

The shutter opens a little. "You can't come in here," the voice answers peevishly, "my masters are away, and they don't harbor strangers."

Mary thrusts her arm desperately through the opening.

"Only let me in and dry my clothes," she says; "for the love of God have pity on me!"

The shutter is again opened. "Maybe I'd show more pity in keeping you out," the woman says. "They're a wild, rough gang, and they may return any minute, and if they find you here, I wouldn't give much for your chances, my girl."

"Oh, let me in, if only for a few minutes," cries Mary, "or I shall perish of cold."

"Come to the door," the woman says.

The rough door is unbarred and the girl staggers into a good-sized room, where a fire of logs is blazing on a stone hearth.

Mary falls into a seat near the red glow, the water trickles off her till it makes a pool on the floor. The woman stares at her in wonder, but she asks no questions; she sets a pot of coffee on the hearth to warm for her dripping guest.

"You'll get your death in those clothes, and she looks compassionately at the girl's slender figure and sad face, then she goes into a closet opposite the fire and comes back with a blanket over her arm. "Take off your skirts quickly," she says, "and wrap this round you, while I dry 'em a bit."

Mary was too stupefied to move, but with an effort she does what she is bid, and then she sits wrapped in the blanket. While she drinks the hot coffee given her, the woman holds the girl's dripping clothes close to the blazing logs.

The woman is small and ugly; she looks as if drink and hard usage have dulled her faculties. Every now and then, however, she gives her visitor a keen glance, and then she turns away and seems absorbed in listening.

All at once she starts. "They are coming—don't you hear them?" she says excitedly. "Yes—it's them, safe enough—I hear the signal—you're not safe," her voice sinks to a whisper; "if they find you they'll shoot you—or worse—you must hide in there—come!"

She thrusts Mary's clothes into her arms and hurries her to the place from which she has taken the blanket. The girl finds herself pushed past rows of shelves and within a second door, which the woman closes on her, and then the girl hears her also close the first door into the room. Mary finds herself in a veritable black hole, seemingly hung round with blankets; there is hardly room to turn, and yet she does not feel stifled. Looking up she sees glimpses of starlight through the chinks of the log roof. As the girl stands still trembling with cold, she hears a tramp of footsteps outside; the tramp comes nearer, and then goes round the cabin. Next minute she hears loud voices in the room she has just quitted.

Mary has not shared her hostess' terror. The shock she has undergone has taken away all emotion. Her dulness makes her insensible of danger.

All at once her heart beats fast; through the rough planked doors she hears voices more distinctly. There has been first a continual dialogue, now a hubbub of sound, now several voices jeer at one of the party, who seems to keep silence. These voices are coarse and ruffianly, and Mary at last feels afraid. A fierce oath, and then a fist strikes the table with vehemence, and silences the clamor of the rest.

"Hold your jaw, every one. I have the swag safe; let them laugh who win."

Mary's heart seems to stand still, and she sinks back against the wall of the cabin.

It is Somerfield's voice. The wretched girl does not lose consciousness, but for a time she is deaf to what is happening. While she lay half drowned among the tree roots, it had seemed to her that a sudden frenzy had seized on her lover, and she had forgotten the existence of her money; now the horrible fact is clear.

She rouses from her stupor to hear a hubbub of voices, some of them eager and clamorous. Somerfield's sounds brutal and defiant. He calls loudly for more drink; and after this there comes a lull in the talk. Soon this changes into wild songs and laughter, choruses with loud blows on the table, quarrels, at which she turns faint again, and amid it all—one of the loudest—she hears Somerfield's voice. After what seems to her a long time, these sounds subside, sink by degrees into stillness, and soon it is plain by the snoring and heavy breathing that the revellers are sound asleep.

Overhead the stars have paled, and a chill air coming in slowly with gray glimmer warns poor Mary that dawn is breaking.

Moving very quietly she manages to dress herself in the confined space in which she stands. She has scarcely finished when the closet door opens gently, and the woman beckons her forth:

"They are all asleep," she whispers in the girl's ear.

The miserable creature is trembling; but without a word she leads the way to the cabin door. There is only a dim light coming from the log fire. The woman noiselessly opens the door, and the fire-glow mixes strangely with the pale gleam that comes in from the doorway, and falls on the faces of the men who lie sleeping in varied positions on the floor.

Somerfield lies nearest the fire, but his face is hidden in the blanket he has rolled himself in; his frieze coat lies beside him. Mary shrinks away as she passes him; she has nearly reached the door when a strange idea comes to her. She will take his coat.

If she ever reaches England again this will be a proof to his friends that her terrible story is true.

She turns back, takes the coat from beside him, and then, pressing the hand of the woman as she glides past her, she flies out into the cold morning air.

Mary was never able coherently to relate how she reached New York and the steamer she had come out in, the day before it started on its homeward journey. She had a confused memory of walking through the chill dawn and waiting wearily and half-dead at the small station house, and when she got to the steamer she was too ill to be questioned.

To the captain's eager inquiries she answered, "Not now, captain; I'm dreaming still. I'll tell you when I wake;" and the horror in her eyes checked the good man's questions.

For several days she lay in her berth almost unconscious of what happened, but at last she roused and looked dreamily about her.

Presently her eyes fell on the frieze coat she had carried away. She looked at it in wonder; then, as all came back, she shivered with horror. How could she have brought away such a witness of the terrible story? After a little she lifted it down; its weight surprised her.

Then suddenly she thrust her hand into one of the pockets and drew forth her money, given by the captain to Somerfield.

The main facts of this story are not fictitious. There are persons still living who knew Mary Abbot and Willie Somerfield, and who have heard Mary tell the tragic ending of the tryst she traveled so far to keep.

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