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Select Poetry.

HOPE.

Hope is life, and we who living
Having no hope, are as the dead,
Who in gloomy graves are sleeping,
While the sun shines bright o'er head

'Tis the source of all ambition,
'Tis the life of every scheme,
In it we see the future
Of every prospect, every dream.

Hope will cheer the broken-hearted,
Soothing sorrow, curing pain,
'Tis the star of friends when parted,
For in it they meet again.

It is that which makes the future
Seem a pathway bright and fair;
Lifting oft poor weary mortals
From the depths of woe and care.

Hope is God's great gift from Heaven!
Radiance from a higher sphere;
Priceless boon, in mercy given,
Helping us to do and bear.

A PROVOKING MISTAKE.

MY FATHER and mother both died when I was still a great awkward boy; and I, being the only thing they had to bequeath, became the property of a distant relation. I do not know how it happened, but I had no near relations. I was a kind of walf upon the world from the beginning, and I suppose it was owing to my having no family anchorage that I acquired the habit of swaying to and fro and drifting hither and thither, at the pleasure of the wind and tide. Not that my guardian was inattentive or unkind—quite the reverse; but he was indolent and careless, contenting himself with providing abundantly for my schooling and my pocket, and leaving everything else to chance. He would have done the same to his son if he had had one, and he did the same thing to his daughter. But girls somehow cling where they are cast—anything is an anchorage for them; and as Laura grew up she gave the care she had never found, and was the little mother to the whole house. As for the titular mother, she had not an atom of character of any kind. She might have been a picture, or a vase, or anything else that is useless except to the taste or the affections. But mamma was indispensable. It is a vulgar error to suppose that people who have nothing in them are nobody in a house.

It is no wonder that I was always in a hurry, for I must have had an instinctive idea that I had my fortune to look for. The Governor had nothing more than a genteel independence, and this would be a good deal lessened after his death by the lapse of an annuity. But sister Laura was thus provided for well enough, while I had not a shilling in actual money, although plenty of hypothetical thousands and sundry castles in the air. It was the consciousness of the latter kind of property, no doubt, that gave me so free and easy an air, and made me so complete the master of my actions. How I did worry the blessed old woman! how Laura lectured and scolded! how the governor stormed! and how I was forgiven the next minute, and we were all happy again as the day was long! But at length the time of separation came. I had grown a great hulking fellow, strong enough to make my bread as a porter, if that had been needed; and so a situation was found for me in a counting house at Barcelona, and after a lecture and a hearty cry from sister Laura, a blessing and a kiss from mamma, and a great sob kept down by

a hurricane laugh from the governor, I went adrift.

Four years passed rapidly away. I had attained my full height, and more than my full share of inches. I already enjoyed a fair modicum of whiskers, and had even made some progress in the cultivation of a pair of mustaches, when suddenly the house which I was connected with failed. What was I to do? The Governor insisted upon my return to England, where his interest among the mercantile class was considerable. Laura hinted mysteriously that my presence in the house would soon be a matter of great importance to her father, and mamma let out the secret by writing to me that Laura was going to "change her condition." I was glad to hear this, for I knew he would be a model fellow who was Laura's husband; and gulping down my pride, which would fain have persuaded me that it was unmanly to go back again like the ill six-pence, I set out on my return home.

The family, I knew, had moved to another house; but being well acquainted with the town, I had no difficulty in finding the place. It was a range of handsome buildings, which had sprung up in the fashionable outskirts during my absence; and, although it was far on in the evening, my accustomed eyes soon desisted through the gloom, the governor's old-fashioned door plate. I was just on the point of knocking when a temptation came into my way. One of the area windows was open, gaping as if for my reception. A quantity of plate lay upon a table close by. Why should I not enter and appear unannounced in the drawing-room, a sun burnt phantom of five feet, eleven? Why should I not present the precise and careful Laura with a handful of her own spoons and forks, left so conveniently at the service of any area sneak who might chance to pass by? Why? This is only a figure of speech. I asked no question about the matter as the idea was hardly well across my brain when my legs were across the rails. In another moment I had crept in by the window; and chucking at my own cleverness and the great moral lesson I was about to teach, I was stuffing my pockets with the plate.

While thus engaged, the opening of a door in the hall above alarmed me, and, afraid of the failure of my plan, I stepped lightly up in the stair, which was partially lighted by the hall lamp. As I was about to emerge at the top, a servant girl was coming out of a room on the opposite side. She instantly retreated, shut the door with a bang, and I could hear a half-suppressed hysterical cry. I bounded on, sprang up the drawing room stair, and entered the first door at a venture. All was dark, and I stopped for a moment to listen. Lights were hurrying across the hall, and I heard the rough voice of a man, as if scolding and taunting some persons. The girl had doubtless given the alarm, although her information must have been very indistinct, for when she saw me I was in the shadow of the stair, and she could have little more than a vague impression that she beheld a human figure. However this may be, the man's voice appeared to descend the stair to the area room, and presently I heard a crushing noise, not as if he was counting the plate, but rather thrusting it aside en masse. Then I heard the window closed, the shutters bolted, and an alarm bell hung upon them, and the man re-ascending the stair, half scolding, half laughing at the girl's superstition. He took care, notwithstanding, to examine the fastening of the street door, and even to lock it and put the key in his pocket. He then retired into a room, and all was silent.

I began to feel decidedly queer. The governor kept no male servant that I knew of, and had never done so. It was impossible he could have introduced this change into his household without my being informed of it by my sister Laura, whose letters were an exact chronicle of everything down to the health of the cat. This was puzzling. And now that I had time to think, the house was much too large for a family requiring only three sleeping rooms, even when I was at home. It was what is called a double house, with rooms on both sides of the hall, and the apartments on the threshold of which I was still lingering, appeared, from the dim light of the windows, to be of very considerable size. I

now recollected that the quantity of plate I had seen—a portion of which at this moment preternaturally heavy in my pockets—must have been three times greater than any the governor possessed, and that various pieces were of a size and massiveness that I had never before seen in the establishment. In vain I thought myself that I had seen and recognized the well known door-plate, and that the area from which I entered was immediately under; in vain I argued that since Laura was about to be married, the extra quantity of plate might be intended to form a part of her trousseau. I could not convince myself. But the course of my thoughts suggested an idea, and pulling hastily from my pocket a table-spoon, I felt, for I could not see, the legend which contained my fate. But my fingers were tremulous, they seemed to have lost sensation—only I fancied I did feel something more than the governor's plain initials. There was still a light in the hall. If I could but bring that spoon within its illumination! All was silent, and I ventured to descend step after step—not as I had bounded up, but with the stealthy pace of a thief, and the plate growing heavier in my pocket. At length I was near enough to see, in spite of a dimness that gathered over my eyes, and, with a sensation of absolute faintness, I beheld upon the spoon an engraved crest—the red right hand of a baronet!

I crept back again, holding by the banisters, fancying every now and then that I heard a door open behind me, and yet my feet no more consented to quicken their motion than if I had been pursued by a murderer in the nightmare. I at length got into the room, groped for a chair and sat down. No more hurry now. Oh, no! There was plenty of time, and plenty to do in it, for I had to wipe away the perspiration that ran down my face in streams. What was to be done? What had I done? Oh, a trifle, a mere trifle. I had only sneaked into a gentleman's house by a window and pocketed his table-spoons; and here I was locked and barred and belled in, sitting very comfortably, in the dark and alone, in his drawing room. Very peculiarly comfortable. What a capital fellow, to be sure! What an amusing personage! Wouldn't the baronet laugh in the morning? Wouldn't he ask me to stay to breakfast? And wouldn't I eat heartily out of the spoons I had stolen? Who calls me a housebreaker? Who gives me in charge? Who lugs me off by the neck! I will not stand it. I am innocent except of breaking into a baronet's house. I am a gentleman, with another gentleman's spoons in my pocket. I claim the protection of the law! Police! police!

My brain was wandering. I pressed my hand upon my forehead to keep down the thick coming fancies, and determined, for the first time in my life to hold a deliberate consultation with myself. I was in an awkward predicament—it was impossible to deny the fact; but was there anything really serious in the case? I had unquestionably descended into the wrong area, the right hand one instead of the left hand one; but was I not unquestionably the relation, the distant relation—of the next door neighbor? I had been four years from his house, and was there anything more natural than that I should desire to pay my next visit through a subterranean window? I had appropriated, it is true, a quantity of silver plate I had found; but with what other intention could I have done this than to present it to my distant relation's daughter, to reproach her with her carelessness in leaving it next door. Finally, I was snared, caged, trapped—door and window had been bolted upon me without any remonstrance on my part—and I was now some considerable time in the house, unsuspected, yet a prisoner. The position was serious; but come, suppose the worst, that I was actually laid hold of as a malefactor, and commanded to give an account of myself; well I was, as aforesaid, a distant relation of the individual next door; I belonged to nobody in the world if not to him; I bore but an indifferent reputation in regard to steadiness; and after four years absence in a foreign country, I had returned—idle, penniless and objectless—just in time to find an area window opened in the dusk of an evening, a heap of plate lying just behind it, within view of the street.

This self-examination was not encouraging; the case decidedly queer, and as I sat thus pondering in the dark, with the spoon in my hand, I am quite sure that no malefactor in a dungeon could have envied my reflections. In fact, the evidence was so dead against me that I began to doubt my own innocence. What was I here for if my intentions were really honest? and how came it that all this silver plate had found its way into my pockets? I was angry as well as terrified. I was judge and criminal in one, but the instincts of nature got the better of my sense of justice, and I rose suddenly up to ascertain whether it was not possible to get from the window into the street.

As I moved, however, the terrible booty I had in my pocket moved likewise, appearing to me to shriek, like a score of fiends, "Police! police!" and the next instant I heard a quick footstep ascending the stair. Now was the fateful moment come! I was on my feet; my eyes glared upon the door; my hands were clenched; the perspiration had dried suddenly upon my skin, and my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. But the footstep, accompanied by a gleam of light, passed—passed, and from very weakness, I sat down again, with a dreadful indifference to the screams of the plate in my pockets.—Presently there were footsteps along the hall, then voices; then drawing of bolts and creaking of locks; the utter darkness; then silence—lasting, terrible profound. The house had gone to bed; then the house would quickly be asleep; it was time to be up and doing. But first and foremost I must get rid of the plate. Without the hideous *corpus delicti* I should have some chance.—I must at all hazards creep down into the hall, find my way to the lower regions and replace the accursed thing where I found it. It required nerve, to attempt this; but I was thoroughly wound up, and after allowing a reasonable time to elapse, to give my enemies a fair opportunity of falling asleep, I set out upon the adventure. The door creaked as I went out; the plate grated against my very soul as I descended the steps; but slowly, stealthily I crept along the wall, and at length found myself upon the level floor. There was but one door on that side of the hall—the door which led to the area room, and it was with inexpressible relief I reached it in safety and grasped the knob in my hand. The knob turned—but the door did not open; it was locked; it was my fate to be a thief, and, after a moment of new dismay, I turned again doggedly, reached the stair and re-entered the apartment I had left.

It was like getting home. It was snug and private. I had a chair there awaiting me. I thought to myself that many a man would take a deal of trouble to break into such a house. I had only sneaked in. I wondered how Jack Sheppard felt on such occasions.—He would make nothing of getting down into the street from the window, spoons and all. I tried this; the shutters were not even closed, and the sash moving noiselessly, I had no difficulty in raising it. I stepped out into the balcony and looked over.—Nothing was to be seen but a black and yawning gulf beneath, guarded by the imaginary spikes of an invisible railing. Jack would have laughed at this difficulty; but then he had more experience in the craft than I, and was provided with all necessary appliances. As for me, I had stupidly forgotten even my coil of rope. The Governor's house, I found had either no balcony at all or it was too far apart to be reached.

Presently I heard a footstep on the sidewalk a little way off. It was approaching with a slow measured pace; the person was walking as calmly and gravely in the night as if it had been broad day. Suppose I hailed this philosophical stranger and confided to him in a friendly way the fact that the baronet, without the slightest provocation, had locked me up in the house, with his silver spoons in my pocket.—Perhaps he would take the trouble of knocking at the door or crying fire, and when the servants opened I might rush out and make my escape.

But while I was looking wistfully down to see if I could not discern the walking figure, which was now under the windows, a sudden glare from the spot dazzled my sight. It was the bull's

eye of a policeman, and with the instinct of a predatory character, I shrank back trembling, crept into the room and shut the window.

By this time I was sensible that there was a little confusion in my thoughts, and by way of employing practical and useful objects I determined to make a tour of the room. But first it was necessary to get rid somehow of my plunder—to plant the property, as we call it; and with that view I laid it carefully, piece by piece, in the corner of a sofa, and concealed it with the cover. This was a great relief. I almost began to feel like the injured party, more like a captive than a robber; and I groped my way through the room with a vague idea that I might perhaps stumble upon some trap door or sliding panel which would lead into the open air, or, at worst into a secret chamber, where I should be safe for any given number of years from my persecutors. But there was nothing of the kind in this stern, prosaic place; nothing but a few cabinets, and tables, and couches, and arm chairs, devotional chairs, footstools, lamps and statuettes, and the elaborate girandole hung around with crystal prisms, which played with such an interminable tune against each other when I chanced to move them that I stumbled away as fast as I could and subsided into a *fauteuil* so rich and deep that I felt myself swallowed up, as it were, in its billows of swan's down.

How long I had been in the house by this time I cannot tell. It seemed to me, when I looked back to form a considerable portion of a lifetime. Indeed, I did not remember the more distant events of the night, although every now and then the fact occurred to me with startling distinctness that all I had gone through was only preliminary to something still to happen; that the morning was to come, the family to be astir and the housebreaker to be apprehended.—My reflections were not continuous. It may be that I dozed between whiles.—How else can I account for my feeling myself grasped by the throat, to the very brink of suffocation, by a hand without a body? How else can I account for sister Laura standing over me where I reclined, pointing to the stolen plate on the sofa, and lecturing me on my horrible propensities till her voice rose to a wild, unearthly scream, which pierced through my brain?

When this fancy occurred I started from my recumbent posture. A voice was actually in my ears, and a living form before my eyes; a lady stood contemplating me with a half scream upon her lips, and the color fading from her cheek, and as I moved she would have fallen to the ground had I not sprang and caught her in my arms. I laid her softly down in the chair. It was the morning twilight. The silence was profound. The boundaries of the room were still dim and indistinct. Is it any wonder that I was in some considerable degree of perplexity as to whether I was not still in the land of dreams?

"Madam," I said, "if you are a vision, it is of no consequence, but if not, I wish particularly to get out."

"Offer no injury," she replied in a tremulous voice, "and no one will molest you. Take what you have come for, and begone."

"That is sooner said than done. The doors and windows below are locked and bolted, and beneath those of this room the area is deep and the spikes sharp. I assure you I have been in every perplexity the whole of last night, and drawing a chair I sat down in front of her. Whether it was owing to my complaining voice, or a mere fact of finding herself in a quiet *tete-a-tete* with a house-breaker, I can't tell; but the lady broke out in a low, hysterical laugh.

"How did you break in?" said she.

"I did not break in; it is far from being my character, I assure. But the area window was open, and so I thought I would come in."

"You were attracted by the plate!—Take it for Heaven's sake, desperate man and go away."

"I did take some of it, but with no evil intentions—only by way of amusement. Here it is," and going to the sofa, I drew off the cover and showed her the plate.

"You have been generous," said she, her voice again trembling; "for the whole must have been in your power.—I will let you out so softly that no one will know. Put up in your pockets