

The Ex-Policeman's Story

It was an old house in Bayard Street. Yes, a mighty old house—wooden, and gable-end to the street. And so dilapidated! Dear me! The crows, who were once supposed to have a mortgage on it, had foreclosed time out of mind; and the rats bought it at sheriff's auction.

It was a blustering, bullying night in November that found me sitting in the front room, second floor, of that old house. Through the keen northeaster, and the every-now-and-then storms of sleet, I had come hither on a lark—one of *my* larks. The variety I indulge in consists in going into all sorts of out-of-the-way places, in all kinds of out-of-sorts weather, without any sort of an umbrella—nothing but an immense top-coat, and no end to Hessian boots. I do this to see life.

The only other occupant of the room was a grizzled, bony man, about fifty years of age, but so worn and stooping that he seemed a good deal older. Altogether, his rigid, utterly unjoyous face, and those lank, talon-like hands of his, left nervous and bare by a pair of very ragged sleeves, made him look like a statue of Troublous Times done in Berlin iron.

This was the man's only room in that house in Bayard Street. But there were other lodgers—there always *are* other lodgers in houses in that street, whose numbers vary from ten to fifty, and they have on the average a dozen very small and dirty boys apiece. Accordingly, when I first came into this room of which I speak, and saw a fire-place there without any fire in it, and thought how mighty cold the old man must be if *I* had to shiver in my top-coat and Hessians, I put my head out into the dark entry and halloed, "John! Jim! Pat!" secure of a liberal answer from one, at least, of the lodgers' dirty little boys to my invitation.

I was agreeably disappointed in my calculation of the number, by an immediate response from eight, certainly, of a grade from the premature infant up to the hobbledehoy, who rushed out into the several intricate passage-ways, screaming, "What's up?" The promise of a dime, conditioned upon the faithful discharge of his trust, to a selection from the tumult who turned out to be Pat, operated so benignantly upon the mind of that youth, that he consented to go for a peck of coals and a bundle of kindling wood. Just as he was putting on his fragmentary shoes to hie forth, that bully of a wind made through the outer keyhole, such an excellent sarcastic imitation of a pleasant family tea kettle that I felt like defying it by a production of the genuine article, and added to my commission a pound of ham, a loaf of bread, and a shilling's worth of tea. In about ten minutes Pat actually came back with the equivalents for my money, whether innate honesty or because the bewilderment of possessing such a treasure of cash prevented him from calculating the extent of "the time" he might have had for that amount, is a question for casuists.

Suppose now the fire made, the tea drawn in another lodger's hired kettle, the ham-rasher done to a turn on still another's frying-pan, these eatable and drinkable comforts, together with the bread, vanished before the starved appetite of poor old Troublous Times, and the last of the lodgers who came out to snuff the savor in the entry, and say, "My! *Hain't* old Hallett having a feed?" gone back to the things they called bed—and you arrive at the exact date where I began at first.

Old Hallett—yes, that was his name—knocked the ashes out of an ancient black pipe which had been lying cold on the mantel-piece, filled it from my box, and thus began:

“Well, I’m beat! I’m quite confounded! If any body had come to me this afternoon and said, ‘Hallett, a friend’s coming—a friend who’ll really take an interest like, and want to know all about you, and how you get on—who’ll bring along bread and ham and coals and tea, and give you a regular old-fashioned supper,’ I’d have said, ‘No, you don’t! I’m too old a bird to fool that way!’ For you’re the first man that has spoken a good word to me this ten years.

“And you would like to hear my story, would you? Well, it may be interesting to you; as for its being so to me I can’t say much. But here goes.

“I have always been a taker-care of other people’s safety. When they had watchmen in new York I was one of them. When they started the police system I went into that corps. Night or day for thirty years I was on duty, through hot and cold, wet and dry, watching and walking, to see that no harm happened to life or property so far as I could help it. I was twenty-two years old when I began, fifty-two when I left off—but very old for that age.

“I got to be forty years old, and I was still a single man. A man who has so little time for his bread and butter you may think, sure enough, has still less for making love. And I always had a queer, old-fashioned idea about getting married—that a fellow must love, and make love, if he wanted to do the thing up all right. I’ve known plenty of people who looked at those things as a matter of business. They said, ‘Now I’m making two dollars a day, and the girl, she’s got a little something, so we’ll just hitch to and say nothing more about it.’ I went to one or two weddings where the thing was done in that way, and hang me if I didn’t ask myself all the time the parson was going through the operation, what difference there was between that and the coupling together of any dumb stock for farmin’ purposes.

“But don’t think that the idea never came into my head. Bless me! fifty times a week. Sometimes when I had to pilot a pretty, frightened young thing over crossings, and she made up a sweet little face and said, ‘Thank ye!’ on the other side of the way, I’d say to myself, ‘Hallett, Hallett, my boy! I wonder whether that’s the farthest that any woman will ever go with you in your life, just across the street; when it would be so nice to be going all the way down to the Battery—the jumping-off place of this world—with a soft hand on your arm, like the big uns?’ Then, too, when I was on my night patrol, and every now and then one of those poor creeturs who have gone over the dam of honor and goodness to whirl round and round for a few years in the Hell-gate of this city, and then be sucked down out of sight—God knows where—when one of these passed by, all tricked out in gay colors, and laughing a dreadful, empty, devil-laugh, I grew awful downhearted with wondering if God couldn’t have saved one of them when she was young and innocent to be the wife of a poor, honest man like Hallett. So many women going to the fiend, and not one for me! I tell ye it was a riddle which almost drove me mad.

“Well, as I said, things went on this way till I was over my fortieth birthday. My old mother, whom I’d been taking care of all along, died, and I was all alone in the world. *My world*—which means the three blocks on Broadway, which made my beat, and the one little room in Grand Street where I did what eating and sleeping I got time for.

“One night in the November of the year I was forty—very much such a night as this, only blowier a trifle, perhaps—I was walking slowly back and forth on patrol, with my hands in my pockets—thinking and wondering as usual. On the other side of the street a man and a woman went by, talking quite loud, and walking at a rate which was almost a run. I didn’t quite hear what they said, but their manner was noticeable, and I stood still under an awning to watch them. They reached the corner and stopped. In the bright light of the gas-lamp I saw the woman lift up her hand, entreating like—oh, such a beautiful white hand that trembled and seemed to speak like a tongue!—then the cursed ruffian that was with her hit her a blow with his great fist, and down she went on the sidewalk like a dead thing, without a groan[.]

“Quick as a flash I sounded the call for help and put after him. But he saw me in time, and the way he legged it was beyond *me*. I soon found that he would get to his crib before any other policeman could come up, and, in the mean time, there was that poor creetur that he’d just felled, devil that he was, lying senseless on the hard, cold pavement, without a soul near her to see whether she was dead or not. So, though my club, so to speak, was thirsty for him as if it had a fever, I hurried back, hot and mad, to the corner. I raised her up in my arms; she was still breathing, slow and heavy, but outside of that gave no more sign of life than the stones she fell on. There was a light in the drug store a block off, so I carried her there as you would a baby, and knocked and called till the sleepy boy got up and let me in. We laid her down on a settee, and poured brandy down her throat and rubbed her hands and feet and held smelling salts to her nose, Lor’, we did every thing for the poor creetur—but it seemed as if she never would come to. At last she did though, and when she opened a pair of great, wild, black eyes and asked where she was, and if she’d been dreaming, and such like, I was perfectly beside myself with joy.

“Would to God, Sir, she had never opened her eyes again!”

Old Hallett clutched convulsively at his throat as if he would choke down with those iron fingers of his something terrible which was rising from within, and then went on.

“She was a pretty creetur—oh, *so* pretty! I’ve seen a great many good-looking women, as is nat’ral, considerin’ all the chances I’ve had in my long life on the street, but I don’t think I’m talkin’ exaggerated when I say that she was the best-looking one I ever saw. The most wonderful thing about her was her hand. I’ve told you how white and speaking it looked in the gas-light where I first saw it; now I couldn’t help taking it up and kissing it, and nursing it like a little bird against my bosom, making an excuse that it was cold, and saying, ‘God bless you, child! you can’t tell how glad I am you ain’t dead, after all.’

“When she got wide awake and nat’ral like once more, so she could talk in a low, feeble voice, she told me she wasn’t hurt much—her head only pained her a little—that was all. Should I take her home? I asked her.

“At the speakin’ of that word ‘home,’ she began to take on dreadful. She hadn’t such a thing in the world; her mother was dead, and her father—the drunken brute that struck her—hadn’t been sober for a month, and was just turned out of a poor old room they had down in Cherry Street, because he wouldn’t pay his rent. He struck her because she begged him to go to the station-

house and ask a lodgin'. And now she didn't know where he'd gone to, or what would become of him. He was found three weeks after floating off Pier No. 1.

"As the girl, in her broken, heart-sick voice, was telling me this story, the druggist's boy behind her head put his tongue in his cheek, and pointed to the corner of his eye in a brutish way, which made me clutch my club tightly again, and feel as if I would like to teach him manners. For I believed her—yes, to this time I believe her yet. I had heard a good many pitiful stories in my day; some of them I couldn't swallow; but, I tell ye, they weren't told in that voice, or with that hand explaining them and putting them home.

"Did you ever notice how quick a man will sometimes settle what's been a puzzle to him for years? Every thing he's ever thought regardin' it—all the whys and the wherefores and the hows go flyin' through his head like an express train; then comes something inside of him like a long whistle; and, before he can speak, the train's stopped at dépôt he never dreamed of, and he goes ashore out of it for his whole life. Well, so it was with me. I've often thought since that the smell of the drugs in that shop must have crazed me, for, quick as a flash, I saw all the lonely nights and days I'd spent in my forty years—all the questions I'd been askin' myself—all the doubts, and the wonderin's, and the twists, and the whirls, run by and haul short up with a roar just at the foot of the settee where I was standin.' For, I said to myself, though this young thing is wretched poor, and her clothes are so thin that they can hardly hold together, I really do believe her heart is a rich, precious thing, and her honor hasn't a rent in it. And though I am forty years old, and she can't have seen half that, she may love me enough to make my lone room shine with a light which I never saw except when I was dreamin'.

"So I said to her, 'You're mistaken; you have got a home.' She looked up at me in a sort of startled, unbelieving way, and stopped crying. But noticin' my badge, and seein' I was on the police, she hid her eyes with that witchin' hand of hers, and answered; 'Yes, yes, take me to the station-house.'

"I caught my breath, and tried to look her steady in the face, and spoke something this way: 'Young woman, my name's Harry Hallett. I ain't rich; I don't live up town in a big house, with picturs and lookin'-glasses in gold frames, and I'm only a policeman. But bein' that's so, I've got a soul and a heart inside of me, and a room in Grand Street outside of me when I'm in-doors; and if either of 'em can do you any good, then you shall never go to the station-house—that's all.'

"The druggist's boy began a indulgin' of himself in some motions and faces which didn't exactly suit my present feelin's, so I gave him a shove which enabled him to sit down without intendin' it; and lifted the girl, almost before she knew it, from the settee and out into the street. The cold air a kind o' revived of her, and as she said she felt quite strong enough to walk I let her do it, and took her gently along, a leanin' on my arm, around to my place in Grand Street. There I tucked her up all snug and warm in my own bed, and went off to attend to my beat till morning.

"Wasn't I a proud, glad man! I didn't mind the cold; I wasn't lonely any more; for my own thoughts, which before that had been more bother to me than all the burglars I ever looked out for, turned all at once into mighty pleasant company, and seemed to patrol up and down with me,

shaking my hands like, and saying, ‘Wish you joy! wish you joy, Harry Hallett!’ My! but it was be-eu-ti-ful!

“I don’t want to tire you, Sir, by stretchin’ out. So I’ll just tell you, as you must have guessed a long way back, that, by-and-by, we were married. We were not a young couple—that is, only one of us—but we had a wedding, such as any newspaper would have called romantic. For the first time since I entered the service I got leave to be off beat for a day, and we had the operation done in church, and my Mary—that was her name—had pretty little rosebuds stuck about in her hair, till she looked like a real walkin’ window from Reid’s green-house. But, O Lord! I musn’t think of that, or I sha’n’t keep up till I get through.

“Bein’ married, of course I felt like increasin’ my ’stablishment. So Mary and I took one more room in the Grand Street buildin’, and began keepin’ house in a small, quiet sort of way. I had been known in the Department for a good while, and, as I had always tried to do my duty, was thought pretty well of. So when I applied to be put on the day service altogether, I didn’t find much difficulty in getting what I asked. That gave us all the pleasant long evenings together, and when I got home after dark, and heard a sweet woman’s voice up at the top of the stairs, in place of the dumbness and dark I used to climb up into, all tired from my beat, I tell you every step seemed like getting higher and higher into a little heaven. And then, when I felt *her* arms round my neck, and her kiss on my mouth, and that little white hand of hers—that all our housekeeping could not soil or cramp—led me in where the bright tea-kettle was a singin’, and the two cups sat waitin’ by the toast on the white cloth, and the candle was lighted, and every thing all brushed up and tidy, smiling ‘How d’ye-do, Harry Hallett?’ right into my face—

“Oh! I mustn’t think of that neither.

“Well, time went on, and we’d been married about a year. We began to know that, before long, by God’s will, there would be three of us to love one another in that dear old place[.] And at last the hour came. Of a soft spring night a little boy was born to us. But he was born dead. Thank God!—born dead.”

Again old Troublous Times, as if realizing how deep must be his wretchedness when he could fervently render so dreadful a thanksgiving, caught at his throat and choked his heart down.

“The mother was sorely tried by this trouble. So was I; but most of all because I feared she would never get up again. But she did rise, after much pain and weakness, and was about again the same as before.

“We lived very much alone. I never had time to make any very large number of friends. I don’t know as how I wanted to—for friends in our walk—policeman’s friends, that is—are, a precious sight too often, these smooth-faced fellows who would get you off your beat to drink with ’em, and then report you to head-quarters to get your place. So I was civil to every body, and intimate with hardly a soul. Mary was enough for me—the thought of her was good company to me all the daytime, and at night the sight of her, and the havin’ her close by, was a whole houseful of friends a drinkin’ my health out of prize-pitchers and singin’ glees. I never thought of wantin’ any body else.

“It’s come acrost me, pretty hard too, a great many times since then, that I didn’t do altogether right in this. She was a young thing, all fresh and rosy, and fond of society, while I was, in a manner, an old man. Old enough to have been her father, and beginnin’ to grow pepper-and-salty all about the temples, though I wasn’t the lookin’ man I am now, not by no means. And it wasn’t in the natur’ of things that she could sit by herself all day, sewin’ or thinkin’, and make up such pretty pictur[e]s of *me* to keep her from being lonely, as I did of *her* every minute I was away. I ought to have made friends for her—and then I should have been sure that she wasn’t in danger of no ’sociations that might be bad. For most folks will have some company—’specially women.

“We had been married for a matter of three years when I began to observe, on comin’ home o’ nights, that Mary was less lively, and seemed to be thinkin’ deeply, and would look ’round with a start, wakin’ up like, when I spoke to her. It weighed on me considerable to see her so—and accordingly, one night says I, ‘Mary, my love, I’m afeard you’re sick, ain’t you?’ ‘Oh no, there was nothing the matter—perhaps it was the weather—that must be all.’ So I took heart, and was glad, whenever a sunshiny day came, and said to myself as I walked up and down the beat, ‘good weather for Mary, the little un’s a singin’ now.’

“By-and-by there came times when, I must say, I *was* a kinder startled. Once or twice I came up stairs in the dark, and some one—a tall fellow it seemed to be, all wrapped up in a cloak and muffler brushed by me in a hurry, and shot out of the street door. And now and then I noticed, when Mary opened her drawer, that there were dead leaves and strings of ribbon that looked like as if there’d been a nosegay there, which had been kept till it fell to pieces. And one time I came on a little bottle of Cologne, which I had never seen before, in the closet, where I was hunting for a bit of old linen to tie up a little scratch I got makin’ an arrest. So, says I, ‘Mary, a present, my dear?’ in a pleasant sort of way, not thinkin’ any wrong, but supposin’ some of the other lodgers had given it to her, for there was a woman in the house whose husband was in soaps and scents on the Bowery. But Mary said no, she had bought it herself—it was so nice for our handkerchiefs on Sundays.

“At last there came a night—O Lord, it seems as if I hadn’t heart to go on! Well, never mind, it’s done now—done years ago—and keeping still can’t help it. How would you feel, supposin’ you’d been married just three years and a half to the only woman you ever loved or could love in all the wide world—and supposin’, wakin’ or dreamin’, you’d never, in all that time, lost sight of her, or stopped sayin’ God bless her! and you came back, half sick, from the street, along tow’rds dark, one September evening, and caught her sitting on another man’s lap, with her arms round his neck, their lips a kissin’, and sayin’ to each other all those words you’d ever said to her when you were lovin’est? How would *you* have felt, I say?”

At the sight of that picture, drawn out of the dust of his memory’s poor disordered lumber-room, for the first time perhaps in years, to be wiped and paraded in its fearful freshness, the drops stood out on the Berlin iron front of old Troublous Times, as they stand beading an ice-urn on some burning summer’s day. With his ragged sleeve he wiped them away.

“Well, what d’ye think of that? It was a nightmare!—an awful scare that froze the blood and kept the feet locked so they couldn’t stir. I never said nothin’. I didn’t move a step from the sill of the

door, but just stood still—with a big weight on my head and a crazy sort o' burning about the eyes. I've heerd tell of men that have come home and found such like, and, before the wicked one could turn about, have driven a knife into his heart and killed the wretched creetur he'd been a leadin' to damnation with him. I can't see how they did it. *I* couldn't even draw breath to groan, as I've told ye.

“Before that maze like went off o' me the man had jumped up. He made a rush at me with all his force—he knocked me down, and was down stairs and out of the door in a flash. And I was left alone with the woman—her as was my Mary—never, O God! to be mine again.

“The blow had stunned me a little at first—so that, for a minute, I was more mazed than I had been before. But, shortly, when I had got strength to lift myself up, I felt wide awake as ever, and seemed quite brought to. And I understood, sensibly, why it was that *she* crouched, dumb and trembling, in the corner, with her hands over her face, as if they were hidin' my eyes. I knew it was because she had made me a man that the world and the devils laugh at; but, if it wasn't the craze made me think so, I heard the good souls in heaven cryin' for me then. I knew it was because all hope for this world was gone for both on us.

“But if she thought I would bluster or take on she was mistaken. I went up to her very slow and calm—I drew her hand from her face, and said, ‘Look at me! Don't be afeard of me—I hain't gone mad—leastways not yet—and you're safe—quite safe—so far as raisin' of hand o' mine can hurt ye. Four years ago this fall I found ye for dead. Ye might have never opened your eyes again on this world but for me[.] I wish to God ye never had—for your sake, mind ye—not for mine; for then ye'd have been with the angels. I took ye to my breast like a baby—I warmed ye, I nourished ye, I comforted ye—don't speak—hear me out—you owe me nothing for that—no, not even your love, if ye couldn't give it. I was an old man, you was a girl; and it was my fault for not tellin' ye that bein' thankful to a man wasn't reason enough for bein' his wife, if that was all. But I was blind—blind with the lightnin' stroke of you that came flashin' down on me through the darkness of a great, long, black night of life. And if I was to blame for not seein', I'm gettin' punished now—punished—punished! Let me take it all on my own head—don't be afeard, I say—I'll never try to make you share it.

““And now, look ye. These past years since I took ye in ye've been my pearl o' great price. I'd have sold all I had to get ye; if ye'd dropped into the deepest sea, I'd have gone to the bottom to bring ye up or stay with ye. If ye'd fallen from the top of Trinity, down yonder, I'd have jumped after ye. If I'd lost ye in the crowd, I'd have gone barehead, barefoot, through sun and rain, till I found ye, over the world. Sunshine never darkened ye to me; in the night ye shone like a glory on me. Flames, waters, death, couldn't have held me back from goin' where you'd gone.

““O God! to think to-day you've gone where I can't follow ye! I reach your hand—I touch ye—but I can't get to you—I can't bring ye back. There's been an awful earthquake in all that great love I thought you were a lovin' me with. Just as I come in that door I felt it heave, and now there's a gulf between us.

“Stay in this room, it shall be yours always. I sha’n’t unshelter the only head that ever laid on my breast. Half of what I have now, half of what I make, is yours. I’ll see that you’re taken care of well, kindly. But I never shall come back again.

“And, as to *him*—him as robbed me—him as damned me—him as put out my light—him as dragged you out of the heaven where you were my God, I go to hunt him, yes, through hell!”

The haggard, bronzed old man grew out of himself in these awful words. No longer bent, no longer cowed and sullen, but upright, terrible-eyed, and menacing, with his clenched, iron hand, so that he seemed sublime as an avenging angel. And I could read what his soul had been in the strange, mixed wrath and pity of that recited hour, from the present indelible stamp, cleared of all rust in the fire of maddening memory. The climax of his speech was uttered in a wild shriek that pierced me.

Then he sank back again. A great shudder came over him, and his voice once more grew low and broken.

“I went away. I wandered all about the streets, not much knowin’ or carin’ where. When I met people I knew, and they said, ‘How d’ye do, Hallett?’ I said I was very well. And I thought I was, for I didn’t exactly understand as yet how it was I hadn’t been dreamin’, and it was real after all.

“I said I wouldn’t go back any more to the room. Somehow or other I did, notwithstanding. I had kind of an idea, perhaps, that I might find *her* there, a wonderin’ where I’d been, and frightened because I hadn’t come. I pulled myself up stairs, a leanin’ hard on the balusters. I went to the door—it was all still and dark as a grave-yard. I opened it—there was nobody in there. *She* was gone—gone—forever!

“Something came over me—a stroke or fit like—and I fell down just inside the sill. I seemed to know how it was, again, and that felled me.

“I wish I’d shut the door before I dropped—My God! I do. I wish they’d ha’ let me lie there, not a knowin’ o’ any thing, to die quiet and forget and be forgotten. Nothin’ would have been heard o’ me till the man came round for rent the next Monday, and then I’d have been out of trouble. But,” said poor old Hallett, in a voice of childish peevishness, “folks never can let ye alone—never. I got a little rest, howsomever, for I didn’t know nothin’, more’n a stone, for six weeks. Then I woke up at the hospital. The first thing I see was a white wall on one side of me, then I turned over, and there was another white wall on the other. Then I looked down to my feet and there was a man standin’ there all in black, with spectacles; and says he, ‘Well, my man, we’re better to day, ain’t we?’ Just then I thought of where I was last, and another of those lightin’ trains I told ye on went through my head loaded with what had happened to me. And as the black-coat said the word ‘better,’ I thought he meant it to laugh at me; and says I to myself that’s a devil, and I’m in the bad place.

“Did *you* ever wake up, the first time after somethin’ awful had happened, and feel it come on, all fresh and dazzlin’ bright, just like that white light that used to be over the Museum? D’ye wonder I thought I was in hell then?”

“It’s an awful tedious story to tell—how I lay in the sick ward day after day, a callin’ on God to let me die and not bein’ able to—a wantin’ to help myself off and for very sickness of heart bein’ too cowardly—too weak to move hand or foot, and yet so strong inside o’ times that it seemed as if my soul would shake my body to pieces, just as you’ve seen some big engine rattle down an old frame-house that the fool of an engineer put it into. I’ll just cut short, and say that I got well so I could go around.

“For a little while after I was on my legs again I didn’t know what I *should* do. I’d been a callin’ ‘Mary!’ and sayin’ wild things all the time I was crazy in the hospital; and that all got out, together with the fact that *she* wasn’t nowhere to be found; and if there wasn’t foul play suspected, leastways it was thought at head-quarters that I must have lost my ideas altogether, so I found it pretty hard, yes, impossible, to get back on the old beat. As I wasn’t brought up to no trade, except police, you can guess that my time hung pretty heavy, and my pocket got pretty light. All this time I had nothin’ to think of but the hell I was in, and, fifty times worse, the one where *she* was.

“I had got a sort of little hole, that was cheap and kinder secluded like, where I could keep my traps (what there was) and stay by till somethin’ turned up to drag out my cussed life by. It was way down Anthony Street—what they call Worth now; why, I never was able to find out, for it ain’t worth navy red, except what the wretched cullies I used to haul up there could make out of the small dry-goods-shop-liftin’ business and panel operations; but it was good enough for me, not bein’ choice about my company when I carried round inside of me day and night a devil worse than the worst of ’em. And by-and-by there came a day to me there, when I had just one V left and one month’s rent to pay. Says I, ‘Hallett, off the dock’s the next thing—but who cares?’

“As I sat on my trunk that mornin’, a sorter spekelatin’ that way to myself, a man I know’d when I was flush, but who I hadn’t no more expectations o’ seein’, now I was cleaned, than I had—well, say of seein’ you to-night—come along, and says he, ‘Hallett, what d’ye think of the detective business?’

“‘Good enough for them that likes it,’ says I, glum enough, suspicioning he didn’t know my fix, and wanted my influence to get him on to the force.

“‘All right, my ole feller,’ says he; ‘but how would you like it by way of variety, supposin’ it was yourself that took it up for a livin’?’

“‘Make yourself clear,’ says I, a openin’ my eyes a little.

“‘Well,’ replied the young man, ‘the long and the short of it is this. They’ve come to the conclusion at the Department that there ain’t quite enough system about the way they’re on now for a nabbin’ of rascals, and they’ve concluded to agonize a special force for that intention—’

“Organize,’ says I; for ye see I wanted to help him on a bit, bein’ he hadn’t much book larnin’.

“Well,’ says he, ‘I don’t care what you call it. Your name was up before the big ’uns, and, considerin’ the fact that you were one of the oldest fellows on the books, and counted knowin’, and had done some sharp things, by way of haulin’ up marauders durin’ your mortal existence, they sent me to hunt you up, and ask if you’d like to be put on the list.’

“Count me in,’ says I, and jumped up, sharp and brisk, as if five minutes before I hadn’t been a thinkin’ of puttin’ an end to myself. It is strange how a man who would give all he’s got to be let die, will hold on, tooth and nail, to a chance of livin’, ain’t it?

“I was on the Detective force for a good while. I was in some pretty ticklish business, and came off well—with banners flyin’. You may have heerd tell of the way Short-foot Jackson was ketched, and the Jolly Millers was broken up at their fence down Mott Street? Well, I was in that, and there *were* folks who said it couldn’t very well have been done without me.

“But all this wasn’t what I was after. The first reason—perhaps after the fear of starving like a dog—for my takin’ the place was the chance it gave me of some day or other huntin’ down the cursed fiend that had dragged *her* out of sight of heaven, and made me homeless and reckless forever. So I worked on, never mindin’ tire or worry more’n a straw, if so be as how by-and-by I might come on his track and be quits with him.

“One morning, when there wasn’t much business on hand, and I was sitting in my chair up at quarters, a lookin’ over the *Herald* to keep from thinkin’ of myself, there came into the room an old gentleman, about sixty, I should say, in a high state of flustration, who said his house had been robbed the night before, and that was the second time in three months. He was so mighty scared that we couldn’t get much idee how it was done from any thing he said, nor who done it, nor where it was done. But says our Captain, ‘Hallett,’ says he, ‘suppose you go along with the gentleman and see what we can do for him. Mr. Updyke’—that was the old man’s name— ‘this is one of our most tried and capable officers, and if any body can attend to the business for you, he can.’

“So we just sailed along together, and taking a stage, went into the up-town part of the city. It was a house in Twenty-third Street that had been broken into, not far from the Eighth Avenue. Coming into the house I couldn’t find a shutter off the hinge, or a door with a lock broke. There wasn’t a hole bored through any where, nor a panel out, nor a window forced. Every thing was just as it had been when the family went to bed the night before, savin’ the little particular of the tea-spoons, a silver waiter, and maybe a French clock or so.

“I own that at first I *was* a trifle bothered. But at length I asked to be shown into the garret. It *was* a garret—none of your sealed attics, all partitioned off with lath and plaster, but a real old-fashioned place, as big as the whole top of the house—with the beams showin’ all brown and bare above, and full of queer hidin’ places, among cradles and broken chairs, and bandboxes and chests, and crockery. I mounted the ladder up to the scuttle, and began examinin’ the trap-door. I looked at it pretty thorough for about a minute, and then says I to the old gentleman who was standing by in a state of great excitement, ‘How long is it since any of your family were through

this here?’ ‘Not for months—not for months,’ says the old gentleman, ‘never think of such a thing—how should they?’

“‘Then, Mr. Updyke,’ says I, ‘It’s my opinion that this is as how you’ve been broken into.’ ‘Lor!’ says he, ‘dy’e think so?’ ‘Most sartainly,’ says I, ‘for look a here.’ Then I showed him what had proved the fact to me. In the first place, the hooks that held down the door were both unfastened. Besides that, the old black marks of mildew all along the lines where the door had laid through months of wet and dry on the combings of the scuttle didn’t now square with the combings by no means, but were quite out of line. And up the stairs there was a print in the dust that laid thick on every step, of a small shoe—that, accordin’ to all natur’, must have belonged to the little foot of a woman, and *quite* a little foot at that.

“Says I, ‘Have the kindness to call your domestics together, and give me a chance to look at their shoes, for if any of ’em can make such a mark as that, we’ve got a clew that there can’t be any mistakin’.’

“The old gentleman did as I asked—and, by threatenin’ and coaxin’, got the cook and the chambermaid, and the lady’s maid, and the little girl that ran errands, to parade, one arter the other, before me. Bless you! the littlest of them had no such foot as that—so small and ladylike. So we sent ’em all down again, very much huffed, and vowin’ they wouldn’t stay another day.

“I stood and thought for a second—then says I, ‘Hain’t nobody else been here lately; no other woman, that might have come up here and let in her pal, and then gone away with him, on the roof?’

“The old gentleman thought for a while, too—and then says he, ‘Mrs. Updyke has had a seamstress in the house—a very nice, pretty, respectable young woman; but she can’t have had nothing to do with it—dear, no! we are all very much taken with her, she’s so modest and pious, and we’d trust her with any thing we’ve got. Likewise, she always leaves at seven o’clock in the evenin’.’

“‘Who saw her out of the front door last night?’ Well, *he* didn’t. No more did Mrs. Updyke. And comin’ to find out, nobody hadn’t. She went out by herself, very quiet, and they heard the front door shut after her, from the basement where they were takin’ dinner—that was all.

“‘Was any body in the up stairs part of the house, j[u]st at that time?’ No—nobody, as far as they knowed. Very well—as the lawyers say, I made up my theory of the case directly. This young woman had watched her chance, and when all the folks were down stairs, had made believe go out—slammed the door to give ’em that idee—and then slipped up into the garret to lay hid among the rubbish till the house was asleep. Arter which matters wasn’t difficult.

“Says I, ‘Will you have the kindness to tell me where that young woman lives?’

“‘O Lord!’ says the old gentleman, ‘you ain’t a goin’ for to arrest her? I wouldn’t have you do it for the world! I should never forgive myself if that innocent young creetur were brought into any suspicion.’

“‘Dear me, Sir,’ says I, laughin’ like, ‘I ain’t goin’ to hurt a hair of her head.’ Just a way o’ mine, you know, to a sorter put him off.

“‘Well, then,’ says the gentleman, ‘if you want to prove her innocence, or any thing of that sort, she always tells my wife to send for her to number so and so, such a street.’ It was a place in one of the numbered streets in Chelsea, a little way above Fourteenth, and down by the North River. Then I left the house and went back to head-quarters. I got myself up as much like an old gentleman of the first class o’ family as was possible. I put on a wig of snow-white hair—a pair of gold spectacles—black kids—old-fashioned coat, vest, and pants, and a big frill with a californy diamond breastpin in it. And as I looked old enough, God knows, I didn’t do nothin’ to my face, but left the lines about the mouth and eyes to speak for themselves. Arter all, I don’t think my best friend—supposin’ I’d had such an article—would ha’ knowed me. Then I took a yaller stage and went up to the Ninth Avenue.”

“I hadn’t no trouble in the least to find the house. It was a low, two-story brick buildin’, with a very neat wooden front stoop, and lookin’ altogether as if it desarved a better neighborhood. The curtains was drawn down close at the first story front windows, and there wasn’t a sound inside, more’n if all the folks was dead. I had to knock about a dozen times before I could rout any body out.

“By-and-by there came to the door, and opened it about half-way, a woman who might have been fifty years old and up’rds—dressed very motherly, in a black bombazine gown, with a white handkerchief round her neck, and a big lace cap on—but lookin’, in the face, a kind o’ sideways, and hard and cruel. ‘Well, Sir?’ says she, in a low, determined sort o’ tone.

“I made my voice broken and feeble like, and said, ‘I’ve come, ma’am, to find a seamstress that’s been recommended to me by an old friend of mine—does she live here? Her name is—I think—’ here I took out a piece of paper and made b’lieve assist my memory—‘Oh, yes! Ellen Williams—yes—yes, that’s the name; does she live here?’

“The woman eyed me pretty sharp for a minute, and then, says she, cold and firm as before, ‘No, she don’t live here—she used to—but she’s left. I don’t know exactly where she is now, but if you’ll leave your number, I’ll try to find her for you and send her round. Perhaps I can.’

“I wrote some number or other, just to appear nat’ral like, of some street that was never heerd of in the directory, and gave it to the woman, who then, without another word, slammed the door to in my face. I made up my mind to keep a watch on that house. I was goin’ off, leanin’ on my cane like a respectable old gentleman, when I happened to look down a little closer at the steps, and what d’ye think caught my eye? As sure as I live, there was the marks of the very same feet I’d seen on the ladder, turned in the direction toward the door! My spectacles had bothered me before, not bein’ used to ’em. Now I looked under ’em and saw the marks plain. I could ha’ held up my hand and sworn they was the same in any court whatsoever. And they had hardly yet dried on. So my mind was made up a little stronger yet, to keep a sharp look-out on that house.

“The next thing to do was to cast about for a place to hide in, where a fellow could see without bein’ seen. Fort’nately the lot opposite wasn’t yet built on, and there was a high board fence in front of it, and a pile of lumber agin’ the hinder side. So says I, ‘That’s my ticket—the very thing to a T.’

“Down I goes to head-quarters again, gives the wink to a darin’ young fellow, who was stout as a lion and had been with me in some pretty hard arrests already, puts on my ordinary citizen’s dress, and goes back with my comrade to Chelsea. After some little trouble we found out the owner of the vacant lot, and introducin’ ourselves, and tellin’ him we had to keep a look-out for some ’un as might do him as much harm as had been done to our client, we prevailed on him to let us spend the day between his lumber and his fence, in a little hole, about large enough—s’posin’ it was an oven—to bake two loaves of bread in. The lot was, as good luck made it, the length of the whole block—so we let ourselves in by the other street, not darin’ to awake suspicions, of course, by enterin’ opposite the house which was to be watched.

“Well, there we stayed—Bill Humphreys and I—cooped up, and mighty uncomfortable, and seein’ nothin’ all day but dirty children and pigs, and now and then a fellow goin’ by mad with the drink they sell on all the corners in that part of Chelsea. We looked through the cracks in the fence by turns, watch and watch, all day long, and the curtains was never raised, nor a blind turned, nor the door opened. About eight o’clock in the evenin’ Humphreys began to get grumpy, and gave it as his opinion that we’d been sold. ‘What the devil’s the use,’ says he, ‘of lyin’ here in this coop any longer? Let’s either go over and search, or clear out and call it a bad job.’

“‘Lie low,’ says I, ‘an hour longer, and then, if somethin’ don’t turn up, I’ll talk to you about doin’ one of those are.’

“It was just about an hour when somethin’ did turn up. The door opposite opened about six inches, and the face of the woman I see in the mornin’ looked out quick and sharp, up and down the street, as if she were discoverin’ whether the coast was clear. Then she drew it in again, and I thought I heard her say, ‘All right!’

“About a minute more and the door opened wider. A man came out, with a big tarpaulin slouched over his eyes, a shawl on, and over that a top-coat—oh! twice as roomy as yours. He had a basket on his arm, and when he had reached the gas-lamp that was in front of the next house, like a fool he lifted up the cover, jest a leetle, to see if he’d got every thing all correct, I suppose. I tell ye I looked with all my eyes! What d’ye think I see? Why, there was the very ornaments, in bronze and gilt, that was in the old gentleman’s description of his French clock.

“‘Quick as lightnin’, Bill!’ whispers I. ‘See if your caps is all right, though God grant we mayn’t want ’em. Quiet now! But over the fence like a shot!’

“Faster a good deal than I’ve told ye, Bill Humphreys and I took that fence at opposite corners. One of us struck the street a little way behind, the other just in front of him. I was the one in front. I was up with him just as he turned to leg it. I grabbed him by the collar, and drew his hand over my holdin’ arm, pressin’ the fingers down, this way.”—(Here old Hallett indoctrinated me into this famous mode of arrest, known among prigs and their captors as “Letter X.”)—“So,” he

resumed, “so that he couldn’t budge an inch. Bill came runnin’ up, but I told him I had no more than I could manage, and he must attend to the house. He started back, and just then the fellow I had pinned gave a long, loud whistle. Holdin’ him by the hand couldn’t help *that*.

“Bill just reached the stoop, and with his heavy shoulder had made the first plunge to break the door in, when a light at one of the upper windows answered the whistle, and I saw a small white hand, with a revolver in it, stuck through the blinds, and aim right at my head. There was no time to think, so I whirled the man round and ducked behind him, so that, struggle as he might, he covered every thing but my legs. Just soon enough for me, for the hand that pulled that trigger was steadied by the devil, first a bang, then a yell from the villain I had hold of, and the blood began pourin’ out in a little stream from j[u]st under his shoulder. He staggered back, droppin’ the basket and pullin’ me after him; then he hissed like a snake, ‘D—n you!’ in my face, and there was no further use of hands for holdin’ of him in this world. He’d gone where justice is a sight quicker. I let him lie, snatched up the basket, and hurried back to help Bill.

“He wanted it, sartain. Two desp’rate women is a match for half a dozen men. It seems as if you couldn’t strike one of ’em, a rememberin’ of your mother and sister, till you hadn’t nothin’ else left to do for life. Comin’ up into the room where the pistol’d been fired, I saw Bill, with his face all one mass of blood, bendin’ over one woman, a tryin’ to bring her mad, fightin’ hands together to put the irons on. She had pulled down his head by the hair so it covered her face all up; and behind him stood the hag I’d seen in the mornin’, just a goin’ to bring a big chair-rung down back of his ear. I grappled her as I would a tiger, for the hell’s cruelty of her face made me almost forget she wasn’t a man. About two minutes more and she was roped down on the bed with the bracelets ’round her wrists—not hurt at all, but ravin’ mad.

“By this time, too, Bill Humphreys had succeeded in getting his hair loose and fastening the woman he had taken. He lifted his scored and bloody face from the wretched creetur who was prostrate under him, and what d’ye think I see? *What d’ye think I see?*

“Oh, my God! *It was my wife!* Her as had been Mary Hallett. All foamin’ with rage, her face beautiful as ever, bedeviled into somethin’ awful. And I had to look right into her eyes, and she into mine!

“She stopped gnashin’ her teeth; the blood all ran down out of her face, till it was white as snow; she gave one terrible shriek— Hark! I heered it then!” and old Hallett crouched, trembling as in an ague fit. “No, no,” said I, stroking his forehead with my fingers, “it was only the wind through the keyhole—that’s all. Don’t be afraid, I will stay by you; and God knows I feel for you, to the very bottom of my heart.”

“No, it wasn’t the wind. I’ve heerd it before, alone here in the dark—often, often. It’s over now. Never mind.

“Then she shut her eyes, and Bill Humphreys says, ‘She’s gone! Good for her—the she-devil.’

“As I saw her a lyin’ there for dead—her as had once been my soul, my very bein’—I forgot every thing, clear back to the night when I lifted her up from the stones of Broadway, still and

pale as she was now, and carried her on my heart like a baby, to make the only three years of sunlight I ever saw around my bed. I seemed to be back there again. I lifted her wild head, with the hair all a-flowin' loose, into my lap and patted it, and called Bill Humphreys to bring me a glass of water.

“He looked at me with his bloody face, and says he, ‘Hallett, are you gone stark mad? What are ye doin’ with that hell’s nussling there? Let her die! Look at my face, will ye, and then ask *me* to get water? Are ye mad, I say?’

“I did look at him, and says I, ‘I believe I am; if I ain’t I ought to be. I wish I was.’ Then I put my coat under *her* head and left her a-lyin’ there, cold and quiet. I took Bill Humphreys by the hand, and drew him just outside of the door, out of sight of the hag who lay ironed on the bed. He followed me, scared like, believin’ me really out of my head.

“‘Humphreys,’ says I, ‘did you ever hear tell on my trouble, *the* trouble?’ ‘I have that,’ says he. ‘Very well, that’s *her—her!*’ ‘Good God! d’ye tell me so?’ says Humphreys.

“‘And now, Humphreys,’ I kept on to him, ‘I’ve allers been a good friend t’ye. When ye was hard up, I lent ye and never asked it till ye was ready. I watched with ye when ye had the Typhus. The time we broke up that fence down to the Jolly Millers, I knocked up the knife Pete Dalgetty was going to stick you with and took the slash on my own arm. And tonight that hag would ha’ done your job with the chair-rung if it hadn’t been for me.’

“‘All right; so ye did, and thank ye for all, a thousand times,’ said Bill, impatient like, wanting me to get through.

“‘Well,’ says I, ‘I’ve saved a little somethin’—two hundred an’ ninety dollars and thirty cents—it’s in the Rose Hall Savin’s Bank. That’s yours. I’ve got a gold watch that hangs over my bunk; that’s yours too, and welcome. When I go, you’ll get my place on the force. You said you liked my revolver better’n yours. Take it—keep it. Only, Bill Humphreys, save *her!* Say as how *I* shot the man. Don’t peach on *her!* Bill! d’ye answer me?’

“I stood and looked at him in agony. I thought I saw a tear droppin’ down among the bloody spots on his face, and took heart. But the next minute he pushed my arm away, and says he,

“‘Hallett, I pity ye, but I can’t help ye—not if ye was my brother—justice must go agin’ feelin’s. Bring along *that* woman,’ p’intin’ to the old hag on the bed, ‘if it’s contrary to your grain to carry the other to the station, and I’ll take her—but go she must.’

“He tried to get past me to do as he said, but I wouldn’t hear on’t. ‘No,’ says I, ‘I’ll take *her* myself—you might handle her rough to make up for that face of yours. I’ll go with her any where, short of hell.’

“So I took her up, careful and gentle, like old times, and carried her out to the street. By this time the old woman had got sobered down, and seein’ she had to go, let Bill take her along sullen like

but without much draggin'. We found a crowd around the dead man, and several police were there tryin' to make way and carry him off.

"The M. P.'s knew us, and asked no questions except if we'd been successful in makin' the arrest. We said 'Yes;' and they followed us, keepin' back the crowd, and bringin' the dead man and the basket of stolen property.

"*She* was cold and still as ever when I laid her down on a bed in the station-house. I just left her for a minute and went to the board where the man as was shot was stretched out. I lifted up the shawl as was gathered round his head, and saw plain, for the first time, that it *was* him that damned *her*! And—perhaps it *is* devilish, but I can't help it—I felt like leapin' and singin' with a sort of crazy joy, to think whose hand he'd died by—to think how sweet a revenge is that wasn't meant to be!

"So they were locked up. The old hag and *she*, now come to at last, but all mute and mad like, staring wildly and answerin' no questions.

"It was several months afore they came to trial. I found out every day how matters was a goin' on, and at last I heerd that the Grand Jury had brought in two bills agin *her*, one for bein' second principal in a burglary, another for shootin' her accomplice, while she was watchin' to protect his unlawful act. And the lawyers told me that last was murder. She might swing for it, at any rate it would go awful hard with her.

"My God, Sir! could I stand by and see that? Could I hear the bell toll, and see the sheriff goin' with his posse, and see the papers tell in great black letters that *she* had died that awful, strugglin' death? *She*, the woman that once laid on my bosom, turnin' the face that I once kissed, beside myself with joy, to an awful stony wall, and a pitiless stony mob—and man that couldn't have no mercy, and God that wouldn't interfere—and then shuttin' its sacred eyes in horror on this world, to meet the next without repentin'? I'd ha' taken her place sooner a hundred times. Dare to? Listen, and see if I dared!

"Bill Humphreys, though he had to be cruel didn't have to be talkative, and he wasn't. He never let on to a soul that *she* was my wife. So, while the warden of the prison where she laid knowed me very well as Old Hallett, the smart 'un, the detective, he hadn't the fust idee what else I was—Hallett, the husband of the murderess. So, one night, as it was gettin' tow' rds bedtime, and he was thinkin' about goin' his usual round to see every thing safe and snug, a queer old figger of a woman, the loosest on the pins, the stoopin'est, the most tottlish ye ever did see, came hobblin' up to him as he sat in his business room by the grate. D'ye think he was surprised when the figger threw back her hood and he saw Harry Hallett? Not he! He gave a knowin' chuckle, slapped me on the back, and says he, 'Good for *you*, old boy! At it again, hey? Well, what's up now? What indiwidoal, with an unfortunate tendency to gettin' into other folks's on a visit without ringin', are we goin' to sarcumvent with that 'are this evening'?"

"Says I, 'Have you got a lodger in here called Ellen Williams, the same that I took the night Bill Humphreys and I broke up that fence over to Chelsea?"

“‘Sartain we have,’ says the warden; ‘her trial don’t come on till next week.’

“‘I want to see her,’ says I; ‘there’s another transaction she knows a good deal about, and I’ve been a gettin’ myself up so that she’ll think I’m the aunt of the man as was shot and tell me all about it. Just hark and see if I couldn’t fool any body.’ Then I mocked the voice of a very old woman, wheezin’ and mumblin’ my words, and talkin’ thin and sharp, till the warden rolled in his chair with laughin’.

“‘At last says he, ‘It’s pretty late, to be sure, but then, bein’ it’s on important service, I’ll give you fifteen minutes, if ye can get through by that time, and if ye *must* do it to-night.’

“‘Yes, I must,’ says I, ‘and it won’t take longer than that. And now I know you’re anxious to be off on your round; so don’t wait for me, but just set one of your boys by her cell door till I get through, and tell him that the sign I’ll give to show it’s me will be sayin’ in a squeaky voice, “Only your old aunt, my dear.”’ And I came the old woman again till he shook his sides.

“‘So he took me to the cell, unlocked the door, and said, ‘A visitor for you, Ellen.’ I went in, he turned the key behind me, and I heard his boy come to wait at the door.

“‘It was dark as pitch inside, but a ruslin’ in the corner of the room, and a faint, sickenin’ voice, that said, ‘Well, who is it?’ told me how to steer. I had made up my mind that if the first thing I did was to make myself known, she would scream, and the game would be up right off.

“‘So in a feigned voice I said, very quiet, ‘I’ve come to save you from this place; don’t make a sound, and in five minutes you will be free.’

“‘Even as it was she was going to give a little shriek, but I put my hand on her mouth and said, ‘Hush! don’t you dare to breathe, or you’ll hang us both! Put on this gown of mine over your night-dress, stick your feet in these boots. There, now tie on this false beard, knot the string on top of your head, put this hood on and draw it close round your face. Now the spectacles.’

“‘Not much longer than I’ve been tellin’ ye did it take to finish the disguise. All the time she trembled like a leaf, gradually becomin’ sartain who it was as was doin’ this for her.

“‘Now,’ says I, ‘I believe ye *look* enough as I did when I came in here to get out, passin’ for me, bein’ as there’s a boy waitin’ with the key, who don’t know my height as well as the warden. But ye must walk like me too. I hobbled in, you must hobble out. And ye must talk like me. The pass-word is, “Only your old aunt, my dear.” See if ye can say it as I do.’

“‘I drilled her on that until she could do it just as well as I did. Then says I, ‘Now ye know who I am. But hush! don’t dare to thank me, I don’t feel like being thanked. Neither like havin’ any body afeared for my sake. I’ll be found out to-morrow morning, but they’ll all say as how I’m mad; so I am, stark mad, and that kind of folks are safe.’ She just got time to say two words, ‘*Forgive me!*’ Says I, ‘Don’t speak that word, the part of your life I’d have to forgive I must have forgotten, or I wouldn’t have been here to-night. I only remember her as I took home from the cold stones of Broadway, it’s her I’m a savin’. Pray to God for what ye are *now!* And don’t go

back to hell, Mary.’ After that word I didn’t dare to trust myself further but pushed her from me, and said, ‘Go! careful, now! for your life.’ Arter which I covered myself up in the bed where she’d been lyin’.

“Every second seemed more’n a year. She hobbled across the floor, makin’ the nateral sort of noise with her cane. She knocked at the door. I heard the bolt slide. I just dared uncover my head enough to hear her open the hood till the beard showed, and hear her say, rather tremblin’, but yet very well indeed, ‘Only yer old aunt, my dear.’ Then the bolt slid back again, and I began to breathe. If she didn’t meet the warden and get stopped to tell what success I’d had, she was safe. If he did meet her, the chances was ten—yes, a hundred to one agin her.

“For an hour I lay in a cold sweat, tremblin’ like a leaf, and havin’ all sorts of horrid ideeas. Now I’d think that they’d caught her and locked her up somewhere else, to face me with her in the mornin’. Then I’d wonder if it was really her as had escaped—if in the dark I hadn’t let out some other woman—and *she* was still waitin’ for the dreadful day o’ doom. For I’d risked all to save her, and if she was to be my damnation and her own once more in this world, by sufferin’ a felon’s death as she had lived a felon’s life, then I couldn’t never hope again for God’s mercy. But all kept quiet—and I reasoned that the warden knew me so well he would have come back to see if it *could* be *me* as had done such a crime, if he’d suspected it—and by-and-by I fell asleep.

“The next mornin’, of course, it was found out. I thought the warden would ha’ killed me. The Sheriff came to see me—so did the District Attorney, and even one or two of the City judges. They wanted to know if I knew what I had done—what I was liable to—where *she* was—and, last of all, why I did it. For a day or two I said nothin’ except to answer their questions, yes or no, not tellin’ a soul the real reason for what I’d done, and Bill Humphreys was man enough not to let on till I told him he might.

“By-and-by, when every body had heard of it, around the courts and the stations, there were about ten people in on one day, all on ’em seemin’ real gentlemen, and one o’ ’em had been talkin’ so kindly to me that my heart seemed o’ a sudden to warm to him. I jumped up from the prison bunk where I was sittin’, and says I,

“‘Hear me, all o’ you Sirs as wants to know why I did this here. She sinned agin God—she sinned agin me. She broke my heart, and she made my last years a hell. She did that which there’s no mercy in man for. I have gi’n her one more chance to get mercy o’ God.

“‘Who here has got a daughter that he would leave off tryin’ for, short o’ the pit? Who’s got a sister, that murder or robbery would shut up his heart from? Who’s got a wife that he wouldn’t foller and foller and foller through nights and days, through pains and watching, if there was one chance o’ savin’ her on the edge o’ the gallows, or the brink of hell? *Who?* I say.

“‘That woman was once *my wife*.

“‘Now I’m ready to be done with as you like. I wasn’t blind—or deaf—or an idiot. I know the law. I’ve been bred up to preservin’ it from a boy, and I’m an old man now. When you were wakin’ for business, I was wakin’ for the law. When you slept I kept it for you. And now that

I've broken it, this first time since I was born, I'm not so ignorant as not to know that it will turn agin me and punish me. It ought to, and I hope it will.

“If I be fined, let the law take all I've got for it. If I be imprisoned, let the stone walls shut up all the last years of a ruined old man. If it be the gallows, I sha'n't flinch to meet what I've wanted these two years. But after all comes the great God, and if, when I stand before Him, I find out I've saved *her*—as I've gi'n mercy, I know I *shall*—Oh!”

Yes—Harry Hallett, thou hast found mercy! For even as the old man, roused into weird eloquence by this remembered plea, wildly gestured with his iron finger, he dropped back into his chair, and was gone.

Gone, where the indictment for his crime, like the record of the old time gentle-hearted soldier's oath, was blotted out by a seraph's tear. Gone, where there is no inquest of deeds but of the spirit that did them—where the city whose streets he walks needeth no watchman—where the thieves of life, of riches, and of honor break not in and steal—where, for evermore, there shall be no discord between love and duty, but both are one and eternal.

On the books of an asylum not far from New York I found these two entries:

1st. “Harry Hallett, aged 48. Entered October 12, 18—. Tried for procuring escape of prisoner. Acquitted and sent here, being insane.”

2d. “Escaped. December, same year.”

Under these I added a third:

3d. “Set free, utterly restored. November 21, 18—.”

Has he found *her* safe? A great vail hangs over the answer. Kind souls, pray for her—pray for the wife of Harry Hallett.

Harper's Weekly [New York, NY], September 18, 1858

It was later published in the collection *Strange Stories of a Detective; or, Curiosities of Crime* by William Russell (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1863).