Mark had no paper to amuse him, for the station was not important enough for a bookstall, and there was nothing to be seen out of the windows, which were silvered with frozen moisture. He had the compartment to himself, and lay back looking up rather sentimentally.

"I wonder," he thought, "if they are going all the way to town, and if I could offer to be of any use to them at King's Cross? At all events, I shall see her once more then."

It was not a very long journey from Chigbourne to the terminus, but, as will be seen hereafter, it was destined to be a landmark in the lives of both Mark and Mabel, though the meeting he looked forward to at the end of it never took place.

CHAPTER V

In the Fog

Mark was roused from his reverie in the railway carriage by the fact that the train, after slackening speed rather suddenly, had come to a dead standstill. "Surely we can't be in already," he said to himself, wondering at the way in which his thoughts had outstripped the time. But on looking out he found that he was mistaken—they were certainly not near the metropolis as yet, nor did they appear to have stopped at any station, though from the blank white fog which reigned all around, and drifted in curling wreaths through the window he had let down, it was difficult to make very sure of this.

Along the whole length of the train conversation, no longer drowned by the motion, rose and fell in a kind of drone, out of which occasional scraps of talk from the nearer carriages were more distinctly audible, until there came a general lull as each party gave way to the temptation of listening to the other—for the dullest talk has an extraordinary piquancy under these circumstances, either because the speakers, being unseen, appeal to our imagination, or because they do not suppose that they are being so generally overheard.

But by-and-by it seemed to be universally felt that the stoppage was an unusual one, and windows went down with a clatter along the carriages, while heads were put out inquiringly. Every kind of voice demanded to be told where they were, and why they were stopping, and

what the deuce the Company meant by it—inquiries met by a guard, who walked slowly along the line, with the diplomatic evasiveness which marks the official dislike to admit any possible hitch in the arrangements.

" Yes," he said, stolidly ; " there might be a bit of a stoppage like ; they'd be going on presently ; he couldn't say how long that would be ; something had gone wrong with the engine ; it was nothing serious ; he didn't exactly know what."

But he was met just under Mark's window by the guard from the brake at the end of the train, when a hurried conference took place, in which there was no stolidity on either side. " Run back as quickly as you can and set the detonators—there ain't a minute to lose, she may be down on us any time, and she'll never see the other signals this weather. I'd get 'em all out of the train if I was you, mate —they ain't safe where they are as it is, that they ain't ! "

The one guard ran back to his brake, and then on to set the fog-signals, while the other went on to warn the passengers. " All get out 'ere, please ; all get out ! " he shouted.

There was the usual obstructive person in the train who required to be logically convinced first of the necessity for disturbing himself ; he put his head angrily out of a window near Mark's : " Here, guard ! " he shouted importantly ; " what's all this ? *Why* am I to get out ? "

" Because you'd better," said the guard shortly.

" But why—where's the platform ? I insist on being taken to a platform—I'm not going to break my leg getting out here." Several people, who had half opened their doors, paused on the steps at this, as if recalled to a sense of their personal dignity.

" Do as you please, sir," said the official ; " the engine's broke down, and we may be run into any minute in this fog ; but if you'd be more comfortable up there——"

There was no want of alacrity after that, the obstructive man being the first down ; all the rosy-faced gentleman hopped out, some of the younger ones still grasping half-played hands of " Nap " or " Loo " and made the best of their way down the embankment, and several old ladies were got out in various stages of flutter, narrowly escaping sprained ankles in the descent.

Mark, who had seen his opportunity from the first, had

rushed to the door of the next compartment, caught Dolly in his arms, as she jumped down, and, hardly believing in his own good fortune, held Mabel's hand in his for one happy moment as she stepped from the high and awkward footboard.

"Down the slope, quick," he cried to them; "get as far from the line as you can in case of a smash."

Mabel turned a little pale, for she had not understood till then that there was any real danger.

"Keep close to me, Dolly," she said, as they went down the slope; "we're safe here."

The fog had gathered thick down in the meadows, and nothing could be seen of the abandoned train when they had gone a few paces from the foot of the embankment; the passengers were moving about in excited groups, not knowing what horrors they might not be obliged to witness in the next few minutes. The excitement increased as one of them declared he could hear the noise of an approaching train.

"Only just in time—God help them if they don't pull up!" cried some, and a woman hoped that "the poor driver and stoker were not on the engine."

Dolly heard this, and broke from Mabel with a loud cry: "Mabel, we've left Frisk!" she sobbed; "he'll be killed—oh, my dog will be killed—he mustn't be left behind!"

And, to Mark's horror, she turned back, evidently with the idea of making for the point of danger; he ran after her, and caught the little silvery-grey form fast in his arms.

"Let me go!" cried Dolly, struggling; "I must get him back—oh, I must!"

"He'll have jumped out by this time—he's quite safe," said Mark, in her ear.

"He was sound asleep in his basket, he'll never wake if I don't call to him—why do you hold me? I tell you I *will* go!" persisted Dolly.

"No, Dolly, no," said Mabel, bending over her; "it's too late—it's hard to leave him, but we must hope for the best." She was crying, too, for the poor doomed dog as she spoke.

Mark was hardly a man from whom anything heroic could be very confidently expected; he was no more unselfish than the generality of young men; as a rule he disliked

personally inconveniencing himself for other people, and in cooler moments, or without the stimulus of Mabel's presence, he would certainly have seen no necessity to run the risk of a painful death for the sake of a dog.

But Mabel was there, and the desire of distinguishing himself in her eyes made a temporary hero out of materials which as first sight were not promising. He was physically fearless enough, and given to acting on impulses without counting the consequences; the impulse seized him now to attempt to rescue this dog, and he obeyed it blindly.

"Wait here," he said to Mabel; "I'll go back for him."

"Oh, no—no," she cried; "it may cost you your life!"

"Don't stop him, Mabel," entreated Dolly; "he is going to save my dog."

Mark had gone already, and was half-way up the slope, slippery as it was, with the grass clumped and matted together by the frost, and scored in long brown tracks by the feet that had just descended it.

Mabel was left to console and encourage the weeping Dolly as best she might, with a terrible suspense weighing on her own heart the while, not altogether on Frisk's account. At the point where the train had broken down the line took a bold curve, and now they could hear, apparently close upon them, the roar of a fast train sweeping round through the fog; there were some faint explosions, hoarse shouting, a long screeching whistle,—and after that the dull shock of a collision; but nothing could be seen from where they stood, and for some moments Mabel remained motionless, almost paralysed by the fear of what might be hidden behind the fog curtain.

Mark clambered painfully up the glistening embankment, hoping to reach the motionless carriages and escape with his object effected before the train he could hear in the distance ground into them with a hideous crash.

He knew his danger, but, to do him justice, he scarcely gave it a thought—any possible suffering seemed as remote and inconsiderable just then as the chance of a broken leg or collar-bone had been to him when running for a touch-down in his football days; the one idea that filled his brain was to return to Mabel triumphant with the rescued dog in his arms, and he had room for no others.

He went as directly as he could to the part of the train in which was the carriage he had occupied, and found it

without much difficulty when he was near enough to make out forms through the fog; the door of Mabel's compartment was open, and, as he sprang up the footboard, he heard the train behind rattling down on him with its whistle screeching infernally, and for the first time felt an uneasy recollection of the horribly fantastic injuries described in accounts of so many railway collisions.

But there was no time to think of this; at the other end of the carriage was the little round wicker-basket he had seen in Dolly's hands at the Chigbourne waiting-room, and in it was the terrier, sleeping soundly as she had anticipated. He caught up the little drowsy beast, which growled ungratefully, and turned to leap down with it to the ballast when there was a sharp concussion, which sent a jangling forward shock, increasing in violence as it went, along the standing train, and threw him violently against the partition of the compartment.

Meanwhile the passengers of the first train, now that the worst was apparently over, and the faint shouts and screams from the embankment had calmed down, began to make their way in the direction of the sounds, and Mabel, holding Dolly fast by the hand, forced herself to follow them, though she was sick and faint with the dread of what she might see.

The first thing they saw was a crowd of eager, excited faces, all questioning and accusing the badgered officials of both trains at the same time.

"Why was an empty train left on the rails unprotected in this way? They might have been all killed. It was culpable negligence all round, and there should be an inquiry—they would insist on an inquiry—they would report this to the traffic manager," and so on.

The faces looked pale and ghastly enough in the fog, but all the speakers were evidently sound in wind and limb, and, as far as could be seen, neither train had left the rails—but where was the young man who had volunteered to recover the dog?"

"Oh, Mabel," cried Dolly, again and again. "Frisk is killed, I'm sure of it, or he'd come to me—something has happened—ask, do ask!"

But Mabel dared not, for fear of hearing that a life had been nobly and uselessly sacrificed; she could only press through the crowd with the object of making her way to the carriage where the suspense would be ended.

" There's some one in one of the carriages ! " she heard a voice saying as she got nearer, and her heart beat faster; and then the crowd parted somehow, and she saw Mark Ashburn come out of it towards her, with a dazed, scared smile on his pale face, and the little trembling dog safe under one arm.

Fortunately for Mark, the fog-signals had been set in time to do their work, and the second train was fitted with powerful brakes which, but for the state of the rails, would have brought it to without any collision at all; as it was, the shock had not been severe enough to damage the rolling-stock to any greater extent than twisting or straining a buffer or coupling-chain here and there, though it had thrown him against the corner of the net-rail with sufficient violence to slightly graze his forehead, and leave him stunned and a little faint for a few minutes.

After sitting down for a short time to recover himself, he picked up the terrier from the cushions on which it was crouching and shivering, having dropped from his hand at the concussion, and feeling himself still rather giddy and sick, got down amongst the astonished crowd, and came towards Mabel and Dolly as we have seen.

It was the best moment, as he thought afterwards, in his life. Every one, probably, with any imagination at all, likes to conceive himself at times as the performer of some heroic action extorting the admiration he longs for from some particular pair of eyes; but opportunities for thus distinguishing oneself are sadly rare nowadays, and often when they come are missed, or, if grasped with success, the fair eyes are looking another way and never see it.

But Mark had a satisfied sense of appearing to the utmost advantage as he met the little girl and placed the dog in her arms.

" There's your dog; he's quite safe, only a little frightened," he said, with a pleasant sympathy in his voice.

Dolly was too overcome for words; she caught Frisk up with her eyes swimming, and ran away with him to pour her self-reproach and relief into his pricked ears, without making any attempt to express her thanks to his rescuer. Her sister, however, made him ample amends.

" How can we thank you ? " she said, with a quiver in her voice and an involuntary admiration in her eyes: " it was so very, very brave of you—you might have been killed!"

" I thought at first it was going to be rather a bad smash," said Mark—he could not resist the impulse now to make all the capital he could out of what he had done—" I was knocked down—and—and unconscious for a little while after it; but I'm not much hurt, as you see. I don't *think* I'm any the worse for it, and at all events your little sister's dog isn't—and that's the main point, isn't it?" he added, with a feeling that his words were equal to the occasion.

" Indeed it isn't," said Mabel warmly; " if you had been seriously hurt I should never have forgiven myself for letting you go—but are you sure you feel no pain anywhere?"

" Well," he admitted, " I fancy I was cut a little about the head " (he was afraid she might not have noticed this) " but that's a trifle."

"There's a cut on your forehead," said Mabel; " it has been bleeding, but I think it has stopped now. Let me bind it up for you in case it should break out again."

It was in truth a very small cut, and had hardly bled at all, but Mark made light of it elaborately, as the surest means of keeping her interest alive. " I am afraid it must be giving you pain," she said, with a pretty, anxious concern in her eyes as she spoke; and Mark protested that the pain was nothing—which was the exact truth, although he had no intention of being taken literally.

They had gone down the embankment again and were slowly crossing the dim field in which they had first taken refuge. No one was in sight, the other passengers being still engaged in comparing notes or browbeating the unhappy guards above; and as Mark glanced at his companion he saw that her thoughts had ceased to busy themselves about him, while her eyes were trying to pierce the gloom which surrounded her.

" I was looking for my little sister," she exclaimed, answering the question in his eyes. " She ran off with the dog you brought back to her, and it is so easy to lose oneself here. I must find out where she is—oh, you are ill!" she broke off suddenly, as Mark staggered and half fell.

" Only a slight giddiness," he said; " if—if I could sit down somewhere for a moment—is that a stile over there?"

" It looks like one. Can you get so far without help?" she said compassionately. " Will you lean on me?"

He seemed to her like some young knight who had been wounded, as it were, in her cause, and deserved all the care she could give him.

"If you will be so very good," said Mark. He felt himself a humbug, for he could have leaped the stile with ease at that very moment.

So he allowed Mabel to guide him to the stile, and sat down on one of its rotten cross-planks while she poured *eau-de-cologne* or some essence of the kind on a handkerchief, and ordered him to bathe his forehead with it. They seemed isolated there together on the batch of hoary grass by a narrow black ditch half hidden in rank weeds, which alone could be distinguished in the prevailing yellowish whiteness, and Mark desired nothing better at that moment.

"I wonder," said Mabel, "if there's a doctor amongst the passengers. There must be, I should think. I am sure you ought to see one. Let me see if I can find one and bring him to you."

But Mark declared he was quite himself again, and would have begged her not to leave him if he dared; and as there really did not seem to be anything serious the matter, Mabel's uneasiness about Dolly returned.

"I can't rest till I find her," she said, "and if you really are strong again, will you help me? She cannot have gone very far."

Mark, only too glad of any pretence to remain with her, volunteered willingly.

"Then will you go round the field that way," she said, "and I will go this, and we will meet here again?"

"Don't you think," said Mark, who had not been prepared for this, "that if—she might not know *me*, you see—I mean if I was not with you?"

"Yes, she will," said Mabel impatiently; "Dolly won't forget you after what you have done, and we are losing time. Go round by there, and call her now and then; if she is here she will come, and if not then we will try the next field."

She went off herself as she spoke, and Mark had nothing for it but to obey, as she so evidently expected to be obeyed. He went round the field, calling out the child's name now and then, feeling rather forlorn and ridiculous as his voice went out unanswered on the raw air. Presently a burly figure, grotesquely magnified by the mist, came towards him, and resolved itself into an ordinary guard.

" You one of the gentlemen in my train, sir ? " he said, " the train as broke down, that is ? "

" Yes," said Mark ; " why ? "

" 'Cause we've got the engine put to-rights, sir ; nothing much the matter with her, there wasn't, and we're goin' on directly, sir ; I'm getting all my passengers together."

Mark was in no hurry to leave that field, but his time was not his own ; he ought to have been at St. Peter's long ago, and was bound to take the first opportunity of getting back. It would not be pleasant as it was, to have to go and fetch down his class from the sixth-form room, where the headmaster had probably given them a temporary asylum.

He had never forgotten a morning on which he had overslept himself, and the mortification he had felt at the Doctor's blandly polite but cutting reception of his apologies. He had a better excuse this time, but even that would not bear over-taxing.

He hesitated a moment, however. " I'll go in a minute," he said, " but there's a lady and a little girl with a dog somewhere about. They mustn't be left behind. Wait while I go and tell them, will you ? "

" Never you fear, sir," said the guard, " we won't go without them, but I'll call 'em ; they'll mind me more than they will you, beggin' your pardon, sir, and you'd better run on, as time's short, and keep places for 'em. You leave it all to me ; I'll take care on 'em."

Mark heard faint barks across the hedge in the direction Mabel had taken. The child was evidently found. The best thing, he thought, to do now was to secure an empty compartment, and with that idea, and perhaps a little from that instinctive obedience to anything in a uniform which is a characteristic of the average respectable Englishman, he let himself be persuaded by the guard, and went back to the train.

To his great joy he found that the compartment Mabel had occupied had no one in it ; he stood waiting by the door for Mabel and her sister to come up, with eager anticipations of a delightful conclusion to his journey.

" Perhaps she will tell me who she is," he thought ; " at all events she will ask me who *I* am. How little I hoped for this yesterday ! "

He was interrupted by a guard—another guard, a sour

looking man with a grizzled beard, who was in charge of the front van.

"Get in, sir, if you mean to travel by this 'ere train," he said.

"I'm waiting for a young lady," said Mark, rather ingenuously, but it slipped out almost without his knowledge. "The other guard promised me——"

"I don't know nothing about no young ladies," said the guard obdurately; "but if you mean my mate, he's just give me the signal from his end, and if you don't want to be left be'ind you'd better take your seat while you can, sir, and pretty sharp, too."

There was nothing else to do; he could not search for Mabel along the train; he must wait till they got to King's Cross; but he took his seat reluctantly and with a heavy disappointment, thinking what a fool he had been to let himself be persuaded by the burly guard.

"But for that, *she* might have been sitting opposite to me now!" he thought bitterly. "What a fool I was to leave her! How pretty she looked when she wanted me to see a doctor; how charming she is altogether! Am I in love with her already? Of course I am; who wouldn't be? I shall see her again. She will speak to me once more and, after all, things might be worse. I couldn't have counted on *that* when we started."

And he tried to console himself with this, feeling an impatient anger at the slow pace of the train as it crept cautiously on towards the goal of his hopes. But the breakdown had not happened very far from town, and, tedious as the time seemed to Mark, it was not actually long before the colour of the atmosphere (there was no other indication) proved that they were nearing the terminus.

It changed by slow gradations from its original yellow-whiteness to mustard colour, from that to a smoky lurid red, and from red to stinging, choking iron-grey, and the iron-grey pall was in full possession of King's Cross, where the sickly moonlight of the electric lamps could only clear small halos immediately around their globes.

Mark sprang out before the train had stopped; he strained his eyes in watching for the form he hoped to see there, but in vain; there were no signs in all that bustle of Mabel or Dolly, or the little dog to whom he owed so much.

He sought out the guard who had deluded him and found him superintending the clearing of the luggage van. He hardly knew whether it was merely a fancy that the official, after making a half-step forward to meet him, and fumbling in all his pockets, turned away again as if anxious to avoid meeting his eye.

Mark forced him to meet him, however, willing or not.

"Where is the lady?" he said sharply. "You left her behind after all, it seems?"

"It wasn't my fault, sir," said the guard wheezily, "nor it wasn't the lady's fault, leastways on'y the little lady's, sir. Both on us tried all we could, but the little missy, her with the tarrier dawg, was nervous-like with it all, and wouldn't hear of getting in the train again; so the young lady, she said, seeing as they was so near London, they could get a fly or a cab or summat, and go on in that."

"And—did she give you no message for me?" said Mark.

There was such evident expectation in his face that the guard seemed afraid to disappoint it.

"I was to give you her respecks and compliments," he said slowly—"or was it her love, now?" he substituted quickly, after a glance at Mark's face, "and you was not to be in a way about her, and she'd be seein' of you again before very long, and——"

"That's all a lie, you know," said Mark, calmly.

"Well, then, she didn't say nothing, if that warn't it," said the guard, doggedly.

"Did she—did she leave any directions about luggage or anything?" said Mark.

"Brown portmanty to go in the left-luggage room till called for," said the guard. "Anything else I can do for you, sir; no? Good mornin', then, and thanky, sir!"

"Never did such a thing as that in my life afore," he muttered, as he went back to his van; "to go and lose a bit o' paper with writing on it. I'm afraid my head's a-leavin' me; they ain't keepin' company, that's plain. I'm sorry I lost that there paper; but it warn't no use a-tellin' of him."

As for Mark, this lame and impotent conclusion brought back all his depression again.

"She never even asked my name!" he thought, bitterly. "I risked my life for her—it *was* for her, and she knew

it; but she has forgotten that already. I've lost her for ever this time; she may not even live in London, and if she did I've no clue to tell me where, and if I had I don't exactly see what use it would be; I won't think about her—yes, I will, she can't prevent me from doing that, at any rate!"

By this time he had left the City station of the Metropolitan Railway, and was going back to his underground labours at St. Peter's, where he was soon engaged in trying to establish something like discipline in his class, which the dark brown fog seemed to have inspired with unaccountable liveliness. His short holiday had not served to rest and invigorate him as much as might have been expected; it had left him consumed with a hopeless longing for something unattainable. His thirst for distinction had returned in an aggravated form, and as that day wore on, and with each day that succeeded it, he felt a wearier disgust with himself and his surroundings.

CHAPTER VI

Bad News

It was Christmas week, and Mrs. Langton and her daughters were sitting, late one afternoon, in the drawing-room where we saw them first. Dolly was on a low stool at her mother's feet, submitting, not too willingly, to have the bow in her hair smoothed and arranged for her.

"It *must* be all right now, mother!" she said, breaking away rebelliously at last.

"It's worse than ever, Dolly," said Mrs. Langton plaintively; "it's slipped over to the left now!"

"But it doesn't matter, it never will keep straight long."

"Well, if you *like* to run about like a little wild child," was the resigned answer.

"Little wild children don't wear bows in their hair; they wear—well, they don't wear anything they've got to be careful and tidy about. I think that must be rather nice," said Dolly, turning round from where she knelt on the hearthrug. "Wake up, Frisk, and be good-tempered directly. Mother, on Christmas Day I'm going to tie a Christmas card round Frisk's neck, and send him into papa's dressing-room to wish him a Merry Christmas, the

first thing in the morning—you won't tell him before the time, will you ? "

" Not if you don't wish it, darling," said Mrs. Langton, placidly.

" I mightn't have had him to tie a card to," said Dolly, taking the dog up and hugging him fondly, " if that gentleman had not fetched him out of the train for me ; and I never said ' thank you ' to him either. I forgot somehow, and then I remembered he was gone. Should you think he will come to see me, Mabel ; you told him that mother would be glad to thank him some time, didn't you, on the paper you gave the guard for him ? "

" Yes, Dolly," said Mabel, turning her head a little away; " but you see he hasn't come yet."

" My dear," said her mother, " really I think he shows better taste in keeping away ; there was no necessity to send him a message at all, and I hope he won't take any advantage of it. Thanking people is so tiresome, and after all, they never think you have said enough about it. It was very kind of the young man, of course, very—though I can't say I ever quite understood what it was he did—it was something in a fog, I know," she concluded vaguely.

" We told you all about it, mother," explained Dolly ; " I'll tell you all over again. There was a fog and our train stopped, and we all got out, and I left Frisk behind, and there he was in the carriage all alone, and then the gentleman ran back and got him out and brought him to me. And another train came up behind and stopped too."

" Dolly tells it rather tamely," said Mabel, her cheeks flushing again. " At the time he ran back for the dog we could all hear the other train rushing up in the fog, mamma, and nobody knew whether there might not be a frightful collision in another minute."

" Then I think it was an extremely rash thing for him to do, my dear ; and if I were his mother I should be very angry with him."

" He was very good-looking, wasn't he, Mabel ? " said Dolly, irrelevantly.

" Was he, Dolly ? Well, yes, I suppose he was, rather," said Mabel, with much outward indifference, and an inward and very vivid picture of Mark's face as he leaned by the style, his fine eyes imploring her not to leave him.

"Well, perhaps he doesn't care about being thanked, or doesn't want to see us again," said Dolly; "if he did, he'd call, you know; you wrote the address on the paper."

Mabel had already arrived at the same conclusion, and was secretly a little piqued and hurt by it; she had gone slightly out of her way to give him an opportunity of seeing her again if he wished, and he had not chosen to take advantage of it; it had not seriously disturbed her peace of mind, but her pride was wounded, notwithstanding. At times she was ready to believe that there had been some mistake or miscarriage with her message, otherwise it was strange that the admiration which it had not been difficult to read in his eyes should have evaporated in this way.

"Why, here's papa—home already!" cried Dolly, as the door opened and a tall man entered. "How do you do, papa? you've rumpled my bow—you didn't think I *meant* it, did you? you can do it again if you like—*I* don't mind a bit; mother does."

He had duly returned the affectionate hug with which Dolly had greeted him, but now he put her aside with a rather preoccupied air, and went to his wife's chair, kissing the smooth forehead she presented, still absently.

"You are early, Gerald," she said; "did the courts rise sooner to-day?"

"No," he said conscientiously, "it's the Vacation now—I left chambers as soon as I could get away," and he was folding and unfolding the evening paper he had brought in with him, as he stood silent before the fire.

Mr. Langton was not much over fifty, and a handsome man still. Young barristers' and solicitors' clerks were apt to consider him rather a formidable personage in Lincoln's Inn. But at home he unbent, a little consciously, perhaps, but he did unbend—being proud and fond of his children, who at least stood in no fear of him.

Mabel's quick eyes were the first to notice a shade on his face and a constraint in his manner; she went to his side and said in an undertone:

"You are not feeling ill, papa, are you, or has anything worried you to-day?"

"I am quite well. I have news to tell you," he said in the same tone. "Now, Dolly, stay in the schoolroom."

He shut the door carefully after her, and then, turning

to his wife and daughter, he said, " You haven't either of you seen the papers to-day, I suppose ? "

" No," said Mrs. Langton ; " you know I never read daily papers. Gerald," she cried suddenly, with a light coming into her eyes, " is another judge dead ? " Visions of her husband on the Bench, a town house in a more central part of London, an increase of social consideration for herself and daughters, began to float into her brain.

" It's not that—if there was, I'm not likely to be offered a judgeship just yet ; it's not good news, Belle. I'm afraid it's very bad," he said warningly, " very bad indeed."

" Oh, papa," cried Mabel, " please tell it at once, whatever it is ! "

" You must let me choose my own course, my dear ; I am coming to the point at once. The *Globe* has a telegram from Lloyd's agent reporting the total loss of the ' Mangalore.' "

" Vincent's ship ! " said Mabel. " Is—is he saved ? "

" We cannot be certain of anything just yet—and—and these disasters are generally exaggerated in the first accounts, but I'm afraid there is very grave reason to fear that the poor boy went down with her—not many passengers were on board at the time, and only four or five of them were saved, and they are women. We can hope for the best still, but I cannot after reading the particulars feel any confidence myself. I made inquiries at the owners' offices this afternoon, but they could tell me very little just yet, though they will have fuller information by to-morrow—but from what they did say I cannot feel very hopeful."

Mabel hid her face, trying to realise that the man who had sat opposite to her there scarcely a month ago, with the strange, almost pathetic, sadness in his eyes, was lying somewhere still and white, fathoms deep under the sea—she was too stunned for tears just yet.

" Gerald," said Mrs. Langton, " Vincent is drowned—I'm sure of it. I feel this will be a terrible shock to me by-and-by ; I don't know when I shall get over it—poor, poor dear fellow ! To think that the last time I saw him was that evening we dined at the Gordon's—you remember, Gerald, a dull dinner—and he saw me into the carriage, and stood there on the pavement saying good-bye ! " Mrs. Langdon seemed to consider that these circumstances had

a deep pathos of their own ; she pressed her eyes daintily with her handkerchief before she could go on.

" Is nothing more known ? " said Mabel, with a strong effort to control her voice.

" Here is the account—stay, I can give you the effect of it. It was in the Indian Ocean, not long after leaving Bombay, somewhere off the Malabar coast ; and the ship seems to have grazed a sunken reef, which ripped a fearful hole in her side, without stopping her course. They were not near enough to the land to hope to reverse the engines and back her on shore at full speed. She began to settle down fast by the head, and their only chance was in the boats, which unfortunately had nearly all become jammed in the davits. Everyone appears to have behaved admirably. They managed at last to launch one of the boats, and to put the women into it ; and they were trying to get out the others when the vessel went down suddenly, not a quarter of an hour after striking the reef."

" Vincent could swim, papa," said Mabel, with gleaming eyes.

" He was not a first-rate swimmer," said Mr. Langton, " I remember that, and even a first-rate swimmer would have found it hard work to reach the shore, if he had not been drawn down with the ship, as seems to have been the fate of most of the poor fellows. Still of course there is always hope."

" And he is dead ! Vincent dead ! It seems so hard, so very, very sad," said Mabel, and began to cry softly.

" Cry, darling," said Mrs. Langton, " it will do you good. I'm sure I wish *I* could cry like that, it would be such a relief. But you know papa says we may hope yet ; we won't give up all hope till we're obliged to ; we must be brave. You really don't care about coming into dinner ? You won't have a little something sent up to your room ? Well, I feel as if food would choke me myself, but I must go in to keep papa company. Will you tell this sad news to Dolly and ask Fraulein to keep her with her till bedtime ? I can't bear to see her just yet."

The tidings had reached Mark early that same afternoon. He was walking home through the City from some " holiday-classes " he had been superintending at St. Peter's, when the heading " Loss of a passenger steamer with —— lives " on the contents-sheets of the evening papers caught

his eye, and led him, when established with a *Globe* in one of the underground Railway carriages, to turn with a languid interest to the details. He started when he saw the name of the vessel, and all his indifference left him as he hurriedly read the various accounts of the disaster, and looked in vain for Vincent's name amongst the survivors.

The next day he, too, went up to the owners' offices to make inquiries, and by that time full information had come in, which left it impossible that any but those who had come ashore in the long-boat could have escaped from the ship. They had remained near the scene of the wreck for some time, but without picking up more than one or two of the crew; the rest must all have been sucked down with the ship, which sank with terrible suddenness at the last.

Vincent was certainly not amongst those in the boat, while, as appeared from the agent's list, he was evidently on board when the ship left Bombay. It was possible to hope no longer after that, and Mark left the offices with the knowledge that Holroyd and he had indeed taken their last walk together; that he would see his face and take his hand no more.

It came to him with a shock, the unavoidable shock which a man feels when he has suddenly to associate the idea of death with one with whom he has had any intimacy. He told himself he was sorry, and for a moment Vincent's fate seemed somehow to throw a sort of halo round his memory, but very soon the sorrow faded, until at last it became little more than an uneasy consciousness that he ought to be miserable and was not.

Caffyn heard the news with a certain satisfaction. A formidable rival had been swept out of his path, and he could speak of him now without any temptation to depreciate his merits, so much so that when he took an opportunity one day of referring to his loss, he did it so delicately that Mabel was touched, and liked him better for this indication of feeling than she had ever been able to do before.

But it is better far for those who are gone that they should be impervious alike to our indifference and our grief, for the truest grief will be insensibly deadened by time, and could not long console the least exacting for the ever-widening oblivion.