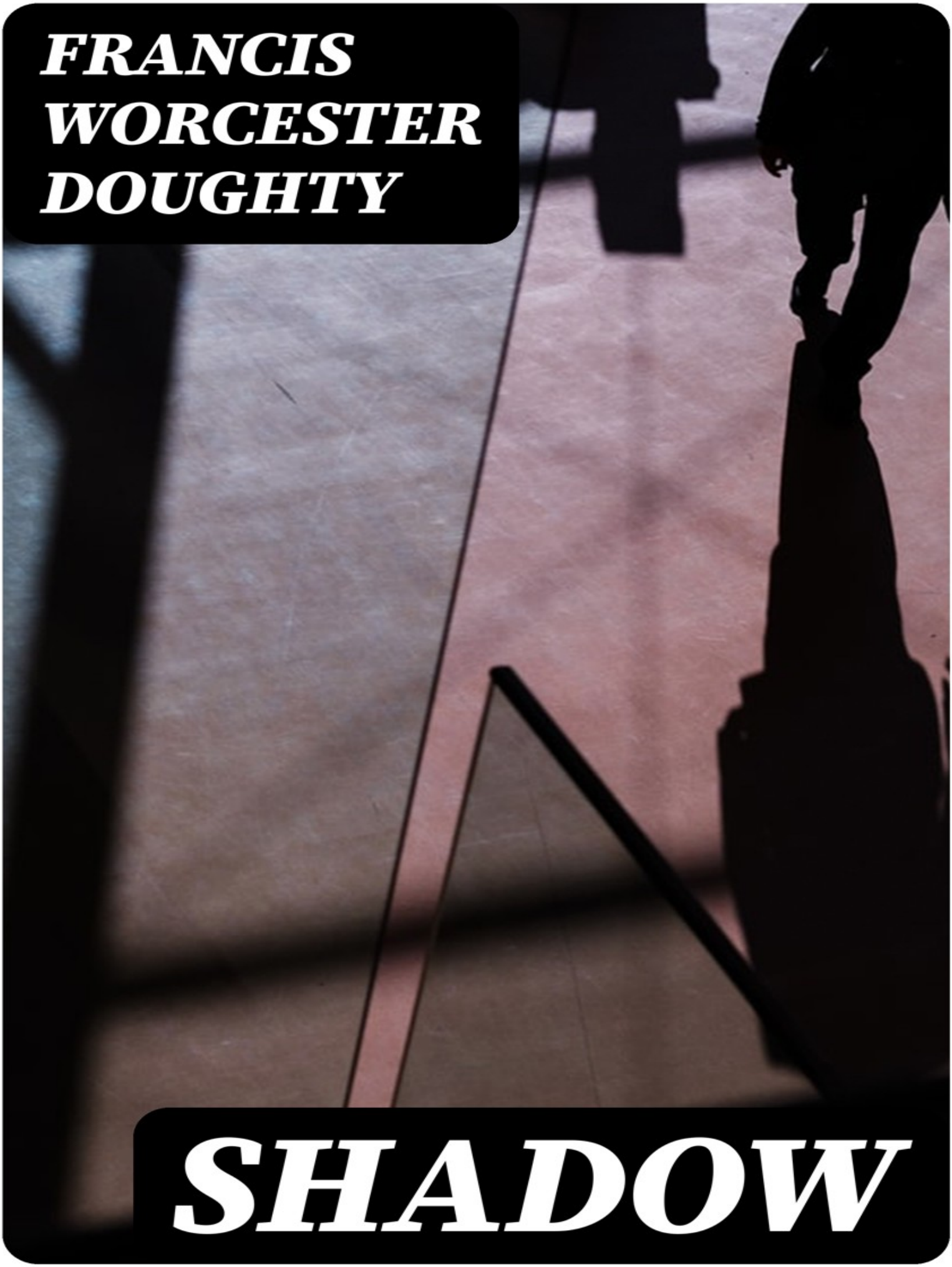
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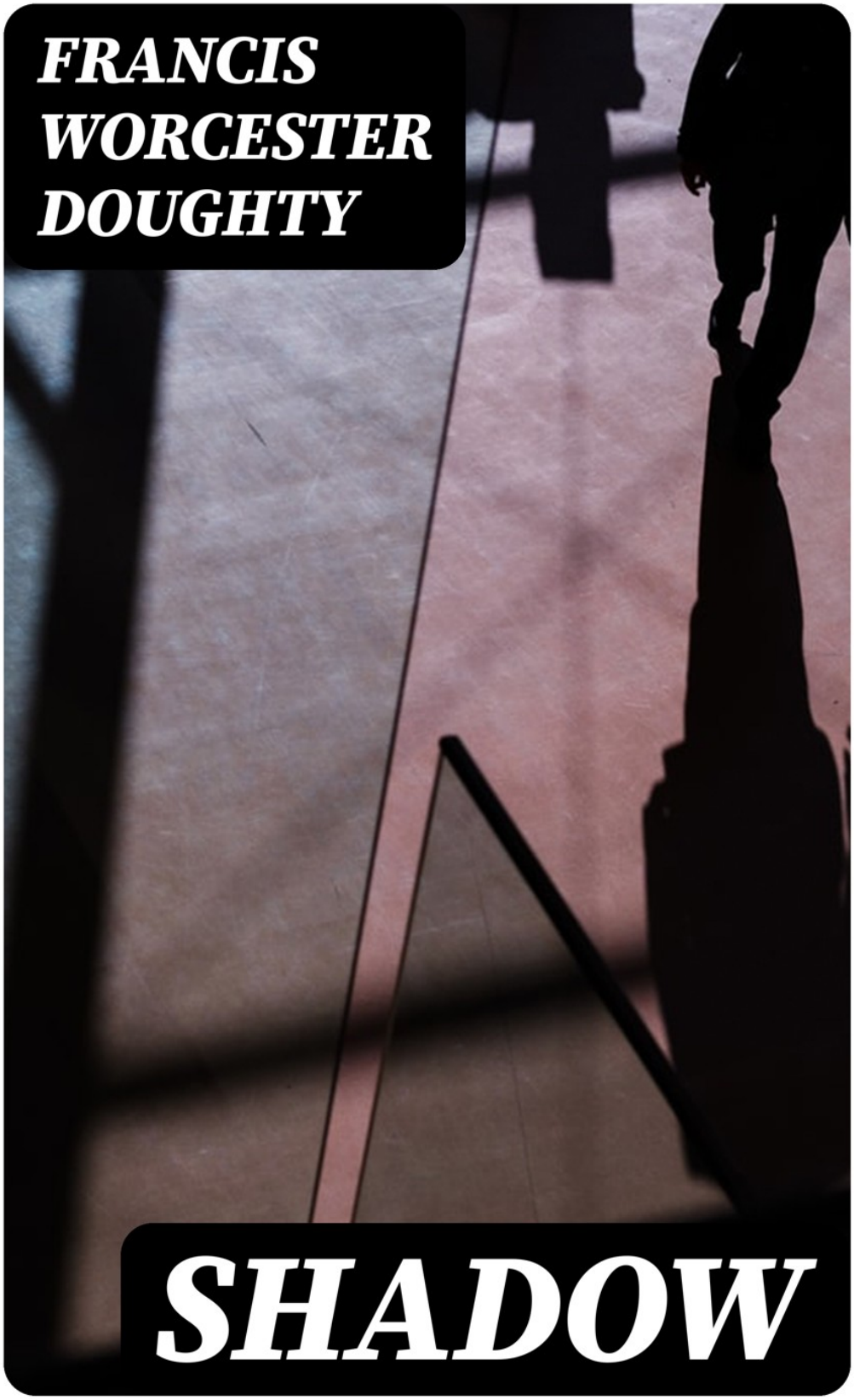
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The Cases of Mysterious Detective

EAN 8596547000198

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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Chapter XXVII. The Mystery Explained

Chapter I.

A Murder

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It was a dark and stormy night. The rain fell heavily and steadily, and what wind there was roamed through the streets with a peculiar, moaning sound.

It was after the midnight hour.

Not a light was to be seen in any of the houses, nor was there any sound to be heard save that produced by the falling rain, and that soughing of the wind—not unlike the sighs and moans of some uneasy spirit unable to rest in the grave.

It was as disagreeable a night as I ever saw. And I could not help shuddering as I hurried homeward through the storm, with bent head, for I felt somewhat as if I were passing through a city of the dead.

This heavy silence—except for the noises mentioned—was very oppressive; and, while I gave a start, I was also conscious of a sense of relief, when I heard a human voice shouting:

"Help—help!"

I paused short.

My head having been bent, the cry coming so unexpectedly, I could not locate its direction.

Presently it came again.

"Help, for Heaven's sake, help!"

Off I dashed to the rescue.

Crack!

Then came a wild wail.

Crack!

Then I heard a thud, as of a human being falling heavily to the sidewalk. And as the person uttered no further cries, one of two things must be the case—he was either insensible or dead.

I increased my pace, and presently turning a corner, saw a burly fellow just dragging a body beneath a gas-lamp, the better to enable him to secure the plunder on his victim's body.

The assassin had already secured most of the stricken man's valuables, when my rapid approach alarmed him, and jumping up, he sprang along the street at a break-neck pace.

Crack!

Crack!

I had drawn a revolver, and I sent a couple of bullets after him, hoping to wing him, as well as to extend the alarm which his shots must already have raised.

A policeman put in an appearance some distance down the street, but the flying murderer took a running leap at him, tumbled him head over heels into the gutter, and then succeeded in making his escape.

When I compared notes with the policeman, I found that neither of us had distinctly enough seen the murderer to be able to give any description of him whatever, save that he was a chunky-built man, and seemed roughly dressed.

We were not surprised, on examining into the prostrate man's condition, to find him dead.

Right in the center of his forehead was a small hole, edged with drying, clotted blood, which mutely said:

"Here entered the fatal messenger from a death-dealing weapon."

The body was conveyed to the station-house, there to remain until it was claimed or conveyed to the morgue.

An examination of the pockets resulted in our learning that his name was Tom Smith. As to his residence, we could find no clew from anything he had on his person, or by consulting the directory.

About two o'clock the next afternoon, a wild-eyed woman entered the station-house, and, in trembling tones, asked to see the body.

I was present at the time, and my heart went out in pity to the pale-faced woman—or perhaps I should say girl, for she certainly had not seen her twentieth birthday.

She disappeared into the inner room where the body was lying, and a few seconds later I heard a low and anguished cry. Then I knew that she had recognized the poor fellow as some one who was near and dear to her.

Kindly hands drew her away from beside the body, and when I saw her again her face was convulsed with anguish, and tears were streaming from her eyes.

For fully half an hour she continued weeping, and not a man of us was there who did not feel uncomfortable. We did not venture to console her, for it seemed like sacrilege to intrude on her during the first period of her sorrow.

Then her sobbing became less loud, and gradually she subdued the more demonstrative expressions of grief.

She finally lifted her head, and in a hollow voice asked to hear the story of his death.

The captain briefly outlined what was known, and she calmly listened to the tale.

"Can I see the person who first reached him?" she asked, when the captain had finished.

"Yes," was the reply. "Detective Howard here is the man you want."

She wished to see me alone, and I conducted her into another room.

Arrived here, she begged me minutely to relate what had happened; and, exhibiting a singular self-control, asked for as close a description of the assassin as I could give.

"You knew him very well?" said I, when an opportunity occurred.

"Yes."

"Perhaps he was your brother?"

"No," she said, and a faint flush flitted into her pallid face for an instant. "No," and then her voice sank to a whisper, "he was to have been my husband."

"Ah! And now, miss, you don't suppose that the assassin could have been an enemy of his? Did he have any enemies, who might rob him, as a blind to cover up their real motive?"

"Tom have an enemy? No—no—he was too good and kind for that. It was done by some murderous wretch for the sake of plunder. Tom must have resisted being robbed, and the ruffian killed him."

"That is my own theory. And—I do not wish to pain you, miss—but what about the body? Has he any family or

relations?"

"No, none in this world. He and I were all in all to each other," and the eyes of the girl became moist again; but she fought back the tears, and quite calmly said:

"I will take care of the body."

Then a troubled expression crossed her face; and, to make a long story short, I gained her confidence, learned that she had not enough to properly inter her lover, and loaned her the money.

With tears of gratitude in her eyes, she thanked me, and every word came straight from her heart.

Her name was Nellie Millbank, she said, and she was utterly alone in the world. Until several days before, she had been employed in a store, but had then been discharged.

Tom was a clerk, but had only a small salary, as soon as which was raised they were to have been married. He had been to see her on that fatal night, to tell her he had obtained a day off, and was going to take her on an excursion on the morrow.

She had been dressed and waiting for him, but he had not come.

Alarmed, for he had always kept his word, she knew not what to do, nor what to think, until, having bought an afternoon paper, she saw an account of the shooting.

This was her simple history.

After the inquest, the body was delivered to her, and then she faded from my sight and knowledge for a long while. Exactly how long, the ensuing chapters will inform you.

Chapter II.

Mat Morris

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"I've been discharged, mother."

"What?"

"I've been discharged."

The face of Mrs. Morris became very grave, and presently her eyes were turned on the boyish yet manly face of her son Mat. Earnestly she gazed at him for several seconds, and then her lips parted with a smile which, wan as it was, expressed satisfaction.

"It was no fault of yours. You did nothing wrong, my son?"

"No, mother, it was not through any fault of mine that I was discharged. Business has fallen off so very much of late that they were compelled to reduce the number of hands. And as I was one of the newest, I was among those laid off."

"Of course I am sorry," said poor Mrs. Morris, "but we must do the best we can."

"I'll not act the part of a sluggard, mother, you can depend on that. I'll try and find something to do to keep the wolf from the door. And my boss gave me a splendid recommendation, and said if business got better he'd send for me at once."

Mat was a good son.

Few better were to be found.

His worst fault, perhaps, was in being a little reckless, or over-brave and independent.

None could insult him with impunity, nor could he nor would he stand by and silently witness anybody being imposed upon. He invariably took the part of the under dog in the fight.

Hardly had Mat finished speaking, when the door opened and a girl entered; a girl whom both mother and son greeted with glances of affection.

Her name was Helen Dilt.

Five years before, when the circumstances of the Morris family had been better, they had taken her from the street—found starving and freezing there on a cold winter's night—and had cared for her.

Mr. Morris had died only a year later, since which time Helen had clung to them, doing what little she could to keep the roof above their heads.

She was not yet sixteen—a slight and winsome little creature; not beautiful, but with a sweet face that when lighted by a smile was remarkably winning.

Of her history she knew nothing.

Her knowledge of herself could be summed up in a few words.

For years cared for by a drunken old hag, with only a faint remembrance of a sweet, sad face before that, she had lost even such a squalid home as she had when the hag died.

Then she had come with the Morris family.

And well did they love her.

Mrs. Morris loved her like a daughter, and Mat loved her much better than a sister. And Helen returned the latter's deep regard.

While no word had openly been spoken, it was tacitly understood by all three that some day, when Mat and Helen were old enough, and the circumstances permitted, they were to be married.

Mat was of slight build, of lithe and willowy frame, in which, however, resided an amount of strength which few would have dreamed possible.

He was just eighteen.

There is an old saying—"that it never rains but it pours."

It seems true sometimes.

Helen, employed in a situation bringing her three dollars a week, had also come home with the news of having been discharged.

It was a grave little trio that gathered about the supper table that night.

Latterly they had been getting along comfortably, but now destitution and want again stared them in the face, and must inevitably take up quarters in the household, unless some one obtained work of some kind to bring in some money.

Mat was up and away early the next morning, and for many mornings thereafter, but although he honestly searched all day long for employment, none was to be found.

And Helen, too, sought for work, but failed to find it, and day by day their slender stock of money diminished, until at last they had eaten the last meal, and had no money wherewith to buy another.

That evening Helen left the house and was gone for a short while, and when she came back she did not say where

she had been.

But she had gone with her shawl to a pawn-shop, and hid away in her dress was the pittance which had been loaned on it.

In the morning she stole out unheard, not long after daylight, and invested her capital in newspapers.

Her cheeks were flushed with shame as she stood on the street, offering her papers for sale. But she fought back her pride. They had been very kind to her, and she should be only too glad, she told herself, to make the sacrifice for their dear sakes.

And how happy she was when she hastened to their home, and put her morning's earnings into the hand of Mrs. Morris.

In vain Mat protested against Helen's selling papers. Let him do it, he said.

"It will need all we can both make to live and pay the rent," Helen quietly returned.

"But you must not go on the street to sell papers, Helen," protested Mat.

"I am young and can afford better to do this than that our good mother should work," said Helen, bravely, casting an affectionate glance toward Mrs. Morris.

And Mat said no more.

It was one day several weeks subsequent to the time when she first began selling papers, that a gentleman stopped to purchase a *Herald* of Helen.

He had paid for it in a mechanical way, and was turning away when he chanced to glance at the face of the newsgirl.

He started slightly, then cast a keen glance at her, paused, and then in a tone of assumed carelessness, asked:

"Haven't I seen you somewhere else, my girl? You have not always sold papers?"

"No, sir."

"Where can I have seen you?"

"I don't know, sir," was the only reply, for Helen did not care to talk to him.

But she saw that he was an elderly man, his hair was streaked with gray, and in clothing and manner he bore the impress of apparent respectability.

"What is your name?" he inquired.

"Helen."

"What!" with another start. "Your name is Helen, is it?" recovering himself. "Helen what, my girl?"

"Helen Morris," was the reply, for she had now for a long time used the name of her benefactors as her own.

Again the gentleman glanced keenly at her, and then moved away slowly, muttering to himself:

"Morris—Morris! I can't understand it. That likeness is wonderful, and cannot exist as a mere accident. I must investigate this, and I'd bet anything that that is not her name."

The gentleman entered a large building on Broadway, ascended in the elevator, and opened the door of an office, on which was lettered the legend:

"Joseph Brown,
Attorney at Law."

Having written a note, he dispatched his office boy with it to a liquor saloon, it being directed to James McGinnis, in care

of the saloon's proprietor.

Late that afternoon a beetle-browed and forbidding-looking individual entered Brown's office.

"Well, I got your letter and I've come!" was the rather sullen salutation he gave Brown. "What's up now? Want to badger me again?"

"Don't talk to me in that manner!" said Brown, quietly, yet in a grim tone. "Remember that I saved your neck from a halter, which I can again put around it at any moment."

The man shuddered, and became meek as a lamb.

"What do you want?"

"That's better," and Brown smiled. "I don't want much of you just now," and then he sank his voice to a whisper.

"That's easy enough," McGinnis said, a few minutes later. "I can let you know to-morrow morning, I think."

"Very well."

When McGinnis put in an appearance the next morning, it was evident from his expression that he had been successful in the task required of him by Brown.

"I've found out that her name isn't Morris. That's the name of the people as she lives with. She's a kind of an adopted daughter, and they said as how her real name was Dilk, or something like that."

"Ha! I thought so," Brown exclaimed, inwardly. And then he bade McGinnis sit down, and for nearly half an hour they conversed in low tones.

Then Brown put a roll of bills into his confederate's hands, and the latter withdrew, saying:

"I'll do the job nately, and there'll be no trouble after it."

And that night Helen did not return home. Half-crazed with alarm, Mat and his mother awaited her coming until nine o'clock, or a little after, and then the young fellow could stand it no longer, but went in search of Helen.

He could not find her.

She did not return during the night, nor even the next day, nor when night again fell.

Mat had scoured the city for her, had visited the places where she usually sold papers, and had questioned all the boot-blacks and newsboys, but had only obtained the meager and unsatisfactory information from one little fellow that he had seen Helen in company with a man just after dusk.

She had disappeared completely, had vanished as utterly as a mist that is dissolved by the sun's warm rays.

"She is gone from us, mother," Mat at last said, in a choking voice. "You remember, mother, what Helen has told us—her impressions concerning her early childhood. And, mother, I believe there is money at the bottom of the thing, that Helen stood in somebody's way, and has been spirited off by this person's orders."

"It is possible."

"Possible! I feel it to be the truth. And I shall not rest night or day, mother, until I have found her. Good-bye, mother, for I am going. Heaven in mercy assist you and care for you until I can come back to do so. Good-bye!"

Mrs. Morris did not wish him to go, but she could not thwart him, for she knew how much he loved Helen. But her face was very pale and anguished as she saw him go.