," she said, turning towards him as she left the house with some of her smaller possessions gathered in one hand. "You will shake hands with me before I go?"

"No," he said, stepping back and putting his hands in his pockets. "I won't; but I'll take a kiss, if you like to give me one."

Margaret hesitated. She had given him a kiss many times before, in the days when they had looked upon each other as brother and sister; but she was little inclined to show such familiarity now. Still, she was leaving, and it was for the last time, and she had loved his father and mother well, so, after a moment's hesitation, she said: "I will kiss you good-bye if you like, Nicholas," and turned her face upwards for the parting salute.

But she was sorry afterwards that she had done so, for Nicholas threw his arms around her, and kissed her repeatedly, then almost threw her from him, and, turning away, said in a harsh voice: "Go, go, I tell you, I have seen the last of you in this house. It will be a very different place when we meet again."

She could not tell what he meant, and she was only anxious to get away. She actually ran from the old house where she had once been so happy and was glad when she left it far behind her, and felt convinced that Nicholas was not following her. The clasp of his arms and the touch of his lips on her cheek seemed to her like some terrible nightmare, and she shuddered at the very thought of ever entering her old home again.

As soon as Margaret had left the house, Nicholas closed the door and locked it. She had gone out from a side entrance, from which a passage led to the bar-parlor and private sitting-room. Nicholas proceeded to lock all the doors which communicated with the bar-parlor, so that, although the inn door itself stood open with an inviting air, there was no possibility that any unwary visitor should stray beyond the precincts of the bar itself. He had sent Sally away, and had dismissed one or two men who generally hung about the back premises, although this fact Margaret did not know. And he had given out that he should close the house that evening, and never open it again. As he expected, this announcement brought a number of old customers that afternoon and evening. But very few of them stayed long, seeing that there was nothing in the landlord's surly face to induce them to remain, and the sweet-voiced Margaret was absent. As the afternoon went their numbers grew very thin, and Nicholas had leisure time to employ himself in a rather odd piece of work, for he was bringing in from the back premises a number of kegs and casks, which he deposited in the sitting-room, and in various other portions of the house. He gave scant attention to the old laborers who came in during the afternoon, leaving them to be served by the pot-

man, who was also under notice, and was to go back to his family that night.

"But what are you going to do with yourself, Nicholas?" one of the men asked him. "You beant' going to live here all by yerself, be 'e?"

"No fear," said Nicholas. "I am going up to London, either by the night train, or early tomorrow morning. The lawyers in Burley will look after the house for me until it is sold."

"Have 'e heard of a customer for it?" asked the old man.

"Yes, and a very good one," said Nicholas, drily. "Oh, I am not going to sell it at a loss, you needn't fear that."

He was glad when they were all gone and he could return to his work, though it was of a curious kind. He was heaping shavings and flimsy rags into some of the rooms and after a time he began to soak them with petroleum, of which he seemed to have laid in a stock; but he shut the front door when he ventured on this piece of work. A knock aroused him, and made him swear irritably to himself.

"Close on eleven o'clock. I shan't open," he said. But the knock was repeated, together with a loud shout, suggestive of nautical ideas.

"Ship ahoy! Heave-ho, Nick! Are you there, old chap?" Nicholas stood for a moment, silent and trembling, with the great drops of perspiration standing upon his brow.

"It's Harry Medicott," he muttered to himself. "I know his voice." Then he went down, carefully locking the doors behind him as he went. It was a dark, rainy night, and there stood Medicott himself, in nondescript and somewhat ragged attire, but with a face as bright and jovial as ever.

"Nick himself, I declare!" he ejaculated. "How goes it, old boy? I am a shipwrecked man, landed without any of my things or a penny in my pocket. Come, you might put me up for a night, so that I can make myself look a bit more respectable before I go down to the village."

"We are closing," said Nicholas, heavily. "I am selling the business. The place is shut up."

"But you can find a corner for me, can't you?" said Harry. Then his face changed a little. "Is anything wrong? How's Mrs. Hallard—and Margaret?"

"My mother's dead," said Nicholas, rather grimly. "Margaret's gone away." His eyes glittered curiously as he held the candle aloft, and Harry, although a simple soul, wondered at the peculiar light in those dark orbs. "Come in," said Nicholas, suddenly changing his tone. "There's no place in the sitting-rooms. They're all full with rubbish and packages; but if you will come straight upstairs, I will put you in my own room—my own bed, if you like, for the matter of that, and fetch you some supper from the larder. Will that do?"

"Splendidly," said Harry, slapping him on the shoulder. "I wondered how you would receive an old friend if he came back to you in rags, Nick. Well, I will remember all my life that you have done me this good turn."

But he did not see the pale and evil look which flitted over the face of Nicholas Hallard as these words were said.

"Come upstairs," said Nicholas, smoothly. "I will show you the way. My room's quite near the top of the house; but there is a good fire, and I was going to have a meal there myself. I will fetch up the ham and the cold beef, and I daresay you would like a bottle of beer, or something stronger, maybe."

So they supped together, merrily enough, until at last Harry, professing himself tired out, flung himself upon the bed to sleep, and Nicholas began to remove the plates and dishes from the room. Before he had finished this operation Harry was fast asleep. Nicholas came and looked at him as he lay.

"I couldn't have planned it better," he said to himself. "Nothing short of an earthquake would wake him after what I put in his beer. Sleep soundly my fine fellow. You will never wake

again." And with these words he turned on his heel and left the room, locking the door securely behind him. Then he went downstairs, and resumed the work upon which he had been engaged before the arrival of Harry Medicott.

* * *

"Fire! Fire! The old inn's alight!" was the cry that echoed through the long village street in the early hours of the Sunday morning, and it was these words which roused Margaret from sleep in the room where she lay with her friend, Jane Carfax. In a very few minutes they arose and had donned their clothes and were out in the open air forming part of the crowd of villagers who had been awakened from their slumbers by the alarming cry of "Fire!" The "Fleetwood Arms" stood at some distance from the village itself, and in rather a lonely spot. It might have been burning for hours before anyone discovered that it was on fire; and, although the river ran close by, there were no fire engines or appliances of any kind to enable people to make any but futile efforts to extinguish the flames.

"Where's Nicholas?" somebody cried out. "Was Nicholas inside?" No, for there was Nicholas himself, wringing his hands and looking up with an expression of despair at the cracking windows and wreaths of smoke and flame.

"It's ruin, ruin, I tell you it is," he cried aloud. "I had only time to get out of the house safe, and I have left everything behind."

"What a mercy that you were out of the house," said Jane, in a low tone to her friend. "I suppose nobody else was left?"

"Nobody, I think," said Margaret. "Ah! the dear old inn that I was so fond of. We shall never see it again."

Suddenly a cry went up. "There's a face at one of the windows! See! at the very top there's someone shouting, and trying to get out!" And then there was a lower cry, which was almost like a sob: "It's Harry Medicott, or his ghost!"

Nicholas stopped wringing his hands and stared upwards; but he did not speak a word. His face was blanched to a hue as ghastly as that of the dead. "He cannot escape," he muttered to himself. "Surely he cannot escape."

There seemed, indeed, no hope for the young man. For the windows beneath him were belching forth great volumes of fire, and from the glow in the room behind him it was plain that the flames had already reached that storey. But even while they looked—all, indeed, except Margaret, who had fallen to the ground in something like a swoon of agony and fear—they saw the young man perform a feat of agility and daring such as they had not ventured to anticipate. He opened the window, and stood upon the sill; then stepping forth, placed his foot warily upon a narrow parapet which ran round that storey of the building. With slow, stealthy steps he made his way along the wall. His training as a sailor made him tread securely where others would not have found a foothold, until he came to the angle of the house where the parapet ended, and it seemed as though he could go no further. To drop would be mere suicide, and the clouds of smoke were becoming so dense that, for a moment or two, his figure was completely concealed. Then a sudden shout went up from the crowd—a shout of exultation and amazement. He had found, it seemed, an old water-pipe, which ran down the side of the wall at that angle—evidently he had remembered it from the days of his boyhood—and, although he ran a considerable risk, seeing that the metal was dangerously set from the heat of the flames, he managed to slide down it as only a sailor or an athlete could do. The last final leap into safety was an easy one, and he found himself unhurt in the centre of the crowd, while a prayer of thanksgiving went up from the hearts of almost all who watched.

But not from the heart of Nicholas Hallard, who stole away in the dark-