II.

LOST IN A LONDON FOG.

WE had been to tea with some friends in Shaftesbury Terrace, and were so busy with our gossip that the evening slipped away unperceived till the clock struck half-past ten. We were two lone ladies, and had meant to leave early, as we were strangers in London and had some way to drive; so our dismay on discovering the lateness of the hour may be imagined.

We had not engaged a carriage to come for us, knowing that a cab-stand was near by, and that a cab would be much cheaper than the snug broughams ladies usually secure for evening use.

Out flew the little maid to get us a cab, and we hurried on our wraps eager to be gone. But we waited and waited, for Mary Ann did not come, and we were beginning to think something had happened to her, when she came hurrying back to say that all the cabs were gone from the neighboring stand, and she had run to another, where, after some delay, she had secured a hansom.

Now it is not considered quite the thing for ladies to go about in hansom cabs, without a gentleman to accompany them, especially in the evening; but being independent Americans, and impatient to relieve our weary hostess of our presence, we said nothing, but bundled in, gave the address, — 24 Colville Gardens, Bayswater, — and away we went.

A dense fog had come on, and nothing was visible but a short bit of muddy street, and lamps looming dimly through the mist. Our driver was as husky as if it had got into his throat, and the big, white horse looked absolutely ghostly as he went off at the breakneck pace which seems as natural to the London cab-horse as mud is to London streets.

"Isn't it fun to go rattling round in this all-out-of-doors style, through a real London fog?" said my sister, who was now enjoying her first visit to this surprising city.

"That remains to be seen. For my part, I'd give a good deal to be shut up, dry and decent, in a four-wheeler, this is so very rowdy," I returned, feeling much secret anxiety as to the propriety of our proceeding.

"You are sure you gave the man the right direction?" I asked, after we had driven through what

seemed a wilderness of crescents, terraces, gardens and squares.

"Of course I did, and he answered, 'All right, mum.' Shall I ask him if it is all right?" said M, who dearly liked to poke up the little door in the roof, which was our only means of communication with the burly, breezy cherub who sat up aloft to endanger the life of his fare.

"You may, for we have ridden long enough to go to St. Paul's."

Up went the little door, and M asked blandly, —

"Are you sure you are going right, driver?"

"No, mum, I ain't," was the cheering response breathed through the trap-door (as M called it) in a hoarse whisper.

"I told you where to go, and it is time we were there."

"I'm new come to London, mum, and ain't used to these parts yet," — began the man.

"Good gracious! so are we; and I'm sure I can't tell you any thing more than the name and number I have already given. You'd better ask the first policeman we meet," cried I, with the foreboding fear heavier than before.

"All right, mum," and down went the little door, and off rattled the cab.

My irrepressible sister burst out laughing at the absurdity of our position.

"Don't laugh, M, for mercy's sake! It's no joke to be wandering about this great city at eleven o'clock at night in a thick fog, with a tipsy driver," I croaked, with a warning pinch.

"He isn't tipsy, only stupid, as we are, not to have engaged a carriage to come for us."

"He is tipsy; I smelt gin in his breath, and he is half asleep up there, I've no doubt, for we have passed one, if not two policemen, I'm sure."

"Nonsense! you wouldn't know your own father in this mist. Let Jarvey alone and he will bring us safely home."

"We shall see," I answered, grimly, as a splash of mud lit upon my nose, and the cab gave a perilous lurch in cutting round a sharp corner.

Did any one ever find a policeman when he was wanted? I never did, though they are as thick as blackberries when they are not needed.

On and on we went, but not a felt helmet appeared, and never did escaping fugitive look more eagerly for the North Star than I did for a gleaming badge on a blue coat.

"There's a station! I shall stop and ask, for I'm not going slamming and splashing about any longer

Hi there, driver!" and I poked up the door with a vigor that would have startled the soundest sleeper.

"Ay, ay, mum," came the wheezy whisper, more wheezy than ever.

"Stop at this station-house and hail some one. We *must* get home, and you *must* ask the way."

"All right, mum," came back the hollow mockery conveyed in those exasperating words.

We did stop, and a star did appear, when I, with all the dignity I could muster, stated the case and asked for aid.

"Pleeseman X," gave it civilly; but I greatly fear he did not believe that the muddy-faced woman with a croaky voice, and the blonde damsel with curls, long earrings and light gloves, were really respectable members of the glorious American Republic.

I felt this and I could not blame him; so, thanking him with a bow which would have done credit to the noblest of my Hancock and Quincy ancestors, we went on again.

Alas, alas, it was all go on and no stop; for although our driver had responded briskly, "Ay, ay, sir," to the policeman's inquiry, "You know your way now, don't you?" he evidently did not know it, and the white horse went steadily up and down

the long, wet streets, like a phantom steed in a horrid dream.

Things really were becoming serious; midnight was approaching. I had not the remotest idea where we were, and the passers-by became more and more infrequent, lights vanished from windows, few cabs were seen and the world was evidently going to bed. The fog was rapidly extinguishing my voice, and anxiety quenching my courage. M's curls hung limp and wild about her face, and even M's spirits began to fail.

"I am afraid we *are* lost," she whispered in my ear.

"Not a doubt of it."

"The man *must* be tipsy, after all."

"That is evident."

"What *will* people think of us?"

"That we are tipsy also."

"What *shall* we do?"

"Nothing but sit here and drift about till morning. The man has probably tumbled off; this dreadful horse is evidently wound up and won't stop till he has run down; the fog is increasing, and nothing will bring us to a halt but a collision with some other shipwrecked Yankee, as lost and miserable as we are."

"Oh, L, don't be sarcastic and grim now! Do exert yourself and land somewhere. Go to a hotel. This horrid man must know where the Langham is."

"I doubt if he knows any thing, and I am sure that eminently respectable house would refuse to admit such a pair of frights as we are, at this disreputable hour. No, we must go on till something happens to save us. We have discovered the secret of perpetual motion, and that is some comfort."

M groaned, I laughed, the ghostly horse sneezed, and I think the driver snored.

When things are pretty comfortable I am apt to croak, but when every thing is tottering on the verge of annihilation I usually feel rather jolly. Such being the perversity of my fallen nature, I began to enjoy myself at this period, and nearly drove poor M out of her wits by awful or whimsical suggestions and pictures of our probable fate.

It was so very absurd that I really could not help seeing the funny side of the predicament, and M was the best fun of all, she looked so like a dilapidated Ophelia with her damp locks, a blue rigolette all awry, her white gloves tragically clasped, and her pale countenance bespattered with the mud that lay thick on the wooden boot and flew freely from the wheels.

I had my laugh out and then tried to mend matters. What could we do? My first impulse was to stir up the sleeping wretch above, and this I did by energetically twitching the reins that hung loosely before our noses like the useless rudder of this lost ship.

"Young man, if you don't wake up and take us to Colville Gardens as quickly as possible, I shall report you to-morrow. I've got your number, and I shall get my friend, Mr. Peter Taylor, of Aubrey House, to attend to the matter. He's an M. P., and will see that you are fined for attempting to drive a cab when you know nothing of London."

I fear that most of this impressive harangue was lost, owing to the noise of the wheels and the feebleness of my nearly extinguished voice; but it had some effect, for though the man did not seem scared by the threatened wrath of an M. P., he did feel his weak point and try to excuse it, for he answered in a gruffy, apologetic tone,—

"Who's a-goin' to know any thing in such a blessed fog as this? Most cabbies wouldn't try to drive at no price, but I'll do my best, mum."

"Very well. Do you know where we are now?" I demanded.

"Blest if I do!"

He didn't say "blest" — quite the reverse; — but I forgave him, for he really did seem to be making an effort, having had his nap out. An impressive pause followed, then M had an inspiration.

"Look, there's a respectable man just going into his house from that four-wheeled cab. Let us hail the whole concern, and get help of some sort."

I gave the order, and, eager to be rid of us at any price, our man rattled us up to the door at which a gray-haired gentleman was settling with his driver.

Bent on clutching this spar of salvation, I burst out of our cab and hastened up to the astonished pair. What I said I don't know, but vaguely remember jumbling into my appeal all the names of all the celebrated and respectable persons whom I knew on both sides of the water, for I felt that my appearance was entirely against me, and really expected to be told to go about my business.

John Bull, however, had pity upon me, and did his best for us, like a man and a brother.

"Take this cab, madam; the driver knows what he is about, and will see you safely home. I'll attend to the other fellow," said the worthy man, politely ignoring my muddy visage and agitated manners.

Murmuring blessings on his head, we skipped into

the respectable four-wheeler, and in a burst of confidence I offered Mr. Bull my purse to defray the expenses of our long drive.

"Rash woman, you'll never see your money again!" cried M, hiding her Roman earrings and clutching her Etruscan locket, prepared for highway robbery if not murder.

I did see my purse again and my money, also; for that dear old gentleman paid our miserable cabby out of his own pocket (as I found afterwards), and with a final gruff "All right!" the pale horse and his beery driver vanished in the mist. It is, and always will be my firm belief that it was a phantom cab, and that it is still revolving ceaselessly about London streets, appearing and disappearing through the fog, to be hailed now and then by some fated passenger, who is whisked to and fro, bewildered and forlorn, till rescued, when ghostly steed and phantom cab vanish darkly.

"Now you will be quite safe, ladies;" and the good old gentleman dismissed us with a paternal smile.

With a feeling of relief I fell back, exhausted by our tribulations.

"I know now how the wandering Jew felt," said M, after a period of repose.

"I don't wish to croak, dear; but if this man does not stop soon, I shall begin to think we have gently stepped out of the frying-pan into the fire. Unless we were several miles out of our way, we ought to arrive *somewhere*," I responded, flattening my nose against the pane, though I literally could not see one inch before that classical feature.

"Well, I'm so tired, I shall go to sleep, whatever happens, and you can wake me up when it is time to scream or run," said M, settling herself for a doze.

I groaned dismally, and registered a vow to spend all my substance in future on the most elegant and respectable broughams procurable for money, with a gray-haired driver pledged to temperance, and a stalwart footman armed with a lantern, pistol, directory, and map of London.

All of a sudden the cab stopped; the driver, not being a fixture, descended, and coming to the window, said, civilly, —

"The fog is so thick, mum, I'm not quite sure if I'm right, but this is Colville Square."

"Don't know any such place. Colville Gardens is what we want. There's a church at the end, and trees in the middle, and" —

"No use, mum, describin' it, for I can't see a

thing. But the Gardens can't be far off, so I 'll try again."

"We never shall find it, so we had better ask the man to take us at once to some station, work-house, or refuge till morning," remarked M, in such a tone of sleepy resignation that I shook her on the spot.

Another jaunt up and down, fog getting thicker, night later, one woman sleepier and the other crosser every minute, but still no haven hove in sight Presently the cab stopped with a decided bump against the curb-stone, and the driver reappeared, saying, with respectful firmness, —

"My horse is beat out, and it 's past my time for turning in, so if this ain't the place I shall have to give it up, mum."

"It is *not* the place," I answered, getting out with the calmness of despair.

"There 's a light in that house and a woman looking out. Go and ask her where we are," suggested M, waking from her doze.

Ready now for any desperate measure, I rushed up the steps, tried vainly to read the number, but could not, and rang the bell with the firm determination to stay in that house till morning at any cost.

Steps came running down, the door flew open,

and I was electrified at beholding the countenance of my own buxom landlady.

"My dear soul, where 'ave you been?" she cried, as I stood staring at her, dumb with surprise and relief.

"From the Crystal Palace to Greenwich, I believe. Come in, M, and ask the man what the fare is," I answered, dropping into a hall chair, and feeling as I imagine Robinson Crusoe did when he got home.

Of course that civil cabby cheated me abominably. I knew it at the time, but never protested; for I was so glad and grateful at landing safely I should have paid a pound if he had asked it.

Next day we were heroines, and at breakfast alternately thrilled and convulsed the other boarders by a recital of our adventures. But the "strong-minded Americans" got so well laughed at that they took great care never to ride in hansom cabs again, or get lost in the fog.

III.

THE BOYS' JOKE, AND WHO GOT THE BEST OF IT.

IT was the day before Christmas, and grandpa's big house was swarming with friends and relations, all brimful of spirits and bent on having a particularly good time. Dinner was over and a brief lull ensued, during which the old folks took naps, the younger ones sat chatting quietly, while the children enlivened the day by a quarrel.

It had been brewing for some time, and during that half hour the storm broke. You see, the boys felt injured because for a week at least the girls had been too busy to pay the slightest attention to them and their affairs, — and what's the good of having sisters and cousins if they don't make themselves useful and agreeable to a fellow? What made it particularly hard to bear was the fact that there was a secret about it, and all they could discover was that *they* were to have no part in the fun. This added to their wrath, for they could have