

the inn, the ticket-of-leave men regarded Draper with stern faces, and no man spoke to him or drank with him.

One evening he approached a group of familiar loungers, making some ingratiatory remark. No one answered, but all conversation ceased, the men sitting in grim silence over their glasses.

'Why, mates, you're Quakers,' said Draper, rallying them.

'We're no mates of yours,' growled a big fellow with a mahogany face.

'And we don't want to be,' said a slighter and younger man, with pronounced emphasis.

'Why, what's the matter?' asked Draper, in a surprised and injured tone. 'Have I done anything to offend you fellows? Have I unconsciously said something to hurt your feelings by alluding to your—'

'Shut up, you miserable rat,' cried one of the convicts, starting to his feet indignantly; 'you couldn't hurt our feelings by any of your sneaking allusions. We're not afraid to hear nor say what we are; but we have just found out what you are, and we want you never to speak to us again. Do you understand? We are men, though we are convicts, and we only want to talk to men; but you are a cowardly hound.'

Draper's jaw had fallen as he listened; but he backed from the table, and gained confidence as he remembered that these men were wholly at the mercy of the police, and would not dare go any further.

'You are an insolent jail-bird,' he said to the speaker; 'I'll see to you within an hour.'

At this, one of the men who sat at the end of the table nearest Draper leant toward him, and taking his glass from the table, cast its contents into his face.

'Get out!' he said; and without noticing him further, the ticket-of-leave men resumed their conviviality.

Burning with wrath, Draper left the tavern, and walked rapidly down the street toward the police station. As he left the inn, a tall man, who had sat at a side table unnoticed, rose and followed him. Half way down the street he overtook him.

'Hello, Preacher!' said Draper, giving a side-glance of dislike at the man, and increasing his speed to pass him. But Mr. Haggett, for it was he, easily kept by his shoulder, and evidently meant to stay there.

'Hello, Pilferer!' retorted Haggett, with a movement of the lip that was expressive and astonishing.

Draper slackened his pace at once, but he did not stop. He glanced furtively at Haggett, wondering what he meant. Haggett ploughed along, but said no more.

'What title was that you gave me?' asked Draper, plucking up courage as he thought of the friendlessness of the timid Scripture-reader.

'You addressed me by my past profession,' answered Haggett, looking straight ahead, 'and I called you by your present one.'

'What do you mean, you miserable—'

Mr. Haggett's bony hand on Draper's collar closed the query with a grip of prodigious power and suggestiveness. Haggett then let him go, making no further reference to the interrupted offence.

'You're going to report those men at the tavern, are you?' asked Haggett.

'I am—the scoundrels. I'll teach them to respect a free man.'

'Why are they not free men?'

'Why? Because they're convicted robbers and murderers, and—'

'Yes; because they were found out. Well, I'll go with you to the station, and have another thief discovered.'

'What do you mean?' asked Draper, standing on the road; 'is that a threat?'

'I mean that those men in the tavern are drinking wine stolen from the Hougoumont, and sold to the inn-keeper by—the person who had charge of it.'

Draper's dry lips came together and opened again, several times, but he did not speak. He was suffering agonies in this series of defeats and exposures. He shuddered again at the terrible thought that some unseen and powerful hand was playing against him.

'Mr. — Reader,' he said at last, holding out his hand with a sickly smile, 'have I offended you or injured you?'

Haggett looked at the proffered hand until it fell back to Draper's side.

'Yes,' he answered, 'a person like you offends and injures all decent people.'

Without a pretence of resentment, the crestfallen Draper retraced his steps towards the tavern. Mr. Haggett stood and watched him. On his way, Draper resolved to leave Fremantle that evening, and ride to Perth, where he would live much more quietly than he had done here. He saw the mistake he had made, and he would not repeat it.

He quietly asked the landlord for his bill, and gave directions for his trunks to be forwarded next day. He asked if he could have a horse that night.

'Certainly,' said the landlord, an ex-convict himself; 'but you must show me your pass.'

'What pass? I'm a free man.'

'O, I'm not supposed to know what you are,' said the landlord; 'only I'm not allowed to let horses to strangers without seeing their passes.'

'Who grants these passes?'

'The Comptroller-General, and he is at Perth. But he'll be here in a day or two.'

Draper cursed between his teeth as he turned away.

A short man, in a blue coat with brass buttons, who had heard this conversation, addressed him as he passed the bar.

'There ain't no fear of your getting lost, Captain Draper. They take better care of a man here than we used to in Walton-le-Dale.'

Draper stared at the speaker as if he saw an apparition. There, before him, with a smile that had no kindness for him, was Officer Lodge, who had known him since boyhood. His amazement was complete; he had not seen Ben Lodge on the voyage, the latter having quietly avoided his eye.

'Why, old friend,' he said, holding out his hand with a joyful lower-face, 'what brings you here?'

Instead of taking his hand, Ben Lodge took his 'glass a' hale' from the counter and looked steadily at Draper.

'That's the foulest hand that ever belonged to Walton,' said the old man.

Draper was about to pass on, with a 'pshaw,' when Ben Lodge stopped him with a word.

'Maybe you wouldn't want to go to Perth so bad if you knew who was there.'

'Who is there?'

'Alice Walmsley—free and happy, thank Heaven! Do you want to see her?'

Draper stepped close to the old man with a deadly scowl.

'Be careful,' he hissed, stealing his hand toward Ben's throat, 'or—'

A long black hand seized Draper's fingers as they moved in their stealthy threat, and twisted them almost from the sockets; and, standing at his shoulder, Draper found a naked bushman, holding a spear. It was Ngarra-jil, whom he did not recognise in his native costume, which, by the way, at first, too, had greatly shocked and disappointed Officer Lodge and Mr. Haggett.

'There's some one else from Walton will be in Perth by-and-by,' continued Ben Lodge, with a smile at Draper's discomfiture; and let me tell you beforehand, Samuel Draper, if he lays eyes on you in that 'ere town, you'll be sorry you didn't die of the black womit.'

Without a look to either side Draper strode from the tavern, and walked toward a hill within the town, which he climbed. He sat him down on the summit, amid the rough and dry salt-grass. He was shaken to the place where his soul might have been. He felt that he could not move tongue nor hand without discovery. The cunning that had become almost intellectual from long use was worthless as chaff. His life recoiled on him like a hissing snake, and bit him horribly. Before his death, he was being judged and put in hell.