

hind him. A little restless under the scrutiny of the stranger, Dick turned abruptly and passed him. John Tuff looked up at the skies, as though endeavouring to remember something he had forgotten, and scratched his chin meditatively, and stood still. But when Dick looked back a moment later, John Tuff was coming along steadily after him.

The new Richard Smith was, of course, suspicious of discovery, and he hesitated for a moment what to do. To run would mean that he confessed at once that he was afraid of an encounter; to meet the man might prove as bad. However, while he hesitated, John Tuff settled the matter for himself and for Dick as well, by moving nervously towards the latter.

"You'll excuse me, sir—but I saw you in the theatre to-night," he began.

"Well, what of that?" asked Dick sharply. "There were a few people in the hall, I believe. What do you want?"

"I caught sight of you when I was doing that funny bit with my head under the lid of the desk," went on John, with a smile. "That generally gets a laugh, and it was while I was looking round and waiting for it, as you might say, that I caught sight of you."

"Perhaps I wasn't laughing," said Dick. "If so, I'm sorry."

"It wasn't that exactly," said John Tuff seriously. "It was because I knew you—and you didn't ought to be there at all."

"Oh, I'd paid my money," said Dick, with a laugh.

"I didn't mean that, sir," said John. "I meant that you ought not to have been there because—well—because you were dead."

"I'm afraid you've mistaken me for someone else," replied Dick coldly. "If you wish to know, my name is Smith—Richard Smith."

"The first one's all right," said John Tuff, with a nod—"and as for the second, there's such a lot of them knocking about that I suppose they're easy picked up. Now I ask you, sir, as man to man—do you look like Richard Smith?"

"I don't know," replied Dick, with a laugh. "I don't know how I ought to look at all, I'm sure. What would you like to call myself? I'm always willing to oblige."

"If I had the naming of you, sir," said John, slowly. "I should write you down Richard Carvell."

"Never heard the name in my life," said Dick, stoutly. "So that you see, my friend, you would write me down wrongly."

"Asking your pardon, sir, I should not," retorted the other. "Come, sir, as man to man—I've played a few parts in my time, from holding a banner upwards—and I'm used to it; but you're playing a part now, Mr Richard Carvell, and it don't fit you. Why, from what I've read about you in the papers, the ghost of 'Amlet' would be more your mark."

"I told you just now that I was of an obliging nature," said Dick, after a moment's pause. "Supposing I let you christen me Richard Carvell—"

"Done at the font years ago," murmured John Tuff as an aside.

"What is your particular fancy for doing so?"

"First—because I know you, and have met you in Market Rimstone in your own father's house; second—because, according to the papers, you're dead and buried some time back; and third, because you don't look Richard Smith, and you never will." Thus Mr John Tuff, in great excitement, and with his round, rather innocent-looking face glowing with eagerness.

Dick laughed boyishly, and shrugged his shoulders. "Good reasons all," he said, "and I should be a fool to deny how just they are. Let us say that I am Richard Carvell—back from the grave—or never having entered it—what then? And more than that—who are you that knows so much about me?"

"My father, sir, is Tuff of the house of Carvell," said the young man. "One of the best fathers that ever lived, though big 'ealed, and having a rooted objection to the boards. I have seen you, sir, several times, when I have been to Market Rimstone on filial duty intent."

"And you've run me to earth here," said Dick. "Now, Mr Tuff, the son of your father can be nothing but a gentleman, and I want to appeal to you as a gentleman. For certain reasons I may not divulge, I have dropped out of the scheme of life; I am apparently dead and buried and done for, and a certain

Richard Smith (a handy name that no one will quarrel with me for annexing) has sprung up in my place. Let sleeping dogs—or dead dogs, for the matter of that—lie, Mr Tuff; I'm a dead dog, and that's all you need know. More than that, I'm a poor dog—without a friend in the world, without a home, without a future. Good-night."

He turned on his heel, and walked rapidly away; John Tuff ran after him. "Stop a minute, sir—stop a minute!" exclaimed John, eagerly clutching at his arm. "My father's the best of fathers, as I've said, though down on play actors, and often and often I've heard him speak of you as 'Master Dick,' and as one of the best also. Never thought much of your brother, if you'll excuse me saying it, didn't father—but you was what might be called a tip-topper. Consequently, I couldn't find it in my conscience to let you go off like this—sort of exit to slow music—business, and no call afterwards." All this John Tuff poured out at a great rate, as he ran along beside Dick, who was striding away in a great hurry.

Dick stopped, and looked down at John Tuff; he spoke huskily, because it was not an easy matter to speak at all to this man, the first friendly creature who had spoken to him for a long time.

"I might have known you were old Tuff's son—you couldn't have spoken so nicely if you hadn't been. But you can't do me any good; you can't call me back from the grave into which I have let people thrust me. As I've told you, I'm done with; I'm an outsider, with no earthly chance in the race of life. All the same, I'm grateful to you; it's good to hear a friendly voice."

"I don't in the least know, sir, why you've changed your name—unless it should 'appen to be that you're going in for the profession, where it's done constantly," went on John Tuff rapidly. "My own name being fitted for comedy parts, I was rather grateful to father for having given it me, in a manner of speaking; but that don't concern us now. The only thing is, sir, why without a home, or friend, if I might make so bold, when here is one to hand? I'm sure if father knew that I'd ever passed by Master Dick, as he called you, there wouldn't be much chance for me when he comes to arrange about his savings. I've got a quiet and humble lodging near by—in the same house, I may say, as the manager and his wife—always a handy thing to keep the ear of the management as it were; and so I makes a rule of taking a top attic, while they spread themselves on the first floor. It's the only way of getting on in this profession, if you ask me. And if only you'd consent to come home with me, and let me introduce you as a gentleman friend, it might give me that sort of leg up that'd land me straight under the limes for the rest of my life. So you see, sir, it wouldn't be altogether on your side; I should be getting a bit out of it. And Mrs Joplin, a rare believer in blood, too, I can assure you, sir."

John Tuff had talked himself out of breath by this time, and could only gaze expectantly at Dick. Good, easy Dick—languishing for sympathy and friendship, no matter of what sort—shrugged his shoulders again, slipped his arm through the arm of the gratified Mr. Tuff, and walked off with him. "For to-night at least," he said, "Richard Carvell should come back from the grave, to give you his ghostly companion, Mr Tuff."

They walked together to John Tuff's lodgings, climbed the stairs to the attic that gentleman had described, and found themselves, to use his expression, "at 'ome all in a minute." And then John busied about to get something for his new friend to eat and to drink.

"I shan't forget this in a hurry, Tuff," said Dick gratefully. "When a man has been out of touch with the world for a week or two, and has scarcely spoken to a human being, except to ask for what he wants, it's good to look on the face of a friend."

"I'm sure, Mr Carvell—"

"Not that," broke in Dick hastily. "Richard Smith—now and always. And to-night is an oasis in the life of Richard Smith; he eats and drinks, and is almost merry; to-morrow he goes back to the obscurity from which you have dragged him."

"Is there no chance of your going back—I mean properly back, to be the gentleman that wasn't mentioned?" asked John Tuff anxiously. You see, I'm a bit startled in a manner of speaking, because it isn't often you drop the silent tear over the grave of a friend, as it were, as set forth in the newspapers, and the next day, almost, find him drink-

ing your whisky and soda. Though always most welcome, I assure you, alive or dead," added John hurriedly.

"There is no chance of my ever going back at all," said Dick. "As Richard Smith I am making a somewhat weak attempt to face the world and earn a living; but, I'm too respectable-looking to dig, and as to stealing"—Dick's face flushed, and he turned away his head—"I shan't do that."

John Tuff remembered certain dark hints in the papers concerning the loss of a sum of money, the mere mention of which was sufficient to take his breath away, and delicately said nothing. At that very moment there came a knock at the door, and a small man thrust in a very large head, and ejaculated in an excited whisper the one word, "Tuff!"

Mr. Tuff hurriedly pulled open the door, and disclosed the figure of Mr. Orlando Joplin in private life, with no trace of the persecuted forger about him, except that he wore the look of dejection which Dick had noticed as prominent in that character. After a glance at Dick, Mr. Joplin, in a mysterious stage whisper, spoke to John Tuff.

"Tuff—Mrs. Joplin, in quite a lady like fashion, is tearing her hair—reciting bits from the Bard in the wrong places, and generally disturbing what you might call the night watches. Mrs. Joplin is upset."

"Something gone wrong?" asked John Tuff.

"Everything has gone wrong," exclaimed the little man, still in the same rasping whisper. "Hobson has objected to the cutting of certain lines, although goodness knows he ought to be used to it by this time—and has gone. There isn't a man to be had in time for to-morrow. Not a single, solitary man. What's to be done?"

While the little man excitedly poured out these words, John Tuff looked with raised eyebrows, and a quizzical smile at Dick, who tried politely enough not to hear the conversation.

Then suddenly, with a very flushed face, John fung out a hand dramatically towards Mr. Richard Smith, and exclaimed:

"There's your man! What's the matter with him?"

Mr. Joplin looked at Dick a little doubtfully; seeing before him a tall, well-built, handsome young fellow, he scrutinized him carefully, turned and nodded to Tuff very rapidly, then also waved a hand towards Dick.

"Pray introduce me to your friend," said Mr. Joplin, with an air of importance. "An actor friend, I presume?" he added, when the introduction had been duly made.

"An actor, sir?" broke in John Tuff, before Dick had time to speak. "All the plays that my friend Mr. Richard Smith hasn't played in you might safely swallow, sir, and they wouldn't hurt you. I daresay you've heard the name. Mr. Richard Smith 'appens to be resting at the moment; he's a quick study and a hard worker. As for his manners on the stage—"

"Really, my dear Tuff—" began Dick. "The only thing that's ever been against 'im, sir, is his modesty," went on Tuff, warming with his subject. "He hasn't made enough of himself, in a manner of speaking. And really if it isn't the funniest thing in the world," he added, "that he should have looked in to-night, just at the moment when Mr. Hobson takes it into his head to cut 'is lucky."

In this extraordinary fashion Dick suddenly found himself on the fair road to a profession—or, at all events, to the earning of something of an income. Scarcely knowing what was happening, he was dragged downstairs by the excited and jubilant John Tuff and Orlando Joplin; was introduced to Mrs. Joplin (who at once began politely tearing her hair on hearing sounds of their approach), and was received with icy politeness by that lady. She pointed out to him how absolutely necessary it was that he should understand that the public clamoured to see her in the trying role of the forger's wife, and in a secondary fashion, Mr. Orlando Joplin, the forger; that the author had found it necessary to make a great deal more of the part of the villain, originally played by Mr. Hobson, than was at all necessary; and that, in fact, Mr. Richard Smith, in playing that part, must bear before him always the motto—"Keep it down!" All of which



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