

NO OTHER WAY.

By SIR WALTER BESANT.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

Mrs. Isabel Weyland, a widow, is threatened with the debtors' prison. Her creditor, Mrs. Brymer, suggests a way out of the difficulty...

CHAPTER II—(Continued.)

On the Poor Side.

Copyrighted, 1901, by Dodd, Mead & Co. "Sir, stay. If you were free tomorrow, what would you do?"

sniffed violently to show her disapproval of methods quite obsolete in business.

"Mrs. Brymer," said her debtor, "there will be no business done between this young gentleman and myself."

"It is but an advance—a trifling advance," she dropped her voice to a whisper, "will you hear from me again?"

"Sir, stay. If you were free tomorrow, what would you do?"

other court, because smaller. Here were about a dozen men and boys in iron clanking up and down the stone pavement.

"We are tolerably full just now," he said. "Nixey, we tried the other day—twelve are cast for nothing—here they are—your man among them, madam. By the Lord! a fine fellow, too—to be atomized by the hangman."



It is not impossible. Say—again—if you were free?"

"If I were free—oh, if I were free!" A sudden flush of color flew into his cheeks.

"If I were free! I should go back to the Inner Temple. Where else could I go?"

"And then?"

"I should wait on fortune. There are many chances for a barrister. Why, I am a scholar as good as most of them."

"I dream of king's counsel and of judges!"

The tears crowded to his eyes and rolled down the cheeks.

"Sir," she repeated. "I will not, I say, do you the injustice we contemplated."

Meaning—let me—? She placed a burning long silk purse with gold at both ends—in his hands—let me—against the time when you are king's counsel and of judges!"

He stood silent. The purse lay in his hand—he was transfixed. His eyes filled with tears.

"Madam," he said in a manner, at random, as one who knows not what to say. "It is too much. You are an angel. The prison has become a pool of Bethesda. Its waters, to be sure, are always troubled. The angel takes the prisoners out of the same." He collected himself. "Madam," he said, "how shall I—madam, you overwhelm me."

"Then show your sense by taking the money. Indeed, sir, you must. It is necessary for you to return to the other side, to fashion, to live. If you must remain for a while in this place with the gentlemen who are for the time your companions. Sir, if you refuse you will insult me. I shall believe that you mean to insult me. Sir, what have I done that you should insult a stranger?"

She took up the purse and again placed it in his hand.

"Madam, I place my honor in your hands when I take this purse. Perhaps—may I know not how, or when, if it is possible, kind heaven may one day give me the opportunity. Your honor is always safe in your own hands, but there may be a time when they may be—once a mouse delivered a lion—"

"Sir, I am sure that if such a time were to come I should be able to depend upon you. Remember that on many occasions a woman has been saved by a gallant knight."

He received the purse, but unwillingly. To take the lady's money was to lower himself in her eyes. Yet he was poor and in rags and had no means of buying the next meal; no bed and no blanket; no books and no occupation.

"If, madam, I must take your money—at least let me know."

"My name? No, sir, best not to know. I have learned yours. Let me watch your course, myself unseen."

"Then let me, only for once, see that lovely face. I know that it is lovely because it is the home of pity. For once let me look upon it. If only that I may gaze it upon my heart."

The lady lifted her mask. The young man was right. Truly, it was a lovely face. And now it was glowing with pity and blushing, with the shame of being found out in a kind secret, her eyes, downcast, were full of tears; she looked like the very goddess of pity. The young man sank upon his knees, he forgot his rags and his poverty, he forgot his bare legs and his bare feet, his stubby beard and his unkempt wig; he was a gentleman once more, and a gallant, and a worshiper of the sex. He took her hand and bent over it and kissed it—as a grateful gentleman should.

Just then Mrs. Brymer opened the door. "May I come in?" she asked. The young man rose and retired a step. The dressmaker, however, saw him on his knees; she saw the purse in his hand, the lady without her mask, the tears in her eyes and the newly born look of hope and joy in the face of the prisoner from the Poor Side.

"Tut—tut," she said. "This is very unbusiness-like, madam," she stopped and whispered. "Take back your purse. Let me deal with him. Five shillings a week—and he will be dead in six months—and you will be free. Oh, you have suffered yourself to pity him! Shame! Shame! Business knows no pity." She stood up and

well. To our next meeting. Perhaps, after all, you may save my reputation."

CHAPTER III.

A Strange Marriage.

In the coach as they rolled away from the king's bench Mrs. Brymer gave vent to her ill-humor and disappointment. "I dream of king's counsel and of judges!"

"What I own I could not have hoped to accomplish. I found for you that young fellow, born and brought up as a gentleman, though as poor as Job, consuming away in the starvation and misery of the Poor Side, and he will be dead in a few months."

"And what did you do?" cried over him. "Gave him money. Gave him cold beef and wine. That's what you did. It takes the heart out of a body. And what's the good when all's told? He will spend the money and then the starving will begin. No one else will ever give him any. No one goes to visit him; he is told you so; he has no friends; then he must sell his shoes and stockings again; then he must starve; then he will die; then he will be laid in St. George's churchyard, and you not a whit the better. Madam, you make me sick and sorry."

"You said you had another way, Mrs. Brymer. The thought of that other way softened my heart toward the poor young gentleman."

"Poor young gentleman!" Mrs. Brymer snorted and sniffed. "Poor young swindler! Poor young thief! Poor young footpad! Why, the fellow has got credit for 35 guineas without any means of paying, and now the unfortunate tradesman must suffer. And you say, 'poor young gentleman!'"

"You will acknowledge that putting him into prison does not increase his power of paying it. Would it not be better to let him out and to trust to his honor to earn the money and pay as soon as he can?"

"Madam, the man who does not pay his bills ought to be locked up for life. It is the least and the fairest punishment due to such a crime; why—it is not half enough—the ought to be whipped once a week at the cart's tail; he ought to be sent to the plantations; he ought to be hanged—every week we hang poor wretches not half so bad as this man who will not pay his debts! No punishment is bad enough for such an one!"

All the shopkeeper appeared in her angry words, in her flaming face, in her hot wrath. "For the tradesman, look you, is dependent on the credit he gives. He must give it; he must trust his customers' honor. If that fails him, do you think he will find grace or favor with them who have trusted him, the wholesale merchants, the gentlemen in black velvet and gold buttons who look so pious and talk so smug? Not so. Not so. They will exact the letter of the law. Why did I write to you? Why—on account of those who press me? There's a friend on it, say you again, in business; no compassion and no consideration."

"But I am not in business, Mrs. Brymer. Therefore I may have compassion—on myself, as well as on that young man."

She went on, regardless of the interruption. "The tradesman must pay. He must pay, and on the day, else he must be hanged. When he is bankrupt, what is there for him but the prison? No allowance, no excuse, no grating of time, any more than for the lying gentleman who hath brought him to this dreadful pass!"

"Would it not be better to let him remain outside, to earn some money and to pay where he can?"

Mrs. Brymer went on, without replying to this pertinent question:

"Think what bankruptcy means. The man in prison—he cannot earn anything. His friends on it, say you again, in business; cannot earn anything. The children cannot earn anything. The grudging relations dole out every shilling with words of reproach and contempt. The family have lost their respectability. They have lost their friends. The boys cannot be apprenticed. Like their father and their grandfather be-

fore them. They must become servants all their lives, unless they list and follow the colors or get out to the plantations, where they will be little better than negro slaves. The girls cannot marry—say, they cannot learn housewifery; they are sunk beneath the notice of honest tradesmen and are yet above the craftsmen; they are exposed to the dangers and temptations of the wicked town. Think of them when they go to church. Formerly they had their own pew and walked out after the quality, respected and envied; now they sit unconsidered on the benches among the charity children and the almswomen and the servants, ashamed and scorned. Madam," she stopped and took breath. "You know not, believe me, how dreadful a thing bankruptcy is to a respectable tradesman of the city, say how it drags down him and his family and makes them the most miserable of mortals. You have compassion for that young gentleman in the King's Bench; you have given him money and food—it is very well; you are not in trade—I declare, madam, truthfully, that I should like to flog that young gentleman who is so free with his kisses and his mumping and mouthing over ladies' hands, and his kisses—aye—to flog him from the temple to London bridge and back again I would do it myself—I would lay it on with a will joyfully, I would—joyfully, I would."

In this mood she continued while the hackney coach rumbled on, and the way of London bridge and presently down

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"Aye, aye," he said. "That is what you want, is it? I thought so—well—one of their visitors will run your errand for you."

Mrs. Brymer wrote a few words on a paper. "Yes, yes—we won't come another will. They'll marry the devil, and joyfully, for a guinea. Here, you boy!" he called to one of the lads, who sat stupidly waiting for the pot to be finished and taken back to the tavern. "Do you want to earn a shilling? Run round to the Fleet market. Can you read? Then ask for Parson Gaynam. Tell him to come here at once. If he is engaged or drunk call another. Come back with a parson and you shall have the shilling. Run, ye young fellow! I'll look after your pot. 'Tis Truxo, is it? Well, he'll be hanged next week. A lusty fellow! Pity to hang a man so strong. There's one who won't snivel at the last, and he won't bluster and swagger—know his sort. He'll look like the devil—I think he verily is first cousin to the devil."

Mrs. Brymer turned to her companion. "Madam," she said, "it is but a step to the Fleet Market. The parsony is always ready. Best sit down and recover your spirits." Isabel trembled and shook. "These pigs cannot hurt you. Pah! The place and the company are alike foul and stifling. What does it matter if they are all to be hanged next week? A good riddance, truly."

"Which of the two," Isabel asked, gazing around her more curiously, as she became accustomed to the scene.

"Madam, does it matter which is the man? I have already spoken to him. Believe me, you will have no trouble with him. He is ready, and eager, and will do his duty. It is your only chance. Remember that you must be free, that the fellow is a wretch of the deepest dye and that he has to be hanged on Monday. You will only meet him this once; just to go through the mill with him. Then we shall come away. The parson will give you the marriage certificate, which you must keep carefully, because you may possibly want it. Don't trouble about anything else. For the rest, I charge myself. I will go to Ludgate Hill and inform the draper that the debt is transferred to one Adolphus Truxo, now in Newgate; you need but to change your lodging for a while, as I said before, to prevent a visit from the unfortunate man. As for me, you must pay me the whole of your debt to me, and I shall ask nothing more of you—save the continuance of your custom—which I shall have the right of asking—after all I have done for you. There is not another dressmaker in London would have taken all this trouble out of pure kindness."

Isabel understood very little of this discourse. She sat down on the stone bench at the end of the court and trembled, feeling sick and faint and sorry. She could not keep her thoughts from the man who had implored her to pay his bill, nor from the bankruptcy and the misery brought upon a whole family by her own extravagance and folly, nor from the ruined home and the loss of all that makes life happy to the mother and the wife, nor from the cruel fate of the children deprived of their fathers by such a blow. It would have been a misery to take the lawyer, but she was so young and so ignorant that she did not know what to do. She was so young and so ignorant that she did not know what to do. She was so young and so ignorant that she did not know what to do.

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TRADES THAT KILL. Stonecutters who work on sandstone seldom live to be more than fifty years of age and nearly all of them die of lung disease due to the inhalation of mineral dust. Another class of workers who succumb to lung troubles are those who prepare feathers for trimmings and ornaments. They inhale the floating, feathery particles, and in three years disease has a firm hold on them. The grinders and polishers of cut-glass rarely live beyond the age of forty. They too die of lung trouble. The average death rate for consumption is reckoned at about sixteen per cent. of the total mortality from disease. But among flint-workers that percentage leaps from sixteen to eighty per cent.; among needle-polishers to seventy per cent.; and among file-cutters to sixty-two per cent. These are some of the trades that kill.

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It is not impossible. Say—again—if you were free? "If I were free—oh, if I were free!" A sudden flush of color flew into his cheeks. "If I were free! I should go back to the Inner Temple. Where else could I go?" "And then?" "I should wait on fortune. There are many chances for a barrister. Why, I am a scholar as good as most of them." "I dream of king's counsel and of judges!" The tears crowded to his eyes and rolled down the cheeks. "Sir," she repeated. "I will not, I say, do you the injustice we contemplated. Meaning—let me—? She placed a burning long silk purse with gold at both ends—in his hands—let me—against the time when you are king's counsel and of judges!" He stood silent. The purse lay in his hand—he was transfixed. His eyes filled with tears. "Madam," he said in a manner, at random, as one who knows not what to say. "It is too much. You are an angel. The prison has become a pool of Bethesda. Its waters, to be sure, are always troubled. The angel takes the prisoners out of the same." He collected himself. "Madam," he said, "how shall I—madam, you overwhelm me."