

thought, staring at the swift tide. The dusk settled down upon the river. I heard a step close behind me, and turned sharply. There, pale but shapely, and glorious as to the eyes, stood my divinity of the pavement artist's stand. I lifted my hat.

"You don't know me," she said, speaking rapidly and in a strained undertone, "but I have come to warn you. You are in terrible danger, and you must leave London within an hour or you will lose your life. Do not question me, but for Heaven's sake go!"

There was a pause. I thought twice, and spoke.

"You warned a friend of mine a fortnight ago," I said.

"I did," she said sadly; "he took no notice, but you will not escape by an accident, as he did."

In spite of the horror of the thing I could find nothing but pity for the overwrought girl, and my heart yearned to her. I took a step forward.

"I am in danger," I said, "I know it. And you know some miscreant who intends—Heaven knows why—to take my life. Who is it, and who are you? Are you afraid to tell me? Then I will tell you what I believe—it is the pavement artist of Trafalgar-square."

The girl recoiled slightly, but recovered herself. She hid her face, but said nothing.

"Tell me the truth," I said gently; "one life has been lost and another endangered. What is this mystery?"

The girl uncovered her face and looked straight at me, her features set, her cheeks cold and white as marble.

"I will tell you!" she said. "I have seen you before, and you have honest eyes, at least. Heaven knows there is no one I dare speak to, but you shall help me. I am the pavement artist's sister!"

"He is all that remains of a genius—a genius that woke London to a new world of art ten years ago. He had known nothing but luxury from his cradle, but he has sunk to the gutter—and he is a homicidal maniac!"

I know every working of his mind. It is the mind of a clever fiend that awakes from its lethargy sometimes, and looks for a victim. Then he draws the face of that victim on the pavement that he has sunk to—and then he kills him.

"You will say that I should have had him incarcerated where he could do no harm. I have tried, but his cunning is infinite. No one alive has the proof of his misdeeds, not even I. Not the first expert in England can prove him mad—none even suspect it, and I was blamed for harbouring a fallacy. I have tried to follow him and save him from himself, but he escapes me with the cunning of an animal. He is thought harmless, and he will kill you to-night so surely as the moon rises if you stay!"

She stopped, and I watched her, a great wonder at my heart.

"Thank you," I said, as gently as I could. "You have done me a great honour in the telling, and I will help you. Never mind why. Your brother shall be in good hands to-night if it is the proof that is lacking."

"I do not know what you can do," she said sadly. "I would give my soul to know that he was in safe keeping and could not stain his hands with blood. Yet even that would be horrible. It would be better for us both were he dead. I say it, though I love him still—my brother!"

"Tell me where I can find you or communicate with you," I said, "and leave me to do the best I can."

She handed me a card, after a second's hesitation, and slipped away into the darkness before I could speak again.

CHAPTER IV.
MERCIFUL DEATH.

I hailed a cab and drove rapidly to the house of a doctor friend of mine named Ransome, and after conferring with me for an hour he left me and went to Scotland Yard, where he enlisted the services of an inspec-

tor with whom I had had many dealings and four plain-clothes men. I went on my own way, keeping to the crowded streets, a whistle handy in my breast pocket, and at the time appointed with Ransome I turned down to the nearly deserted Embankment by Arundel-street. A shadow flitted ahead of me, and another passed from behind, and I walked down by the river wall quietly as I could, but with my senses strained and every nerve on the alert. Twice I passed from end to end of the Embankment. Surely my enemy would find me out, here or in the streets. And as I passed a niche in the wall for the third time a noiseless shadow stepped out behind me. I wheeled quickly. The shadow sprang at me, and I had barely time to catch its right wrist as the flash of a knife glinted above me. The whistle shrilled loudly, and my assailant, with a grunt of fury, picked me up as though I had been a child—I stand six feet two—and dashed me down with stunning force. The knife flashed again, but my five helpers were upon my enemy. There was a short struggle, and a pair of handcuffs snapped crisply. Then the captive, with a furious effort, wrenched himself clear, and the pale moonlight fell on the leaden face of the pavement artist. He raised his manacled hands as though to dash Ransome to the earth, when they dropped suddenly. A crimson flash swept across his face, he staggered, and fell.

Ransome attended to him swiftly, gave a restorative, and undid the man's collar. He stooped and placed his ear to the captive's chest. Then he rose soberly.

"He suffered from an aortal aneurism," said Ransome in a low voice. "It has burst under the excitement, as it was bound to do, and he is dead. Poor beggar!"

We stood for a moment in silence. Then an ambulance was sent for, and the procession fled slowly westwards. When the formalities were over I hailed a cab and drove as fast as the

horse could take me to the address upon my card. A silver-haired house-keeper opened the door, and I was shown into a small drawing-room, where, with a little gasp, my angel of the timely warning rose to meet me.

"He is dead," I said quietly, and I put the happenings of the past hour in as few words as possible. Then I withdrew and left her to her sorrow.

"But you will come again?" she said as I went. It was a command.

And I did. But though all the happiness the world holds is mine at last, I never pass with my wife by the Thames-side after dark, where the black river cuts its way through the London night.

(The End.)

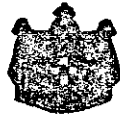
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