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THE MOONSTONE

A Romance

by Wilkie Collins

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PROLOGUE

THE STORMING OF SERINGAPATAM (1799):

(Extracted from a Family Paper.)

I

I address these lines?written in India?to my relatives in England.

My object is to explain the motive which has induced me to refuse the right hand of friendship to my cousin, John Herncastle. The reserve which I have hitherto maintained in this matter has been misinterpreted by members of my family whose good opinion I cannot consent to forfeit. I request them to suspend their decision until they have read my narrative. And I declare, on my word of honour, that what I am now

about to write is, strictly and literally, the truth.

The private difference between my cousin and me took its rise in a great public event in which we were both concerned?the storming of Seringapatam, under General Baird, on the 4th of May, 1799.

In order that the circumstances may be clearly understood, I must revert for a moment to the period before the assault, and to the stories current in our camp of the treasure in jewels and gold stored up in the Palace of Seringapatam.

II

One of the wildest of these stories related to a Yellow Diamond? a famous gem in the native annals of India.

The earliest known traditions describe the stone as having been set in the forehead of the four-handed Indian god who typifies the Moon. Partly from its peculiar colour, partly from a superstition which represented it as feeling the influence of the deity whom it adorned, and growing and lessening in lustre with the waxing and waning of the moon, it first gained the name by which it continues to be known in India to this day?the name of THE MOONSTONE. A similar superstition was once prevalent, as I have heard, in ancient Greece and Rome; not applying, however (as in India), to a diamond devoted to the service of a god, but to a semi-transparent stone of the inferior order of gems, supposed to be affected by the lunar influences?the moon, in this latter case also, giving the name by which the stone is still known to collectors in our own time.

The adventures of the Yellow Diamond begin with the eleventh century of the Christian era.

At that date, the Mohammedan conqueror, Mahmoud of Ghizni, crossed India; seized on the holy city of Somnauth; and stripped of its treasures the famous temple, which had stood for centuries?the shrine of Hindoo pilgrimage, and the wonder of the Eastern world.

Of all the deities worshipped in the temple, the moon-god alone escaped the rapacity of the conquering Mohammedans. Preserved by three Brahmins, the inviolate deity, bearing the Yellow Diamond in its forehead, was removed by night, and was transported to the second of the sacred cities of India?the city of Benares.

Here, in a new shrine?in a hall inlaid with precious stones, under a roof supported by pillars of gold?the moon-god was set up and worshipped. Here, on the night when the shrine was completed, Vishnu the Preserver appeared to the three Brahmins in a dream.

The deity breathed the breath of his divinity on the Diamond in the forehead of the god. And the Brahmins knelt and hid their faces in their robes. The deity commanded that the Moonstone should be watched, from that time forth, by three priests in turn, night and day, to the end of the generations of men. And the Brahmins heard, and bowed before

his will. The deity predicted certain disaster to the presumptuous mortal who laid hands on the sacred gem, and to all of his house and name who received it after him. And the Brahmins caused the prophecy to be written over the gates of the shrine in letters of gold.

One age followed another, and still, generation after generation, the successors of the three Brahmins watched their priceless Moonstone, night and day. One age followed another until the first years of the eighteenth Christian century saw the reign of Aurungzebe, Emperor of the Moguls. At his command havoc and rapine were let loose once more among the temples of the worship of Brahmah. The shrine of the four-handed god was polluted by the slaughter of sacred animals; the images of the deities were broken in pieces; and the Moonstone was seized by an officer of rank in the army of Aurungzebe.

Powerless to recover their lost treasure by open force, the three guardian priests followed and watched it in disguise. The generations succeeded each other; the warrior who had committed the sacrilege perished miserably; the Moonstone passed (carrying its curse with it) from one lawless Mohammedan hand to another; and still, through all chances and changes, the successors of the three guardian priests kept their watch, waiting the day when the will of Vishnu the Preserver should restore to them their sacred gem. Time rolled on from the first to the last years of the eighteenth Christian century. The Diamond fell into the possession of Tippoo, Sultan of Seringapatam, who caused it to be placed as an ornament in the handle of a dagger, and who commanded it to be kept among the choicest treasures of his armoury. Even then, in the palace of the Sultan himself, the three guardian priests still kept their watch in secret. There were three officers of Tippoo's household, strangers to the rest, who had won their master's confidence by conforming, or appearing to conform, to the Mussulman faith; and to those three men report pointed as the three priests in disguise.

III

So, as told in our camp, ran the fanciful story of the Moonstone. It made no serious impression on any of us except my cousin, whose love of the marvellous induced him to believe it. On the night before the assault on Seringapatam, he was absurdly angry with me, and with others, for treating the whole thing as a fable. A foolish wrangle followed; and Herncastle's unlucky temper got the better of him. He declared, in his boastful way, that we should see the Diamond on his finger, if the English army took Seringapatam. The sally was saluted by a roar of laughter, and there, as we all thought that night, the thing ended.

Let me now take you on to the day of the assault.

My cousin and I were separated at the outset. I never saw him when we forded the river; when we planted the English flag in the first breach; when we crossed the ditch beyond; and, fighting every inch of our way, entered the town. It was only at dusk, when the place was ours, and after General Baird himself had found the dead body of Tippoo under a heap of the slain, that Herncastle and I met.

We were each attached to a party sent out by the general's orders to prevent the plunder and confusion which followed our conquest. The camp-followers committed deplorable excesses; and, worse still, the soldiers found their way, by an unguarded door, into the treasury of the Palace, and loaded themselves with gold and jewels. It was in the court outside the treasury that my cousin and I met, to enforce the laws of discipline on our own soldiers. Herncastle's fiery temper had been, as I could plainly see, exasperated to a kind of frenzy by the terrible slaughter through which we had passed. He was very unfit, in my opinion, to perform the duty that had been entrusted to him.

There was riot and confusion enough in the treasury, but no violence that I saw. The men (if I may use such an expression) disgraced themselves good-humouredly. All sorts of rough jests and catchwords were bandied about among them; and the story of the Diamond turned up again unexpectedly, in the form of a mischievous joke. 'Who's got the Moonstone?' was the rallying cry which perpetually caused the plundering, as soon as it was stopped in one place, to break out in another. While I was still vainly trying to establish order, I heard a frightful yelling on the other side of the courtyard, and at once ran towards the cries, in dread of finding some new outbreak of the pillage in that direction.

I got to an open door, and saw the bodies of two Indians (by their dress, as I guessed, officers of the palace) lying across the entrance, dead.

A cry inside hurried me into a room, which appeared to serve as an armoury. A third Indian, mortally wounded, was sinking at the feet of a man whose back was towards me. The man turned at the instant when I came in, and I saw John Herncastle, with a torch in one hand, and a dagger dripping with blood in the other. A stone, set like a pommel, in the end of the dagger's handle, flashed in the torchlight, as he turned on me, like a gleam of fire. The dying Indian sank to his knees, pointed to the dagger in Herncastle's hand, and said, in his native language, 'The Moonstone will have its vengeance yet on you and yours!' He spoke those words, and fell dead on the floor.

Before I could stir in the matter, the men who had followed me across the courtyard crowded in. My cousin rushed to meet them, like a madman. 'Clear the room!' he shouted to me, 'and set a guard on the door!' The men fell back as he threw himself on them with his torch and his dagger. I put two sentinels of my own company, on whom I could rely, to keep the door. Through the remainder of the night, I saw no more of my cousin.

Early in the morning, the plunder still going on, General Baird announced publicly by beat of drum, that any thief detected in the fact, be he whom he might, should be hung. The provost-marshal was in attendance, to prove that the General was in earnest; and in the throng that followed the proclamation, Herncastle and I met again.

He held out his hand, as usual, and said, 'Good morning.'

I waited before I gave him my hand in return.

"Tell me first," I said, "how the Indian in the armoury met his death, and what those last words meant, when he pointed to the dagger in your hand?"

"The Indian met his death, as I suppose, by a mortal wound," said Herncastle. "What his last words meant I know no more than you do."

I looked at him narrowly. His frenzy of the previous day had all calmed down. I determined to give him another chance.

"Is that all you have to tell me?" I asked.

He answered, "That is all."

I turned my back on him; and we have not spoken since.

IV

I beg it to be understood that what I write here about my cousin (unless some necessity should arise for making it public) is for the information of the family only. Herncastle has said nothing that can justify me in speaking to our commanding officer. He has been taunted more than once about the Diamond, by those who recollect his angry outbreak before the assault; but, as may easily be imagined, his own remembrance of the circumstances under which I surprised him in the armoury has been enough to keep him silent. It is reported that he means to exchange into another regiment, avowedly for the purpose of separating himself from _me_.

Whether this be true or not, I cannot prevail upon myself to become his accuser; and I think with good reason. If I made the matter public, I have no evidence but moral evidence to bring forward. I have not only no proof that he killed the two men at the door; I cannot even declare that he killed the third man inside; for I cannot say that my own eyes saw the deed committed. It is true that I heard the dying Indian's words; but if those words were pronounced to be the ravings of delirium, how could I contradict the assertion from my own knowledge? Let our relatives, on either side, form their own opinion on what I have written, and decide for themselves whether the aversion I now feel towards this man is well or ill founded.

Although I attach no sort of credit to the fantastic Indian legend of the gem, I must acknowledge, before I conclude, that I am influenced by a certain superstition of my own in this matter. It is my conviction, or my delusion, no matter which, that crime brings its own fatality with it. I am not only persuaded of Herncastle's guilt; I am even fanciful enough to believe that he will live to regret it, if he keeps the Diamond; and that others will live to regret taking it from him, if he gives the Diamond away.

THE STORY

FIRST PERIOD

THE LOSS OF THE DIAMOND (1848)

The Events related by Gabriel Betteredge, house-steward in the service of Julia, Lady Verinder.

CHAPTER I

In the first part of Robinson Crusoe, at page one hundred and twenty-nine, you will find it thus written:

Now I saw, though too late, the Folly of beginning a Work before we count the Cost, and before we judge rightly of our own Strength to go through with it.

Only yesterday, I opened my Robinson Crusoe at that place. Only this morning (May twenty-first, eighteen hundred and fifty), came my lady's nephew, Mr. Franklin Blake, and held a short conversation with me, as follows:

Betteredge, says Mr. Franklin, I have been to the lawyer's about some family matters; and, among other things, we have been talking of the loss of the Indian Diamond, in my aunt's house in Yorkshire, two years since. Mr. Bruff thinks as I think, that the whole story ought, in the interests of truth, to be placed on record in writing and the sooner the better.

Not perceiving his drift yet, and thinking it always desirable for the sake of peace and quietness to be on the lawyer's side, I said I thought so too. Mr. Franklin went on.

In this matter of the Diamond, he said, the characters of innocent people have suffered under suspicion already as you know. The memories of innocent people may suffer, hereafter, for want of a record of the facts to which those who come after us can appeal. There can be no doubt that this strange family story of ours ought to be told. And I think, Betteredge, Mr. Bruff and I together have hit on the right way of telling it.

Very satisfactory to both of them, no doubt. But I failed to see what I myself had to do with it, so far.

We have certain events to relate, Mr. Franklin proceeded; and we have certain persons concerned in those events who are capable of relating them. Starting from these plain facts, the idea is that we should all write the story of the Moonstone in turn as far as our own personal experience extends, and no farther. We must begin by showing how the Diamond first fell into the hands of my uncle Herncastle, when he was serving in India fifty years since. This prefatory narrative I

have already got by me in the form of an old family paper, which relates the necessary particulars on the authority of an eye-witness. The next thing to do is to tell how the Diamond found its way into my aunt's house in Yorkshire, two years ago, and how it came to be lost in little more than twelve hours afterwards. Nobody knows as much as you do, Betteredge, about what went on in the house at that time. So you must take the pen in hand, and start the story.?

In those terms I was informed of what my personal concern was with the matter of the Diamond. If you are curious to know what course I took under the circumstances, I beg to inform you that I did what you would probably have done in my place. I modestly declared myself to be quite unequal to the task imposed upon me?and I privately felt, all the time, that I was quite clever enough to perform it, if I only gave my own abilities a fair chance. Mr. Franklin, I imagine, must have seen my private sentiments in my face. He declined to believe in my modesty; and he insisted on giving my abilities a fair chance.

Two hours have passed since Mr. Franklin left me. As soon as his back was turned, I went to my writing-desk to start the story. There I have sat helpless (in spite of my abilities) ever since; seeing what Robinson Crusoe saw, as quoted above?namely, the folly of beginning a work before we count the cost, and before we judge rightly of our own strength to go through with it. Please to remember, I opened the book by accident, at that bit, only the day before I rashly undertook the business now in hand; and, allow me to ask?if _that_ isn't prophecy, what is?

I am not superstitious; I have read a heap of books in my time; I am a scholar in my own way. Though turned seventy, I possess an active memory, and legs to correspond. You are not to take it, if you please, as the saying of an ignorant man, when I express my opinion that such a book as _Robinson Crusoe_ never was written, and never will be written again. I have tried that book for years?generally in combination with a pipe of tobacco?and I have found it my friend in need in all the necessities of this mortal life. When my spirits are bad?_Robinson Crusoe_. When I want advice?_Robinson Crusoe_. In past times when my wife plagued me; in present times when I have had a drop too much?_Robinson Crusoe_. I have worn out six stout _Robinson Crusoes_ with hard work in my service. On my lady's last birthday she gave me a seventh. I took a drop too much on the strength of it; and _Robinson Crusoe_ put me right again. Price four shillings and sixpence, bound in blue, with a picture into the bargain.

Still, this don't look much like starting the story of the Diamond?does it? I seem to be wandering off in search of Lord knows what, Lord knows where. We will take a new sheet of paper, if you please, and begin over again, with my best respects to you.

CHAPTER II

I spoke of my lady a line or two back. Now the Diamond could never have been in our house, where it was lost, if it had not been made a present

of to my lady's daughter; and my lady's daughter would never have been in existence to have the present, if it had not been for my lady who (with pain and travail) produced her into the world. Consequently, if we begin with my lady, we are pretty sure of beginning far enough back. And that, let me tell you, when you have got such a job as mine in hand, is a real comfort at starting.

If you know anything of the fashionable world, you have heard tell of the three beautiful Miss Herncastles. Miss Adelaide; Miss Caroline; and Miss Julia?this last being the youngest and the best of the three sisters, in my opinion; and I had opportunities of judging, as you shall presently see. I went into the service of the old lord, their father (thank God, we have got nothing to do with him, in this business of the Diamond; he had the longest tongue and the shortest temper of any man, high or low, I ever met with)?I say, I went into the service of the old lord, as page-boy in waiting on the three honourable young ladies, at the age of fifteen years. There I lived till Miss Julia married the late Sir John Verinder. An excellent man, who only wanted somebody to manage him; and, between ourselves, he found somebody to do it; and what is more, he throve on it and grew fat on it, and lived happy and died easy on it, dating from the day when my lady took him to church to be married, to the day when she relieved him of his last breath, and closed his eyes for ever.

I have omitted to state that I went with the bride to the bride's husband's house and lands down here. ?Sir John,? she says, ?I can't do without Gabriel Betteredge.? ?My lady,? says Sir John, ?I can't do without him, either.? That was his way with her?and that was how I went into his service. It was all one to me where I went, so long as my mistress and I were together.

Seeing that my lady took an interest in the out-of-door work, and the farms, and such like, I took an interest in them too?with all the more reason that I was a small farmer's seventh son myself. My lady got me put under the bailiff, and I did my best, and gave satisfaction, and got promotion accordingly. Some years later, on the Monday as it might be, my lady says, ?Sir John, your bailiff is a stupid old man. Pension him liberally, and let Gabriel Betteredge have his place.? On the Tuesday as it might be, Sir John says, ?My lady, the bailiff is pensioned liberally; and Gabriel Betteredge has got his place.? You hear more than enough of married people living together miserably. Here is an example to the contrary. Let it be a warning to some of you, and an encouragement to others. In the meantime, I will go on with my story.

Well, there I was in clover, you will say. Placed in a position of trust and honour, with a little cottage of my own to live in, with my rounds on the estate to occupy me in the morning, and my accounts in the afternoon, and my pipe and my _Robinson Crusoe_ in the evening?what more could I possibly want to make me happy? Remember what Adam wanted when he was alone in the Garden of Eden; and if you don't blame it in Adam, don't blame it in me.

The woman I fixed my eye on, was the woman who kept house for me at my

cottage. Her name was Selina Goby. I agree with the late William Cobbett about picking a wife. See that she chews her food well and sets her foot down firmly on the ground when she walks, and you're all right. Selina Goby was all right in both these respects, which was one reason for marrying her. I had another reason, likewise, entirely of my own discovering. Selina, being a single woman, made me pay so much a week for her board and services. Selina, being my wife, couldn't charge for her board, and would have to give me her services for nothing. That was the point of view I looked at it from. Economy with a dash of love. I put it to my mistress, as in duty bound, just as I had put it to myself.

"I have been turning Selina Goby over in my mind," I said, "and I think, my lady, it will be cheaper to marry her than to keep her."

My lady burst out laughing, and said she didn't know which to be most shocked at—my language or my principles. Some joke tickled her, I suppose, of the sort that you can't take unless you are a person of quality. Understanding nothing myself but that I was free to put it next to Selina, I went and put it accordingly. And what did Selina say? Lord! how little you must know of women, if you ask that. Of course she said, Yes.

As my time drew nearer, and there got to be talk of my having a new coat for the ceremony, my mind began to misgive me. I have compared notes with other men as to what they felt while they were in my interesting situation; and they have all acknowledged that, about a week before it happened, they privately wished themselves out of it. I went a trifle further than that myself; I actually rose up, as it were, and tried to get out of it. Not for nothing! I was too just a man to expect she would let me off for nothing. Compensation to the woman when the man gets out of it, is one of the laws of England. In obedience to the laws, and after turning it over carefully in my mind, I offered Selina Goby a feather-bed and fifty shillings to be off the bargain. You will hardly believe it, but it is nevertheless true—she was fool enough to refuse.

After that it was all over with me, of course. I got the new coat as cheap as I could, and I went through all the rest of it as cheap as I could. We were not a happy couple, and not a miserable couple. We were six of one and half-a-dozen of the other. How it was I don't understand, but we always seemed to be getting, with the best of motives, in one another's way. When I wanted to go upstairs, there was my wife coming down; or when my wife wanted to go down, there was I coming up. That is married life, according to my experience of it.

After five years of misunderstandings on the stairs, it pleased an all-wise Providence to relieve us of each other by taking my wife. I was left with my little girl Penelope, and with no other child. Shortly afterwards Sir John died, and my lady was left with her little girl, Miss Rachel, and no other child. I have written to very poor purpose of my lady, if you require to be told that my little Penelope was taken care of, under my good mistress's own eye, and was sent to school and taught, and made a sharp girl, and promoted, when old enough, to be

Miss Rachel's own maid.

As for me, I went on with my business as bailiff year after year up to Christmas 1847, when there came a change in my life. On that day, my lady invited herself to a cup of tea alone with me in my cottage. She remarked that, reckoning from the year when I started as page-boy in the time of the old lord, I had been more than fifty years in her service, and she put into my hands a beautiful waistcoat of wool that she had worked herself, to keep me warm in the bitter winter weather.

I received this magnificent present quite at a loss to find words to thank my mistress with for the honour she had done me. To my great astonishment, it turned out, however, that the waistcoat was not an honour, but a bribe. My lady had discovered that I was getting old before I had discovered it myself, and she had come to my cottage to wheedle me (if I may use such an expression) into giving up my hard out-of-door work as bailiff, and taking my ease for the rest of my days as steward in the house. I made as good a fight of it against the indignity of taking my ease as I could. But my mistress knew the weak side of me; she put it as a favour to herself. The dispute between us ended, after that, in my wiping my eyes, like an old fool, with my new woollen waistcoat, and saying I would think about it.

The perturbation in my mind, in regard to thinking about it, being truly dreadful after my lady had gone away, I applied the remedy which I have never yet found to fail me in cases of doubt and emergency. I smoked a pipe and took a turn at *_Robinson Crusoe_*. Before I had occupied myself with that extraordinary book five minutes, I came on a comforting bit (page one hundred and fifty-eight), as follows: 'Today we love, what tomorrow we hate.' I saw my way clear directly. Today I was all for continuing to be farm-bailiff; tomorrow, on the authority of *_Robinson Crusoe_*, I should be all the other way. Take myself tomorrow while in tomorrow's humour, and the thing was done. My mind being relieved in this manner, I went to sleep that night in the character of Lady Verinder's farm-bailiff, and I woke up the next morning in the character of Lady Verinder's house-steward. All quite comfortable, and all through *_Robinson Crusoe_*!

My daughter Penelope has just looked over my shoulder to see what I have done so far. She remarks that it is beautifully written, and every word of it true. But she points out one objection. She says what I have done so far isn't in the least what I was wanted to do. I am asked to tell the story of the Diamond and, instead of that, I have been telling the story of my own self. Curious, and quite beyond me to account for. I wonder whether the gentlemen who make a business and a living out of writing books, ever find their own selves getting in the way of their subjects, like me? If they do, I can feel for them. In the meantime, here is another false start, and more waste of good writing-paper. What's to be done now? Nothing that I know of, except for you to keep your temper, and for me to begin it all over again for the third time.

CHAPTER III

The question of how I am to start the story properly I have tried to settle in two ways. First, by scratching my head, which led to nothing. Second, by consulting my daughter Penelope, which has resulted in an entirely new idea.

Penelope's notion is that I should set down what happened, regularly day by day, beginning with the day when we got the news that Mr. Franklin Blake was expected on a visit to the house. When you come to fix your memory with a date in this way, it is wonderful what your memory will pick up for you upon that compulsion. The only difficulty is to fetch out the dates, in the first place. This Penelope offers to do for me by looking into her own diary, which she was taught to keep when she was at school, and which she has gone on keeping ever since. In answer to an improvement on this notion, devised by myself, namely, that she should tell the story instead of me, out of her own diary, Penelope observes, with a fierce look and a red face, that her journal is for her own private eye, and that no living creature shall ever know what is in it but herself. When I inquire what this means, Penelope says, "Fiddlesticks!" I say, "Sweethearts."

Beginning, then, on Penelope's plan, I beg to mention that I was specially called one Wednesday morning into my lady's own sitting-room, the date being the twenty-fourth of May, eighteen hundred and forty-eight.

"Gabriel," says my lady, "here is news that will surprise you. Franklin Blake has come back from abroad. He has been staying with his father in London, and he is coming to us tomorrow to stop till next month, and keep Rachel's birthday."

If I had had a hat in my hand, nothing but respect would have prevented me from throwing that hat up to the ceiling. I had not seen Mr. Franklin since he was a boy, living along with us in this house. He was, out of all sight (as I remember him), the nicest boy that ever spun a top or broke a window. Miss Rachel, who was present, and to whom I made that remark, observed, in return, that she remembered him as the most atrocious tyrant that ever tortured a doll, and the hardest driver of an exhausted little girl in string harness that England could produce. "I burn with indignation, and I ache with fatigue," was the way Miss Rachel summed it up, "when I think of Franklin Blake."

Hearing what I now tell you, you will naturally ask how it was that Mr. Franklin should have passed all the years, from the time when he was a boy to the time when he was a man, out of his own country. I answer, because his father had the misfortune to be next heir to a Dukedom, and not to be able to prove it.

In two words, this was how the thing happened:

My lady's eldest sister married the celebrated Mr. Blake—equally famous for his great riches, and his great suit at law. How many years he went on worrying the tribunals of his country to turn out the Duke in possession, and to put himself in the Duke's place—how many lawyer's purses he filled to bursting, and how many otherwise harmless people he

set by the ears together disputing whether he was right or wrong? is more by a great deal than I can reckon up. His wife died, and two of his three children died, before the tribunals could make up their minds to show him the door and take no more of his money. When it was all over, and the Duke in possession was left in possession, Mr. Blake discovered that the only way of being even with his country for the manner in which it had treated him, was not to let his country have the honour of educating his son. ?How can I trust my native institutions,? was the form in which he put it, ?after the way in which my native institutions have behaved to _me?_? Add to this, that Mr. Blake disliked all boys, his own included, and you will admit that it could only end in one way. Master Franklin was taken from us in England, and was sent to institutions which his father _could_ trust, in that superior country, Germany; Mr. Blake himself, you will observe, remaining snug in England, to improve his fellow-countrymen in the Parliament House, and to publish a statement on the subject of the Duke in possession, which has remained an unfinished statement from that day to this.

There! thank God, that?s told! Neither you nor I need trouble our heads any more about Mr. Blake, senior. Leave him to the Dukedom; and let you and I stick to the Diamond.

The Diamond takes us back to Mr. Franklin, who was the innocent means of bringing that unlucky jewel into the house.

Our nice boy didn?t forget us after he went abroad. He wrote every now and then; sometimes to my lady, sometimes to Miss Rachel, and sometimes to me. We had had a transaction together, before he left, which consisted in his borrowing of me a ball of string, a four-bladed knife, and seven-and-sixpence in money?the colour of which last I have not seen, and never expect to see again. His letters to me chiefly related to borrowing more. I heard, however, from my lady, how he got on abroad, as he grew in years and stature. After he had learnt what the institutions of Germany could teach him, he gave the French a turn next, and the Italians a turn after that. They made him among them a sort of universal genius, as well as I could understand it. He wrote a little; he painted a little; he sang and played and composed a little?borrowing, as I suspect, in all these cases, just as he had borrowed from me. His mother?s fortune (seven hundred a year) fell to him when he came of age, and ran through him, as it might be through a sieve. The more money he had, the more he wanted; there was a hole in Mr. Franklin?s pocket that nothing would sew up. Wherever he went, the lively, easy way of him made him welcome. He lived here, there, and everywhere; his address (as he used to put it himself) being ?Post Office, Europe?to be left till called for.? Twice over, he made up his mind to come back to England and see us; and twice over (saving your presence), some unmentionable woman stood in the way and stopped him. His third attempt succeeded, as you know already from what my lady told me. On Thursday the twenty-fifth of May, we were to see for the first time what our nice boy had grown to be as a man. He came of good blood; he had a high courage; and he was five-and-twenty years of age, by our reckoning. Now you know as much of Mr. Franklin Blake as I did?before Mr. Franklin Blake came down to our house.

The Thursday was as fine a summer's day as ever you saw: and my lady and Miss Rachel (not expecting Mr. Franklin till dinner-time) drove out to lunch with some friends in the neighbourhood.

When they were gone, I went and had a look at the bedroom which had been got ready for our guest, and saw that all was straight. Then, being butler in my lady's establishment, as well as steward (at my own particular request, mind, and because it vexed me to see anybody but myself in possession of the key of the late Sir John's cellar) then, I say, I fetched up some of our famous Latour claret, and set it in the warm summer air to take off the chill before dinner. Concluding to set myself in the warm summer air next seeing that what is good for old claret is equally good for old age I took up my beehive chair to go out into the back court, when I was stopped by hearing a sound like the soft beating of a drum, on the terrace in front of my lady's residence.

Going round to the terrace, I found three mahogany-coloured Indians, in white linen frocks and trousers, looking up at the house.

The Indians, as I saw on looking closer, had small hand-drums slung in front of them. Behind them stood a little delicate-looking light-haired English boy carrying a bag. I judged the fellows to be strolling conjurers, and the boy with the bag to be carrying the tools of their trade. One of the three, who spoke English and who exhibited, I must own, the most elegant manners, presently informed me that my judgment was right. He requested permission to show his tricks in the presence of the lady of the house.

Now I am not a sour old man. I am generally all for amusement, and the last person in the world to distrust another person because he happens to be a few shades darker than myself. But the best of us have our weaknesses and my weakness, when I know a family plate-basket to be out on a pantry-table, is to be instantly reminded of that basket by the sight of a strolling stranger whose manners are superior to my own. I accordingly informed the Indian that the lady of the house was out; and I warned him and his party off the premises. He made me a beautiful bow in return; and he and his party went off the premises. On my side, I returned to my beehive chair, and set myself down on the sunny side of the court, and fell (if the truth must be owned), not exactly into a sleep, but into the next best thing to it.

I was roused up by my daughter Penelope running out at me as if the house was on fire. What do you think she wanted? She wanted to have the three Indian jugglers instantly taken up; for this reason, namely, that they knew who was coming from London to visit us, and that they meant some mischief to Mr. Franklin Blake.

Mr. Franklin's name roused me. I opened my eyes, and made my girl explain herself.

It appeared that Penelope had just come from our lodge, where she had been having a gossip with the lodge-keeper's daughter. The two girls had seen the Indians pass out, after I had warned them off, followed by

their little boy. Taking it into their heads that the boy was ill-used by the foreigners?for no reason that I could discover, except that he was pretty and delicate-looking?the two girls had stolen along the inner side of the hedge between us and the road, and had watched the proceedings of the foreigners on the outer side. Those proceedings resulted in the performance of the following extraordinary tricks.

They first looked up the road, and down the road, and made sure that they were alone. Then they all three faced about, and stared hard in the direction of our house. Then they jabbered and disputed in their own language, and looked at each other like men in doubt. Then they all turned to their little English boy, as if they expected him to help them. And then the chief Indian, who spoke English, said to the boy, ?Hold out your hand.?

On hearing those dreadful words, my daughter Penelope said she didn?t know what prevented her heart from flying straight out of her. I thought privately that it might have been her stays. All I said, however, was, ?You make my flesh creep.? (_Nota bene:_ Women like these little compliments.)

Well, when the Indian said, ?Hold out your hand,? the boy shrunk back, and shook his head, and said he didn?t like it. The Indian, thereupon, asked him (not at all unkindly), whether he would like to be sent back to London, and left where they had found him, sleeping in an empty basket in a market?a hungry, ragged, and forsaken little boy. This, it seems, ended the difficulty. The little chap unwillingly held out his hand. Upon that, the Indian took a bottle from his bosom, and poured out of it some black stuff, like ink, into the palm of the boy?s hand. The Indian?first touching the boy?s head, and making signs over it in the air?then said, ?Look.? The boy became quite stiff, and stood like a statue, looking into the ink in the hollow of his hand.

(So far, it seemed to me to be juggling, accompanied by a foolish waste of ink. I was beginning to feel sleepy again, when Penelope?s next words stirred me up.)

The Indians looked up the road and down the road once more?and then the chief Indian said these words to the boy; ?See the English gentleman from foreign parts.?

The boy said, ?I see him.?

The Indian said, ?Is it on the road to this house, and on no other, that the English gentleman will travel today??

The boy said, ?It is on the road to this house, and on no other, that the English gentleman will travel today.?

The Indian put a second question?after waiting a little first. He said: ?Has the English gentleman got It about him??

The boy answered?also, after waiting a little first??Yes.?

The Indian put a third and last question: "Will the English gentleman come here, as he has promised to come, at the close of day?"

The boy said, "I can't tell."

The Indian asked why.

The boy said, "I am tired. The mist rises in my head, and puzzles me. I can see no more today."

With that the catechism ended. The chief Indian said something in his own language to the other two, pointing to the boy, and pointing towards the town, in which (as we afterwards discovered) they were lodged. He then, after making more signs on the boy's head, blew on his forehead, and so woke him up with a start. After that, they all went on their way towards the town, and the girls saw them no more.

Most things they say have a moral, if you only look for it. What was the moral of this?

The moral was, as I thought: First, that the chief juggler had heard Mr. Franklin's arrival talked of among the servants out-of-doors, and saw his way to making a little money by it. Second, that he and his men and boy (with a view to making the said money) meant to hang about till they saw my lady drive home, and then to come back, and foretell Mr. Franklin's arrival by magic. Third, that Penelope had heard them rehearsing their hocus-pocus, like actors rehearsing a play. Fourth, that I should do well to have an eye, that evening, on the plate-basket. Fifth, that Penelope would do well to cool down, and leave me, her father, to doze off again in the sun.

That appeared to me to be the sensible view. If you know anything of the ways of young women, you won't be surprised to hear that Penelope wouldn't take it. The moral of the thing was serious, according to my daughter. She particularly reminded me of the Indian's third question, "Has the English gentleman got it about him?" "Oh, father!" says Penelope, clasping her hands, "don't joke about this. What does 'it' mean?"

"We'll ask Mr. Franklin, my dear," I said, "if you can wait till Mr. Franklin comes." I winked to show I meant that in joke. Penelope took it quite seriously. My girl's earnestness tickled me. "What on earth should Mr. Franklin know about it?" I inquired. "Ask him," says Penelope. "And see whether he thinks it a laughing matter, too." With that parting shot, my daughter left me.

I settled it with myself, when she was gone, that I really would ask Mr. Franklin—mainly to set Penelope's mind at rest. What was said between us, when I did ask him, later on that same day, you will find set out fully in its proper place. But as I don't wish to raise your expectations and then disappoint them, I will take leave to warn you here—before we go any further—that you won't find the ghost of a joke in our conversation on the subject of the jugglers. To my great surprise, Mr. Franklin, like Penelope, took the thing seriously. How

seriously, you will understand, when I tell you that, in his opinion, it meant the Moonstone.

CHAPTER IV

I am truly sorry to detain you over me and my beehive chair. A sleepy old man, in a sunny back yard, is not an interesting object, I am well aware. But things must be put down in their places, as things actually happened—and you must please to jog on a little while longer with me, in expectation of Mr. Franklin Blake's arrival later in the day.

Before I had time to doze off again, after my daughter Penelope had left me, I was disturbed by a rattling of plates and dishes in the servants' hall, which meant that dinner was ready. Taking my own meals in my own sitting-room, I had nothing to do with the servants' dinner, except to wish them a good stomach to it all round, previous to composing myself once more in my chair. I was just stretching my legs, when out bounced another woman on me. Not my daughter again; only Nancy, the kitchen-maid, this time. I was straight in her way out; and I observed, as she asked me to let her by, that she had a sulky face—a thing which, as head of the servants, I never allow, on principle, to pass me without inquiry.

“What are you turning your back on your dinner for?” I asked. “What's wrong now, Nancy?”

Nancy tried to push by, without answering; upon which I rose up, and took her by the ear. She is a nice plump young lass, and it is customary with me to adopt that manner of showing that I personally approve of a girl.

“What's wrong now?” I said once more.

“Rosanna's late again for dinner,” says Nancy. “And I'm sent to fetch her in. All the hard work falls on my shoulders in this house. Let me alone, Mr. Betteredge!”

The person here mentioned as Rosanna was our second housemaid. Having a kind of pity for our second housemaid (why, you shall presently know), and seeing in Nancy's face, that she would fetch her fellow-servant in with more hard words than might be needful under the circumstances, it struck me that I had nothing particular to do, and that I might as well fetch Rosanna myself; giving her a hint to be punctual in future, which I knew she would take kindly from me.

“Where is Rosanna?” I inquired.

“At the sands, of course!” says Nancy, with a toss of her head. “She had another of her fainting fits this morning, and she asked to go out and get a breath of fresh air. I have no patience with her!”

“Go back to your dinner, my girl,” I said. “I have patience with her, and I'll fetch her in.”

Nancy (who has a fine appetite) looked pleased. When she looks pleased, she looks nice. When she looks nice, I chuck her under the chin. It isn't immorality?it?s only habit.

Well, I took my stick, and set off for the sands.

No! it won't do to set off yet. I am sorry again to detain you; but you really must hear the story of the sands, and the story of Rosanna?for this reason, that the matter of the Diamond touches them both nearly. How hard I try to get on with my statement without stopping by the way, and how badly I succeed! But, there!?Persons and Things do turn up so vexatiously in this life, and will in a manner insist on being noticed. Let us take it easy, and let us take it short; we shall be in the thick of the mystery soon, I promise you!

Rosanna (to put the Person before the Thing, which is but common politeness) was the only new servant in our house. About four months before the time I am writing of, my lady had been in London, and had gone over a Reformatory, intended to save forlorn women from drifting back into bad ways, after they had got released from prison. The matron, seeing my lady took an interest in the place, pointed out a girl to her, named Rosanna Spearman, and told her a most miserable story, which I haven't the heart to repeat here; for I don't like to be made wretched without any use, and no more do you. The upshot of it was, that Rosanna Spearman had been a thief, and not being of the sort that get up Companies in the City, and rob from thousands, instead of only robbing from one, the law laid hold of her, and the prison and the reformatory followed the lead of the law. The matron?s opinion of Rosanna was (in spite of what she had done) that the girl was one in a thousand, and that she only wanted a chance to prove herself worthy of any Christian woman?s interest in her. My lady (being a Christian woman, if ever there was one yet) said to the matron, upon that, ?Rosanna Spearman shall have her chance, in my service.? In a week afterwards, Rosanna Spearman entered this establishment as our second housemaid.

Not a soul was told the girl?s story, excepting Miss Rachel and me. My lady, doing me the honour to consult me about most things, consulted me about Rosanna. Having fallen a good deal latterly into the late Sir John?s way of always agreeing with my lady, I agreed with her heartily about Rosanna Spearman.

A fairer chance no girl could have had than was given to this poor girl of ours. None of the servants could cast her past life in her teeth, for none of the servants knew what it had been. She had her wages and her privileges, like the rest of them; and every now and then a friendly word from my lady, in private, to encourage her. In return, she showed herself, I am bound to say, well worthy of the kind treatment bestowed upon her. Though far from strong, and troubled occasionally with those fainting-fits already mentioned, she went about her work modestly and uncomplainingly, doing it carefully, and doing it well. But, somehow, she failed to make friends among the other women servants, excepting my daughter Penelope, who was always kind to

Rosanna, though never intimate with her.

I hardly know what the girl did to offend them. There was certainly no beauty about her to make the others envious; she was the plainest woman in the house, with the additional misfortune of having one shoulder bigger than the other. What the servants chiefly resented, I think, was her silent tongue and her solitary ways. She read or worked in leisure hours when the rest gossiped. And when it came to her turn to go out, nine times out of ten she quietly put on her bonnet, and had her turn by herself. She never quarrelled, she never took offence; she only kept a certain distance, obstinately and civilly, between the rest of them and herself. Add to this that, plain as she was, there was just a dash of something that wasn't like a housemaid, and that was like a lady, about her. It might have been in her voice, or it might have been in her face. All I can say is, that the other women pounced on it like lightning the first day she came into the house, and said (which was most unjust) that Rosanna Spearman gave herself airs.

Having now told the story of Rosanna, I have only to notice one of the many queer ways of this strange girl to get on next to the story of the sands.

Our house is high up on the Yorkshire coast, and close by the sea. We have got beautiful walks all round us, in every direction but one. That one I acknowledge to be a horrid walk. It leads, for a quarter of a mile, through a melancholy plantation of firs, and brings you out between low cliffs on the loneliest and ugliest little bay on all our coast.

The sandhills here run down to the sea, and end in two spits of rock jutting out opposite each other, till you lose sight of them in the water. One is called the North Spit, and one the South. Between the two, shifting backwards and forwards at certain seasons of the year, lies the most horrible quicksand on the shores of Yorkshire. At the turn of the tide, something goes on in the unknown deeps below, which sets the whole face of the quicksand shivering and trembling in a manner most remarkable to see, and which has given to it, among the people in our parts, the name of the Shivering Sand. A great bank, half a mile out, nigh the mouth of the bay, breaks the force of the main ocean coming in from the offing. Winter and summer, when the tide flows over the quicksand, the sea seems to leave the waves behind it on the bank, and rolls its waters in smoothly with a heave, and covers the sand in silence. A lonesome and a horrid retreat, I can tell you! No boat ever ventures into this bay. No children from our fishing-village, called Cobb's Hole, ever come here to play. The very birds of the air, as it seems to me, give the Shivering Sand a wide berth. That a young woman, with dozens of nice walks to choose from, and company to go with her, if she only said 'Come!', should prefer this place, and should sit and work or read in it, all alone, when it's her turn out, I grant you, passes belief. It's true, nevertheless, account for it as you may, that this was Rosanna Spearman's favourite walk, except when she went once or twice to Cobb's Hole, to see the only friend she had in our neighbourhood, of whom more anon. It's also true that I was now setting out for this same place, to fetch the girl in to dinner, which brings

us round happily to our former point, and starts us fair again on our way to the sands.

I saw no sign of the girl in the plantation. When I got out, through the sandhills, on to the beach, there she was, in her little straw bonnet, and her plain grey cloak that she always wore to hide her deformed shoulder as much as might be?there she was, all alone, looking out on the quicksand and the sea.

She started when I came up with her, and turned her head away from me. Not looking me in the face being another of the proceedings, which, as head of the servants, I never allow, on principle, to pass without inquiry?I turned her round my way, and saw that she was crying. My bandanna handkerchief?one of six beauties given to me by my lady?was handy in my pocket. I took it out, and I said to Rosanna, ?Come and sit down, my dear, on the slope of the beach along with me. I?ll dry your eyes for you first, and then I?ll make so bold as to ask what you have been crying about.?

When you come to my age, you will find sitting down on the slope of a beach a much longer job than you think it now. By the time I was settled, Rosanna had dried her own eyes with a very inferior handkerchief to mine?cheap cambric. She looked very quiet, and very wretched; but she sat down by me like a good girl, when I told her. When you want to comfort a woman by the shortest way, take her on your knee. I thought of this golden rule. But there! Rosanna wasn?t Nancy, and that?s the truth of it!

?Now, tell me, my dear,? I said, ?what are you crying about??

?About the years that are gone, Mr. Betteredge,? says Rosanna quietly. ?My past life still comes back to me sometimes.?

?Come, come, my girl,? I said, ?your past life is all sponged out. Why can?t you forget it??

She took me by one of the lappets of my coat. I am a slovenly old man, and a good deal of my meat and drink gets splashed about on my clothes. Sometimes one of the women, and sometimes another, cleans me of my grease. The day before, Rosanna had taken out a spot for me on the lappet of my coat, with a new composition, warranted to remove anything. The grease was gone, but there was a little dull place left on the nap of the cloth where the grease had been. The girl pointed to that place, and shook her head.

?The stain is taken off,? she said. ?But the place shows, Mr. Betteredge?the place shows!?

A remark which takes a man unawares by means of his own coat is not an easy remark to answer. Something in the girl herself, too, made me particularly sorry for her just then. She had nice brown eyes, plain as she was in other ways?and she looked at me with a sort of respect for my happy old age and my good character, as things for ever out of her own reach, which made my heart heavy for our second housemaid. Not

feeling myself able to comfort her, there was only one other thing to do. That thing was?to take her in to dinner.

?Help me up,? I said. ?You?re late for dinner, Rosanna?and I have come to fetch you in.?

?You, Mr. Betteredge!? says she.

?They told Nancy to fetch you,? I said. ?But I thought you might like your scolding better, my dear, if it came from me.?

Instead of helping me up, the poor thing stole her hand into mine, and gave it a little squeeze. She tried hard to keep from crying again, and succeeded?for which I respected her. ?You?re very kind, Mr. Betteredge,? she said. ?I don?t want any dinner today?let me bide a little longer here.?

?What makes you like to be here?? I asked. ?What is it that brings you everlastingly to this miserable place??

?Something draws me to it,? says the girl, making images with her finger in the sand. ?I try to keep away from it, and I can?t. Sometimes,? says she in a low voice, as if she was frightened at her own fancy, ?sometimes, Mr. Betteredge, I think that my grave is waiting for me here.?

?There?s roast mutton and suet pudding waiting for you!? says I. ?Go in to dinner directly. This is what comes, Rosanna, of thinking on an empty stomach!? I spoke severely, being naturally indignant (at my time of life) to hear a young woman of five-and-twenty talking about her latter end!

She didn?t seem to hear me: she put her hand on my shoulder, and kept me where I was, sitting by her side.

?I think the place has laid a spell on me,? she said. ?I dream of it night after night; I think of it when I sit stitching at my work. You know I am grateful, Mr. Betteredge?you know I try to deserve your kindness, and my lady?s confidence in me. But I wonder sometimes whether the life here is too quiet and too good for such a woman as I am, after all I have gone through, Mr. Betteredge?after all I have gone through. It?s more lonely to me to be among the other servants, knowing I am not what they are, than it is to be here. My lady doesn?t know, the matron at the reformatory doesn?t know, what a dreadful reproach honest people are in themselves to a woman like me. Don?t scold me, there?s a dear good man. I do my work, don?t I? Please not to tell my lady I am discontented?I am not. My mind?s unquiet, sometimes, that?s all.? She snatched her hand off my shoulder, and suddenly pointed down to the quicksand. ?Look!? she said ?Isn?t it wonderful? isn?t it terrible? I have seen it dozens of times, and it?s always as new to me as if I had never seen it before!?

I looked where she pointed. The tide was on the turn, and the horrid sand began to shiver. The broad brown face of it heaved slowly, and

then dimpled and quivered all over. "Do you know what it looks like to me?" says Rosanna, catching me by the shoulder again. "It looks as if it had hundreds of suffocating people under it—all struggling to get to the surface, and all sinking lower and lower in the dreadful deeps! Throw a stone in, Mr. Betteredge! Throw a stone in, and let's see the sand suck it down!"

Here was unwholesome talk! Here was an empty stomach feeding on an unquiet mind! My answer—a pretty sharp one, in the poor girl's own interests, I promise you!—was at my tongue's end, when it was snapped short off on a sudden by a voice among the sandhills shouting for me by my name. "Betteredge!" cries the voice, "where are you?" "Here!" I shouted out in return, without a notion in my mind of who it was. Rosanna started to her feet, and stood looking towards the voice. I was just thinking of getting on my own legs next, when I was staggered by a sudden change in the girl's face.

Her complexion turned of a beautiful red, which I had never seen in it before; she brightened all over with a kind of speechless and breathless surprise. "Who is it?" I asked. Rosanna gave me back my own question. "Oh! who is it?" she said softly, more to herself than to me. I twisted round on the sand and looked behind me. There, coming out on us from among the hills, was a bright-eyed young gentleman, dressed in a beautiful fawn-coloured suit, with gloves and hat to match, with a rose in his button-hole, and a smile on his face that might have set the Shivering Sand itself smiling at him in return. Before I could get on my legs, he plumped down on the sand by the side of me, put his arm round my neck, foreign fashion, and gave me a hug that fairly squeezed the breath out of my body. "Dear old Betteredge!" says he. "I owe you seven-and-sixpence. Now do you know who I am?"

Lord bless us and save us! Here—four good hours before we expected him—was Mr. Franklin Blake!

Before I could say a word, I saw Mr. Franklin, a little surprised to all appearance, look up from me to Rosanna. Following his lead, I looked at the girl too. She was blushing of a deeper red than ever, seemingly at having caught Mr. Franklin's eye; and she turned and left us suddenly, in a confusion quite unaccountable to my mind, without either making her curtsy to the gentleman or saying a word to me. Very unlike her usual self: a civiller and better-behaved servant, in general, you never met with.

"That's an odd girl," says Mr. Franklin. "I wonder what she sees in me to surprise her?"

"I suppose, sir," I answered, drolling on our young gentleman's Continental education, "it's the varnish from foreign parts."

I set down here Mr. Franklin's careless question, and my foolish answer, as a consolation and encouragement to all stupid people—it being, as I have remarked, a great satisfaction to our inferior fellow-creatures to find that their betters are, on occasions, no brighter than they are. Neither Mr. Franklin, with his wonderful

foreign training, nor I, with my age, experience, and natural mother-wit, had the ghost of an idea of what Rosanna Spearman's unaccountable behaviour really meant. She was out of our thoughts, poor soul, before we had seen the last flutter of her little grey cloak among the sandhills. And what of that? you will ask, naturally enough. Read on, good friend, as patiently as you can, and perhaps you will be as sorry for Rosanna Spearman as I was, when I found out the truth.

CHAPTER V

The first thing I did, after we were left together alone, was to make a third attempt to get up from my seat on the sand. Mr. Franklin stopped me.

‘There is one advantage about this horrid place,’ he said; ‘we have got it all to ourselves. Stay where you are, Betteredge; I have something to say to you.’

While he was speaking, I was looking at him, and trying to see something of the boy I remembered, in the man before me. The man put me out. Look as I might, I could see no more of his boy's rosy cheeks than of his boy's trim little jacket. His complexion had got pale: his face, at the lower part was covered, to my great surprise and disappointment, with a curly brown beard and moustachios. He had a lively touch-and-go way with him, very pleasant and engaging, I admit; but nothing to compare with his free-and-easy manners of other times. To make matters worse, he had promised to be tall, and had not kept his promise. He was neat, and slim, and well made; but he wasn't by an inch or two up to the middle height. In short, he baffled me altogether. The years that had passed had left nothing of his old self, except the bright, straightforward look in his eyes. There I found our nice boy again, and there I concluded to stop in my investigation.

‘Welcome back to the old place, Mr. Franklin,’ I said. ‘All the more welcome, sir, that you have come some hours before we expected you.’

‘I have a reason for coming before you expected me,’ answered Mr. Franklin. ‘I suspect, Betteredge, that I have been followed and watched in London, for the last three or four days; and I have travelled by the morning instead of the afternoon train, because I wanted to give a certain dark-looking stranger the slip.’

Those words did more than surprise me. They brought back to my mind, in a flash, the three jugglers, and Penelope's notion that they meant some mischief to Mr. Franklin Blake.

‘Who's watching you, sir, and why?’ I inquired.

‘Tell me about the three Indians you have had at the house today,’ says Mr. Franklin, without noticing my question. ‘It's just possible, Betteredge, that my stranger and your three jugglers may turn out to be pieces of the same puzzle.’

How do you come to know about the jugglers, sir? I asked, putting one question on the top of another, which was bad manners, I own. But you don't expect much from poor human nature? so don't expect much from me.

I saw Penelope at the house, says Mr. Franklin; and Penelope told me. Your daughter promised to be a pretty girl, Betteredge, and she has kept her promise. Penelope has got a small ear and a small foot. Did the late Mrs. Betteredge possess those inestimable advantages?

The late Mrs. Betteredge possessed a good many defects, sir, says I. One of them (if you will pardon my mentioning it) was never keeping to the matter in hand. She was more like a fly than a woman: she couldn't settle on anything.

She would just have suited me, says Mr. Franklin. I never settle on anything either. Betteredge, your edge is better than ever. Your daughter said as much, when I asked for particulars about the jugglers. Father will tell you, sir. He's a wonderful man for his age; and he expresses himself beautifully. Penelope's own words? blushing divinely. Not even my respect for you prevented me from? never mind; I knew her when she was a child, and she's none the worse for it. Let's be serious. What did the jugglers do?

I was something dissatisfied with my daughter? not for letting Mr. Franklin kiss her; Mr. Franklin was welcome to that? but for forcing me to tell her foolish story at second hand. However, there was no help for it now but to mention the circumstances. Mr. Franklin's merriment all died away as I went on. He sat knitting his eyebrows, and twisting his beard. When I had done, he repeated after me two of the questions which the chief juggler had put to the boy? seemingly for the purpose of fixing them well in his mind.

Is it on the road to this house, and on no other, that the English gentleman will travel today? Has the English gentleman got it about him? I suspect, says Mr. Franklin, pulling a little sealed paper parcel out of his pocket, that it means this. And this, Betteredge, means my uncle Herncastle's famous Diamond?

Good Lord, sir! I broke out, how do you come to be in charge of the wicked Colonel's Diamond?

The wicked Colonel's will has left his Diamond as a birthday present to my cousin Rachel, says Mr. Franklin. And my father, as the wicked Colonel's executor, has given it in charge to me to bring down here.

If the sea, then oozing in smoothly over the Shivering Sand, had been changed into dry land before my own eyes, I doubt if I could have been more surprised than I was when Mr. Franklin spoke those words.

The Colonel's Diamond left to Miss Rachel! says I. And your father, sir, the Colonel's executor! Why, I would have laid any bet you like, Mr. Franklin, that your father wouldn't have touched the Colonel with a pair of tongs!

?Strong language, Betteredge! What was there against the Colonel? He belonged to your time, not to mine. Tell me what you know about him, and I'll tell you how my father came to be his executor, and more besides. I have made some discoveries in London about my uncle Herncastle and his Diamond, which have rather an ugly look to my eyes; and I want you to confirm them. You called him the ?wicked Colonel? just now. Search your memory, my old friend, and tell me why.?

I saw he was in earnest, and I told him.

Here follows the substance of what I said, written out entirely for your benefit. Pay attention to it, or you will be all abroad, when we get deeper into the story. Clear your mind of the children, or the dinner, or the new bonnet, or what not. Try if you can't forget politics, horses, prices in the City, and grievances at the club. I hope you won't take this freedom on my part amiss; it's only a way I have of appealing to the gentle reader. Lord! haven't I seen you with the greatest authors in your hands, and don't I know how ready your attention is to wander when it's a book that asks for it, instead of a person?

I spoke, a little way back, of my lady's father, the old lord with the short temper and the long tongue. He had five children in all. Two sons to begin with; then, after a long time, his wife broke out breeding again, and the three young ladies came briskly one after the other, as fast as the nature of things would permit; my mistress, as before mentioned, being the youngest and best of the three. Of the two sons, the eldest, Arthur, inherited the title and estates. The second, the Honourable John, got a fine fortune left him by a relative, and went into the army.

It's an ill bird, they say, that fouls its own nest. I look on the noble family of the Herncastles as being my nest; and I shall take it as a favour if I am not expected to enter into particulars on the subject of the Honourable John. He was, I honestly believe, one of the greatest blackguards that ever lived. I can hardly say more or less for him than that. He went into the army, beginning in the Guards. He had to leave the Guards before he was two-and-twenty?never mind why. They are very strict in the army, and they were too strict for the Honourable John. He went out to India to see whether they were equally strict there, and to try a little active service. In the matter of bravery (to give him his due), he was a mixture of bull-dog and game-cock, with a dash of the savage. He was at the taking of Seringapatam. Soon afterwards he changed into another regiment, and, in course of time, changed into a third. In the third he got his last step as lieutenant-colonel, and, getting that, got also a sunstroke, and came home to England.

He came back with a character that closed the doors of all his family against him, my lady (then just married) taking the lead, and declaring (with Sir John's approval, of course) that her brother should never enter any house of hers. There was more than one slur on the Colonel that made people shy of him; but the blot of the Diamond is all I need mention here.

It was said he had got possession of his Indian jewel by means which, bold as he was, he didn't dare acknowledge. He never attempted to sell it—not being in need of money, and not (to give him his due again) making money an object. He never gave it away; he never even showed it to any living soul. Some said he was afraid of its getting him into a difficulty with the military authorities; others (very ignorant indeed of the real nature of the man) said he was afraid, if he showed it, of its costing him his life.

There was perhaps a grain of truth mixed up with this last report. It was false to say that he was afraid; but it was a fact that his life had been twice threatened in India; and it was firmly believed that the Moonstone was at the bottom of it. When he came back to England, and found himself avoided by everybody, the Moonstone was thought to be at the bottom of it again. The mystery of the Colonel's life got in the Colonel's way, and outlawed him, as you may say, among his own people. The men wouldn't let him into their clubs; the women—more than one—whom he wanted to marry, refused him; friends and relations got too near-sighted to see him in the street.

Some men in this mess would have tried to set themselves right with the world. But to give in, even when he was wrong, and had all society against him, was not the way of the Honourable John. He had kept the Diamond, in flat defiance of assassination, in India. He kept the Diamond, in flat defiance of public opinion, in England. There you have the portrait of the man before you, as in a picture: a character that braved everything; and a face, handsome as it was, that looked possessed by the devil.

We heard different rumours about him from time to time. Sometimes they said he was given up to smoking opium and collecting old books; sometimes he was reported to be trying strange things in chemistry; sometimes he was seen carousing and amusing himself among the lowest people in the lowest slums of London. Anyhow, a solitary, vicious, underground life was the life the Colonel led. Once, and once only, after his return to England, I myself saw him, face to face.

About two years before the time of which I am now writing, and about a year and a half before the time of his death, the Colonel came unexpectedly to my lady's house in London. It was the night of Miss Rachel's birthday, the twenty-first of June; and there was a party in honour of it, as usual. I received a message from the footman to say that a gentleman wanted to see me. Going up into the hall, there I found the Colonel, wasted, and worn, and old, and shabby, and as wild and as wicked as ever.

"Go up to my sister," says he; "and say that I have called to wish my niece many happy returns of the day."

He had made attempts by letter, more than once already, to be reconciled with my lady, for no other purpose, I am firmly persuaded, than to annoy her. But this was the first time he had actually come to the house. I had it on the tip of my tongue to say that my mistress had

a party that night. But the devilish look of him daunted me. I went upstairs with his message, and left him, by his own desire, waiting in the hall. The servants stood staring at him, at a distance, as if he was a walking engine of destruction, loaded with powder and shot, and likely to go off among them at a moment's notice.

My lady had a dash no more of the family temper. "Tell Colonel Herncastle," she said, when I gave her her brother's message, "that Miss Verinder is engaged, and that I decline to see him." I tried to plead for a civiller answer than that; knowing the Colonel's constitutional superiority to the restraints which govern gentlemen in general. Quite useless! The family temper flashed out at me directly. "When I want your advice," says my lady, "you know that I always ask for it. I don't ask for it now." I went downstairs with the message, of which I took the liberty of presenting a new and amended edition of my own contriving, as follows: "My lady and Miss Rachel regret that they are engaged, Colonel; and beg to be excused having the honour of seeing you."

I expected him to break out, even at that polite way of putting it. To my surprise he did nothing of the sort; he alarmed me by taking the thing with an unnatural quiet. His eyes, of a glittering bright grey, just settled on me for a moment; and he laughed, not out of himself, like other people, but into himself, in a soft, chuckling, horribly mischievous way. "Thank you, Betteredge," he said. "I shall remember my niece's birthday." With that, he turned on his heel, and walked out of the house.

The next birthday came round, and we heard he was ill in bed. Six months afterwards—that is to say, six months before the time I am now writing of—there came a letter from a highly respectable clergyman to my lady. It communicated two wonderful things in the way of family news. First, that the Colonel had forgiven his sister on his death-bed. Second, that he had forgiven everybody else, and had made a most edifying end. I have myself (in spite of the bishops and the clergy) an unfeigned respect for the Church; but I am firmly persuaded, at the same time, that the devil remained in undisturbed possession of the Honourable John, and that the last abominable act in the life of that abominable man was (saving your presence) to take the clergyman in!

This was the sum-total of what I had to tell Mr. Franklin. I remarked that he listened more and more eagerly the longer I went on. Also, that the story of the Colonel being sent away from his sister's door, on the occasion of his niece's birthday, seemed to strike Mr. Franklin like a shot that had hit the mark. Though he didn't acknowledge it, I saw that I had made him uneasy, plainly enough, in his face.

"You have said your say, Betteredge," he remarked. "It's my turn now. Before, however, I tell you what discoveries I have made in London, and how I came to be mixed up in this matter of the Diamond, I want to know one thing. You look, my old friend, as if you didn't quite understand the object to be answered by this consultation of ours. Do your looks belie you?"

"No, sir," I said. "My looks, on this occasion at any rate, tell the truth."

"In that case," says Mr. Franklin, "suppose I put you up to my point of view, before we go any further. I see three very serious questions involved in the Colonel's birthday-gift to my cousin Rachel. Follow me carefully, Betteredge; and count me off on your fingers, if it will help you," says Mr. Franklin, with a certain pleasure in showing how clear-headed he could be, which reminded me wonderfully of old times when he was a boy. "Question the first: Was the Colonel's Diamond the object of a conspiracy in India? Question the second: Has the conspiracy followed the Colonel's Diamond to England? Question the third: Did the Colonel know the conspiracy followed the Diamond; and has he purposely left a legacy of trouble and danger to his sister, through the innocent medium of his sister's child? _That_ is what I am driving at, Betteredge. Don't let me frighten you."

It was all very well to say that, but he _had_ frightened me.

If he was right, here was our quiet English house suddenly invaded by a devilish Indian Diamond—bringing after it a conspiracy of living rogues, set loose on us by the vengeance of a dead man. There was our situation as revealed to me in Mr. Franklin's last words! Who ever heard the like of it?—in the nineteenth century, mind; in an age of progress, and in a country which rejoices in the blessings of the British constitution? Nobody ever heard the like of it, and, consequently, nobody can be expected to believe it. I shall go on with my story, however, in spite of that.

When you get a sudden alarm, of the sort that I had got now, nine times out of ten the place you feel it in is your stomach. When you feel it in your stomach, your attention wanders, and you begin to fidget. I fidgeted silently in my place on the sand. Mr. Franklin noticed me, contending with a perturbed stomach or mind—which you please; they mean the same thing—and, checking himself just as he was starting with his part of the story, said to me sharply, "What do you want?"

What did I want? I didn't tell _him_; but I'll tell _you_, in confidence. I wanted a whiff of my pipe, and a turn at _Robinson Crusoe_.

CHAPTER VI

Keeping my private sentiments to myself, I respectfully requested Mr. Franklin to go on. Mr. Franklin replied, "Don't fidget, Betteredge," and went on.

Our young gentleman's first words informed me that his discoveries, concerning the wicked Colonel and the Diamond, had begun with a visit which he had paid (before he came to us) to the family lawyer, at Hampstead. A chance word dropped by Mr. Franklin, when the two were alone, one day, after dinner, revealed that he had been charged by his father with a birthday present to be taken to Miss Rachel. One thing

led to another; and it ended in the lawyer mentioning what the present really was, and how the friendly connexion between the late Colonel and Mr. Blake, senior, had taken its rise. The facts here are really so extraordinary, that I doubt if I can trust my own language to do justice to them. I prefer trying to report Mr. Franklin's discoveries, as nearly as may be, in Mr. Franklin's own words.

"You remember the time, Betteredge," he said, "when my father was trying to prove his title to that unlucky Dukedom? Well! that was also the time when my uncle Herncastle returned from India. My father discovered that his brother-in-law was in possession of certain papers which were likely to be of service to him in his lawsuit. He called on the Colonel, on pretence of welcoming him back to England. The Colonel was not to be deluded in that way. "You want something," he said, "or you would never have compromised your reputation by calling on me." My father saw that the one chance for him was to show his hand; he admitted, at once, that he wanted the papers. The Colonel asked for a day to consider his answer. His answer came in the shape of a most extraordinary letter, which my friend the lawyer showed me. The Colonel began by saying that he wanted something of my father, and that he begged to propose an exchange of friendly services between them. The fortune of war (that was the expression he used) had placed him in possession of one of the largest Diamonds in the world; and he had reason to believe that neither he nor his precious jewel was safe in any house, in any quarter of the globe, which they occupied together. Under these alarming circumstances, he had determined to place his Diamond in the keeping of another person. That person was not expected to run any risk. He might deposit the precious stone in any place especially guarded and set apart—like a banker's or jeweller's strongroom—for the safe custody of valuables of high price. His main personal responsibility in the matter was to be of the passive kind. He was to undertake either by himself, or by a trustworthy representative—to receive at a prearranged address, on certain prearranged days in every year, a note from the Colonel, simply stating the fact that he was a living man at that date. In the event of the date passing over without the note being received, the Colonel's silence might be taken as a sure token of the Colonel's death by murder. In that case, and in no other, certain sealed instructions relating to the disposal of the Diamond, and deposited with it, were to be opened, and followed implicitly. If my father chose to accept this strange charge, the Colonel's papers were at his disposal in return. That was the letter."

"What did your father do, sir?" I asked.

"Do?" says Mr. Franklin. "I'll tell you what he did. He brought the invaluable faculty, called common sense, to bear on the Colonel's letter. The whole thing, he declared, was simply absurd. Somewhere in his Indian wanderings, the Colonel had picked up with some wretched crystal which he took for a diamond. As for the danger of his being murdered, and the precautions devised to preserve his life and his piece of crystal, this was the nineteenth century, and any man in his senses had only to apply to the police. The Colonel had been a notorious opium-eater for years past; and, if the only way of getting

at the valuable papers he possessed was by accepting a matter of opium as a matter of fact, my father was quite willing to take the ridiculous responsibility imposed on him?all the more readily that it involved no trouble to himself. The Diamond and the sealed instructions went into his banker's strongroom, and the Colonel's letters, periodically reporting him a living man, were received and opened by our family lawyer, Mr. Bruff, as my father's representative. No sensible person, in a similar position, could have viewed the matter in any other way. Nothing in this world, Betteredge, is probable unless it appeals to our own trumpery experience; and we only believe in a romance when we see it in a newspaper.?

It was plain to me from this, that Mr. Franklin thought his father's notion about the Colonel hasty and wrong.

?What is your own private opinion about the matter, sir?? I asked.

?Let's finish the story of the Colonel first,? says Mr. Franklin.
?There is a curious want of system, Betteredge, in the English mind; and your question, my old friend, is an instance of it. When we are not occupied in making machinery, we are (mentally speaking) the most slovenly people in the universe.?

?So much,? I thought to myself, ?for a foreign education! He has learned that way of girding at us in France, I suppose.?

Mr. Franklin took up the lost thread, and went on.

?My father,? he said, ?got the papers he wanted, and never saw his brother-in-law again from that time. Year after year, on the prearranged days, the prearranged letter came from the Colonel, and was opened by Mr. Bruff. I have seen the letters, in a heap, all of them written in the same brief, business-like form of words: ?Sir,?This is to certify that I am still a living man. Let the Diamond be. John Herncastle.? That was all he ever wrote, and that came regularly to the day; until some six or eight months since, when the form of the letter varied for the first time. It ran now: ?Sir,?They tell me I am dying. Come to me, and help me to make my will.? Mr. Bruff went, and found him, in the little suburban villa, surrounded by its own grounds, in which he had lived alone, ever since he had left India. He had dogs, cats, and birds to keep him company; but no human being near him, except the person who came daily to do the house-work, and the doctor at the bedside. The will was a very simple matter. The Colonel had dissipated the greater part of his fortune in his chemical investigations. His will began and ended in three clauses, which he dictated from his bed, in perfect possession of his faculties. The first clause provided for the safe keeping and support of his animals. The second founded a professorship of experimental chemistry at a northern university. The third bequeathed the Moonstone as a birthday present to his niece, on condition that my father would act as executor. My father at first refused to act. On second thoughts, however, he gave way, partly because he was assured that the executorship would involve him in no trouble; partly because Mr. Bruff suggested, in Rachel's interest, that the Diamond might be worth

something, after all.?

‘Did the Colonel give any reason, sir,’ I inquired, ‘why he left the Diamond to Miss Rachel?’

‘He not only gave the reason—he had the reason written in his will,’ said Mr. Franklin. ‘I have got an extract, which you shall see presently. Don’t be slovenly-minded, Betteredge! One thing at a time. You have heard about the Colonel’s Will; now you must hear what happened after the Colonel’s death. It was formally necessary to have the Diamond valued, before the Will could be proved. All the jewellers consulted, at once confirmed the Colonel’s assertion that he possessed one of the largest diamonds in the world. The question of accurately valuing it presented some serious difficulties. Its size made it a phenomenon in the diamond market; its colour placed it in a category by itself; and, to add to these elements of uncertainty, there was a defect, in the shape of a flaw, in the very heart of the stone. Even with this last serious draw-back, however, the lowest of the various estimates given was twenty thousand pounds. Conceive my father’s astonishment! He had been within a hair’s-breadth of refusing to act as executor, and of allowing this magnificent jewel to be lost to the family. The interest he took in the matter now, induced him to open the sealed instructions which had been deposited with the Diamond. Mr. Bruff showed this document to me, with the other papers; and it suggests (to my mind) a clue to the nature of the conspiracy which threatened the Colonel’s life.’

‘Then you do believe, sir,’ I said, ‘that there was a conspiracy?’

‘Not possessing my father’s excellent common sense,’ answered Mr. Franklin, ‘I believe the Colonel’s life was threatened, exactly as the Colonel said. The sealed instructions, as I think, explain how it was that he died, after all, quietly in his bed. In the event of his death by violence (that is to say, in the absence of the regular letter from him at the appointed date), my father was then directed to send the Moonstone secretly to Amsterdam. It was to be deposited in that city with a famous diamond-cutter, and it was to be cut up into from four to six separate stones. The stones were then to be sold for what they would fetch, and the proceeds were to be applied to the founding of that professorship of experimental chemistry, which the Colonel has since endowed by his Will. Now, Betteredge, exert those sharp wits of yours, and observe the conclusion to which the Colonel’s instructions point!’

I instantly exerted my wits. They were of the slovenly English sort; and they consequently muddled it all, until Mr. Franklin took them in hand, and pointed out what they ought to see.

‘Remark,’ says Mr. Franklin, ‘that the integrity of the Diamond, as a whole stone, is here artfully made dependent on the preservation from violence of the Colonel’s life. He is not satisfied with saying to the enemies he dreads, ‘Kill me?’ and you will be no nearer to the Diamond than you are now; it is where you can’t get at it—in the guarded strongroom of a bank.’ He says instead, ‘Kill me?’ and the Diamond will

be the Diamond no longer; its identity will be destroyed.? What does that mean??

Here I had (as I thought) a flash of the wonderful foreign brightness.

?I know,? I said. ?It means lowering the value of the stone, and cheating the rogues in that way!?

?Nothing of the sort,? says Mr. Franklin. ?I have inquired about that. The flawed Diamond, cut up, would actually fetch more than the Diamond as it now is; for this plain reason?that from four to six perfect brilliants might be cut from it, which would be, collectively, worth more money than the large?but imperfect single stone. If robbery for the purpose of gain was at the bottom of the conspiracy, the Colonel?s instructions absolutely made the Diamond better worth stealing. More money could have been got for it, and the disposal of it in the diamond market would have been infinitely easier, if it had passed through the hands of the workmen of Amsterdam.?

?Lord bless us, sir!? I burst out. ?What was the plot, then??

?A plot organised among the Indians who originally owned the jewel,? says Mr. Franklin??a plot with some old Hindoo superstition at the bottom of it. That is my opinion, confirmed by a family paper which I have about me at this moment.?

I saw, now, why the appearance of the three Indian jugglers at our house had presented itself to Mr. Franklin in the light of a circumstance worth noting.

?I don?t want to force my opinion on you,? Mr. Franklin went on. ?The idea of certain chosen servants of an old Hindoo superstition devoting themselves, through all difficulties and dangers, to watching the opportunity of recovering their sacred gem, appears to _me_ to be perfectly consistent with everything that we know of the patience of Oriental races, and the influence of Oriental religions. But then I am an imaginative man; and the butcher, the baker, and the tax-gatherer, are not the only credible realities in existence to _my_ mind. Let the guess I have made at the truth in this matter go for what it is worth, and let us get on to the only practical question that concerns us. Does the conspiracy against the Moonstone survive the Colonel?s death? And did the Colonel know it, when he left the birthday gift to his niece??

I began to see my lady and Miss Rachel at the end of it all, now. Not a word he said escaped me.

?I was not very willing, when I discovered the story of the Moonstone,? said Mr. Franklin, ?to be the means of bringing it here. But Mr. Bruff reminded me that somebody must put my cousin?s legacy into my cousin?s hands?and that I might as well do it as anybody else. After taking the Diamond out of the bank, I fancied I was followed in the streets by a shabby, dark-complexioned man. I went to my father?s house to pick up my luggage, and found a letter there, which unexpectedly detained me in London. I went back to the bank with the Diamond, and thought I saw the

shabby man again. Taking the Diamond once more out of the bank this morning, I saw the man for the third time, gave him the slip, and started (before he recovered the trace of me) by the morning instead of the afternoon train. Here I am, with the Diamond safe and sound?and what is the first news that meets me? I find that three strolling Indians have been at the house, and that my arrival from London, and something which I am expected to have about me, are two special objects of investigation to them when they believe themselves to be alone. I don't waste time and words on their pouring the ink into the boy's hand, and telling him to look in it for a man at a distance, and for something in that man's pocket. The thing (which I have often seen done in the East) is 'hocus-pocus' in my opinion, as it is in yours. The present question for us to decide is, whether I am wrongly attaching a meaning to a mere accident? or whether we really have evidence of the Indians being on the track of the Moonstone, the moment it is removed from the safe keeping of the bank??

Neither he nor I seemed to fancy dealing with this part of the inquiry. We looked at each other, and then we looked at the tide, oozing in smoothly, higher and higher, over the Shivering Sand.

'What are you thinking of?' says Mr. Franklin, suddenly.

'I was thinking, sir,' I answered, 'that I should like to shy the Diamond into the quicksand, and settle the question in _that_ way.'

'If you have got the value of the stone in your pocket,' answered Mr. Franklin, 'say so, Betteredge, and in it goes!'

It's curious to note, when your mind's anxious, how very far in the way of relief a very small joke will go. We found a fund of merriment, at the time, in the notion of making away with Miss Rachel's lawful property, and getting Mr. Blake, as executor, into dreadful trouble?though where the merriment was, I am quite at a loss to discover now.

Mr. Franklin was the first to bring the talk back to the talk's proper purpose. He took an envelope out of his pocket, opened it, and handed to me the paper inside.

'Betteredge,' he said, 'we must face the question of the Colonel's motive in leaving this legacy to his niece, for my aunt's sake. Bear in mind how Lady Verinder treated her brother from the time when he returned to England, to the time when he told you he should remember his niece's birthday. And read that.'

He gave me the extract from the Colonel's Will. I have got it by me while I write these words; and I copy it, as follows, for your benefit:

'Thirdly, and lastly, I give and bequeath to my niece, Rachel Verinder, daughter and only child of my sister, Julia Verinder, widow?if her mother, the said Julia Verinder, shall be living on the said Rachel Verinder's next Birthday after my death?the yellow Diamond belonging to me, and known in the East by the name of The Moonstone: subject to this

condition, that her mother, the said Julia Verinder, shall be living at the time. And I hereby desire my executor to give my Diamond, either by his own hands or by the hands of some trustworthy representative whom he shall appoint, into the personal possession of my said niece Rachel, on her next birthday after my death, and in the presence, if possible, of my sister, the said Julia Verinder. And I desire that my said sister may be informed, by means of a true copy of this, the third and last clause of my Will, that I give the Diamond to her daughter Rachel, in token of my free forgiveness of the injury which her conduct towards me has been the means of inflicting on my reputation in my lifetime; and especially in proof that I pardon, as becomes a dying man, the insult offered to me as an officer and a gentleman, when her servant, by her orders, closed the door of her house against me, on the occasion of her daughter's birthday.?

More words followed these, providing if my lady was dead, or if Miss Rachel was dead, at the time of the testator's decease, for the Diamond being sent to Holland, in accordance with the sealed instructions originally deposited with it. The proceeds of the sale were, in that case, to be added to the money already left by the Will for the professorship of chemistry at the university in the north.

I handed the paper back to Mr. Franklin, sorely troubled what to say to him. Up to that moment, my own opinion had been (as you know) that the Colonel had died as wickedly as he had lived. I don't say the copy from his Will actually converted me from that opinion: I only say it staggered me.

'Well,' says Mr. Franklin, 'now you have read the Colonel's own statement, what do you say? In bringing the Moonstone to my aunt's house, am I serving his vengeance blindfold, or am I vindicating him in the character of a penitent and Christian man?'

'It seems hard to say, sir,' I answered, 'that he died with a horrid revenge in his heart, and a horrid lie on his lips. God alone knows the truth. Don't ask _me_.'

Mr. Franklin sat twisting and turning the extract from the Will in his fingers, as if he expected to squeeze the truth out of it in that manner. He altered quite remarkably, at the same time. From being brisk and bright, he now became, most unaccountably, a slow, solemn, and pondering young man.

'This question has two sides,' he said. 'An Objective side, and a Subjective side. Which are we to take?'

He had had a German education as well as a French. One of the two had been in undisturbed possession of him (as I supposed) up to this time. And now (as well as I could make out) the other was taking its place. It is one of my rules in life, never to notice what I don't understand. I steered a middle course between the Objective side and the Subjective side. In plain English I stared hard, and said nothing.

'Let's extract the inner meaning of this,' says Mr. Franklin. 'Why did

my uncle leave the Diamond to Rachel? Why didn't he leave it to my aunt??

'That's not beyond guessing, sir, at any rate,' I said. 'Colonel Herncastle knew my lady well enough to know that she would have refused to accept any legacy that came to her from _him_.'

'How did he know that Rachel might not refuse to accept it, too??

'Is there any young lady in existence, sir, who could resist the temptation of accepting such a birthday present as The Moonstone??

'That's the Subjective view,' says Mr. Franklin. 'It does you great credit, Betteredge, to be able to take the Subjective view. But there's another mystery about the Colonel's legacy which is not accounted for yet. How are we to explain his only giving Rachel her birthday present conditionally on her mother being alive??

'I don't want to slander a dead man, sir,' I answered. 'But if he _has_ purposely left a legacy of trouble and danger to his sister, by the means of her child, it must be a legacy made conditional on his sister's being alive to feel the vexation of it.'

'Oh! That's your interpretation of his motive, is it? The Subjective interpretation again! Have you ever been in Germany, Betteredge??

'No, sir. What's your interpretation, if you please??

'I can see,' says Mr. Franklin, 'that the Colonel's object may, quite possibly, have been not to benefit his niece, whom he had never even seen but to prove to his sister that he had died forgiving her, and to prove it very prettily by means of a present made to her child. There is a totally different explanation from yours, Betteredge, taking its rise in a Subjective-Objective point of view. From all I can see, one interpretation is just as likely to be right as the other.'

Having brought matters to this pleasant and comforting issue, Mr. Franklin appeared to think that he had completed all that was required of him. He laid down flat on his back on the sand, and asked what was to be done next.

He had been so clever, and clear-headed (before he began to talk the foreign gibberish), and had so completely taken the lead in the business up to the present time, that I was quite unprepared for such a sudden change as he now exhibited in this helpless leaning upon _me_. It was not till later that I learned by assistance of Miss Rachel, who was the first to make the discovery that these puzzling shifts and transformations in Mr. Franklin were due to the effect on him of his foreign training. At the age when we are all of us most apt to take our colouring, in the form of a reflection from the colouring of other people, he had been sent abroad, and had been passed on from one nation to another, before there was time for any one colouring more than another to settle itself on him firmly. As a consequence of this, he had come back with so many different sides to his character, all more

or less jarring with each other, that he seemed to pass his life in a state of perpetual contradiction with himself. He could be a busy man, and a lazy man; cloudy in the head, and clear in the head; a model of determination, and a spectacle of helplessness, all together. He had his French side, and his German side, and his Italian side?the original English foundation showing through, every now and then, as much as to say, ?Here I am, sorely transmogrified, as you see, but there?s something of me left at the bottom of him still.? Miss Rachel used to remark that the Italian side of him was uppermost, on those occasions when he unexpectedly gave in, and asked you in his nice sweet-tempered way to take his own responsibilities on your shoulders. You will do him no injustice, I think, if you conclude that the Italian side of him was uppermost now.

?Isn?t it your business, sir,? I asked, ?to know what to do next? Surely it can?t be mine??

Mr. Franklin didn?t appear to see the force of my question?not being in a position, at the time, to see anything but the sky over his head.

?I don?t want to alarm my aunt without reason,? he said. ?And I don?t want to leave her without what may be a needful warning. If you were in my place, Betteredge, tell me, in one word, what would you do??

In one word, I told him: ?Wait.?

?With all my heart,? says Mr. Franklin. ?How long??

I proceeded to explain myself.

?As I understand it, sir,? I said, ?somebody is bound to put this plaguy Diamond into Miss Rachel?s hands on her birthday?and you may as well do it as another. Very good. This is the twenty-fifth of May, and the birthday is on the twenty-first of June. We have got close on four weeks before us. Let?s wait and see what happens in that time; and let?s warn my lady, or not, as the circumstances direct us.?

?Perfect, Betteredge, as far as it goes!? says Mr. Franklin. ?But between this and the birthday, what?s to be done with the Diamond??

?What your father did with it, to be sure, sir!? I answered. ?Your father put it in the safe keeping of a bank in London. You put in the safe keeping of the bank at Frizinghall.? (Frizinghall was our nearest town, and the Bank of England wasn?t safer than the bank there.) ?If I were you, sir,? I added, ?I would ride straight away with it to Frizinghall before the ladies come back.?

The prospect of doing something?and, what is more, of doing that something on a horse?brought Mr. Franklin up like lightning from the flat of his back. He sprang to his feet, and pulled me up, without ceremony, on to mine. ?Betteredge, you are worth your weight in gold,? he said. ?Come along, and saddle the best horse in the stables directly.?

Here (God bless it!) was the original English foundation of him showing through all the foreign varnish at last! Here was the Master Franklin I remembered, coming out again in the good old way at the prospect of a ride, and reminding me of the good old times! Saddle a horse for him? I would have saddled a dozen horses, if he could only have ridden them all!

We went back to the house in a hurry; we had the fleetest horse in the stables saddled in a hurry; and Mr. Franklin rattled off in a hurry, to lodge the cursed Diamond once more in the strongroom of a bank. When I heard the last of his horse's hoofs on the drive, and when I turned about in the yard and found I was alone again, I felt half inclined to ask myself if I hadn't woken up from a dream.

CHAPTER VII

While I was in this bewildered frame of mind, sorely needing a little quiet time by myself to put me right again, my daughter Penelope got in my way (just as her late mother used to get in my way on the stairs), and instantly summoned me to tell her all that had passed at the conference between Mr. Franklin and me. Under present circumstances, the one thing to be done was to clap the extinguisher upon Penelope's curiosity on the spot. I accordingly replied that Mr. Franklin and I had both talked of foreign politics, till we could talk no longer, and had then mutually fallen asleep in the heat of the sun. Try that sort of answer when your wife or your daughter next worries you with an awkward question at an awkward time, and depend on the natural sweetness of women for kissing and making it up again at the next opportunity.

The afternoon wore on, and my lady and Miss Rachel came back.

Needless to say how astonished they were, when they heard that Mr. Franklin Blake had arrived, and had gone off again on horseback. Needless also to say, that they asked awkward questions directly, and that the 'foreign politics' and the 'falling asleep in the sun' wouldn't serve a second time over with them. Being at the end of my invention, I said Mr. Franklin's arrival by the early train was entirely attributable to one of Mr. Franklin's freaks. Being asked, upon that, whether his galloping off again on horseback was another of Mr. Franklin's freaks, I said, 'Yes, it was;' and slipped out of it! I think very cleverly in that way.

Having got over my difficulties with the ladies, I found more difficulties waiting for me when I went back to my own room. In came Penelope with the natural sweetness of women to kiss and make it up again; and with the natural curiosity of women to ask another question. This time she only wanted me to tell her what was the matter with our second housemaid, Rosanna Spearman.

After leaving Mr. Franklin and me at the Shivering Sand, Rosanna, it appeared, had returned to the house in a very unaccountable state of mind. She had turned (if Penelope was to be believed) all the colours

of the rainbow. She had been merry without reason, and sad without reason. In one breath she asked hundreds of questions about Mr. Franklin Blake, and in another breath she had been angry with Penelope for presuming to suppose that a strange gentleman could possess any interest for her. She had been surprised, smiling, and scribbling Mr. Franklin's name inside her workbox. She had been surprised again, crying and looking at her deformed shoulder in the glass. Had she and Mr. Franklin known anything of each other before today? Quite impossible! Had they heard anything of each other? Impossible again! I could speak to Mr. Franklin's astonishment as genuine, when he saw how the girl stared at him. Penelope could speak to the girl's inquisitiveness as genuine, when she asked questions about Mr. Franklin. The conference between us, conducted in this way, was tiresome enough, until my daughter suddenly ended it by bursting out with what I thought the most monstrous supposition I had ever heard in my life.

"Father!" says Penelope, quite seriously, "there's only one explanation of it. Rosanna has fallen in love with Mr. Franklin Blake at first sight!"

You have heard of beautiful young ladies falling in love at first sight, and have thought it natural enough. But a housemaid out of a reformatory, with a plain face and a deformed shoulder, falling in love, at first sight, with a gentleman who comes on a visit to her mistress's house, match me that, in the way of an absurdity, out of any story-book in Christendom, if you can! I laughed till the tears rolled down my cheeks. Penelope resented my merriment, in rather a strange way. "I never knew you cruel before, father," she said, very gently, and went out.

My girl's words fell upon me like a splash of cold water. I was savage with myself, for feeling uneasy in myself the moment she had spoken them—but so it was. We will change the subject, if you please. I am sorry I drifted into writing about it; and not without reason, as you will see when we have gone on together a little longer.

The evening came, and the dressing-bell for dinner rang, before Mr. Franklin returned from Frizinghall. I took his hot water up to his room myself, expecting to hear, after this extraordinary delay, that something had happened. To my great disappointment (and no doubt to yours also), nothing had happened. He had not met with the Indians, either going or returning. He had deposited the Moonstone in the bank—describing it merely as a valuable of great price—and he had got the receipt for it safe in his pocket. I went downstairs, feeling that this was rather a flat ending, after all our excitement about the Diamond earlier in the day.

How the meeting between Mr. Franklin and his aunt and cousin went off, is more than I can tell you.

I would have given something to have waited at table that day. But, in my position in the household, waiting at dinner (except on high family festivals) was letting down my dignity in the eyes of the other

servants? a thing which my lady considered me quite prone enough to do already, without seeking occasions for it. The news brought to me from the upper regions, that evening, came from Penelope and the footman. Penelope mentioned that she had never known Miss Rachel so particular about the dressing of her hair, and had never seen her look so bright and pretty as she did when she went down to meet Mr. Franklin in the drawing-room. The footman's report was, that the preservation of a respectful composure in the presence of his betters, and the waiting on Mr. Franklin Blake at dinner, were two of the hardest things to reconcile with each other that had ever tried his training in service. Later in the evening, we heard them singing and playing duets, Mr. Franklin piping high, Miss Rachel piping higher, and my lady, on the piano, following them as it were over hedge and ditch, and seeing them safe through it in a manner most wonderful and pleasant to hear through the open windows, on the terrace at night. Later still, I went to Mr. Franklin in the smoking-room, with the soda water and brandy, and found that Miss Rachel had put the Diamond clean out of his head. "She's the most charming girl I have seen since I came back to England!" was all I could extract from him, when I endeavoured to lead the conversation to more serious things.

Towards midnight, I went round the house to lock up, accompanied by my second in command (Samuel, the footman), as usual. When all the doors were made fast, except the side door that opened on the terrace, I sent Samuel to bed, and stepped out for a breath of fresh air before I too went to bed in my turn.

The night was still and close, and the moon was at the full in the heavens. It was so silent out of doors, that I heard from time to time, very faint and low, the fall of the sea, as the ground-swell heaved it in on the sand-bank near the mouth of our little bay. As the house stood, the terrace side was the dark side; but the broad moonlight showed fair on the gravel walk that ran along the next side to the terrace. Looking this way, after looking up at the sky, I saw the shadow of a person in the moonlight thrown forward from behind the corner of the house.

Being old and sly, I forbore to call out; but being also, unfortunately, old and heavy, my feet betrayed me on the gravel. Before I could steal suddenly round the corner, as I had proposed, I heard lighter feet than mine? and more than one pair of them as I thought? retreating in a hurry. By the time I had got to the corner, the trespassers, whoever they were, had run into the shrubbery at the off side of the walk, and were hidden from sight among the thick trees and bushes in that part of the grounds. From the shrubbery, they could easily make their way, over our fence into the road. If I had been forty years younger, I might have had a chance of catching them before they got clear of our premises. As it was, I went back to set a-going a younger pair of legs than mine. Without disturbing anybody, Samuel and I got a couple of guns, and went all round the house and through the shrubbery. Having made sure that no persons were lurking about anywhere in our grounds, we turned back. Passing over the walk where I had seen the shadow, I now noticed, for the first time, a little bright object, lying on the clean gravel, under the light of the moon. Picking the

object up, I discovered it was a small bottle, containing a thick sweet-smelling liquor, as black as ink.

I said nothing to Samuel. But, remembering what Penelope had told me about the jugglers, and the pouring of the little pool of ink into the palm of the boy's hand, I instantly suspected that I had disturbed the three Indians, lurking about the house, and bent, in their heathenish way, on discovering the whereabouts of the Diamond that night.

CHAPTER VIII

Here, for one moment, I find it necessary to call a halt.

On summoning up my own recollections—and on getting Penelope to help me, by consulting her journal—I find that we may pass pretty rapidly over the interval between Mr. Franklin Blake's arrival and Miss Rachel's birthday. For the greater part of that time the days passed, and brought nothing with them worth recording. With your good leave, then, and with Penelope's help, I shall notice certain dates only in this place; reserving to myself to tell the story day by day, once more, as soon as we get to the time when the business of the Moonstone became the chief business of everybody in our house.

This said, we may now go on again—beginning, of course, with the bottle of sweet-smelling ink which I found on the gravel walk at night.

On the next morning (the morning of the twenty-sixth) I showed Mr. Franklin this article of jugglery, and told him what I have already told you. His opinion was, not only that the Indians had been lurking about after the Diamond, but also that they were actually foolish enough to believe in their own magic—meaning thereby the making of signs on a boy's head, and the pouring of ink into a boy's hand, and then expecting him to see persons and things beyond the reach of human vision. In our country, as well as in the East, Mr. Franklin informed me, there are people who practise this curious hocus-pocus (without the ink, however); and who call it by a French name, signifying something like brightness of sight. 'Depend upon it,' says Mr. Franklin, 'the Indians took it for granted that we should keep the Diamond here; and they brought their clairvoyant boy to show them the way to it, if they succeeded in getting into the house last night.'

'Do you think they'll try again, sir?' I asked.

'It depends,' says Mr. Franklin, 'on what the boy can really do. If he can see the Diamond through the iron safe of the bank at Frizinghall, we shall be troubled with no more visits from the Indians for the present. If he can't, we shall have another chance of catching them in the shrubbery, before many more nights are over our heads.'

I waited pretty confidently for that latter chance; but, strange to relate, it never came.

Whether the jugglers heard, in the town, of Mr. Franklin having been

seen at the bank, and drew their conclusions accordingly; or whether the boy really did see the Diamond where the Diamond was now lodged (which I, for one, flatly disbelieve); or whether, after all, it was a mere effect of chance, this at any rate is the plain truth?not the ghost of an Indian came near the house again, through the weeks that passed before Miss Rachel's birthday. The jugglers remained in and about the town plying their trade; and Mr. Franklin and I remained waiting to see what might happen, and resolute not to put the rogues on their guard by showing our suspicions of them too soon. With this report of the proceedings on either side, ends all that I have to say about the Indians for the present.

On the twenty-ninth of the month, Miss Rachel and Mr. Franklin hit on a new method of working their way together through the time which might otherwise have hung heavy on their hands. There are reasons for taking particular notice here of the occupation that amused them. You will find it has a bearing on something that is still to come.

Gentlefolks in general have a very awkward rock ahead in life?the rock ahead of their own idleness. Their lives being, for the most part, passed in looking about them for something to do, it is curious to see?especially when their tastes are of what is called the intellectual sort?how often they drift blindfold into some nasty pursuit. Nine times out of ten they take to torturing something, or to spoiling something?and they firmly believe they are improving their minds, when the plain truth is, they are only making a mess in the house. I have seen them (ladies, I am sorry to say, as well as gentlemen) go out, day after day, for example, with empty pill-boxes, and catch newts, and beetles, and spiders, and frogs, and come home and stick pins through the miserable wretches, or cut them up, without a pang of remorse, into little pieces. You see my young master, or my young mistress, poring over one of their spiders? insides with a magnifying-glass; or you meet one of their frogs walking downstairs without his head?and when you wonder what this cruel nastiness means, you are told that it means a taste in my young master or my young mistress for natural history. Sometimes, again, you see them occupied for hours together in spoiling a pretty flower with pointed instruments, out of a stupid curiosity to know what the flower is made of. Is its colour any prettier, or its scent any sweeter, when you do know? But there! the poor souls must get through the time, you see?they must get through the time. You dabbled in nasty mud, and made pies, when you were a child; and you dabble in nasty science, and dissect spiders, and spoil flowers, when you grow up. In the one case and in the other, the secret of it is, that you have got nothing to think of in your poor empty head, and nothing to do with your poor idle hands. And so it ends in your spoiling canvas with paints, and making a smell in the house; or in keeping tadpoles in a glass box full of dirty water, and turning everybody's stomach in the house; or in chipping off bits of stone here, there, and everywhere, and dropping grit into all the victuals in the house; or in staining your fingers in the pursuit of photography, and doing justice without mercy on everybody's face in the house. It often falls heavy enough, no doubt, on people who are really obliged to get their living, to be forced to work for the clothes that cover them, the roof that shelters them, and the food that keeps them going. But

compare the hardest day's work you ever did with the idleness that splits flowers and pokes its way into spiders' stomachs, and thank your stars that your head has got something it must think of, and your hands something that they must do.

As for Mr. Franklin and Miss Rachel, they tortured nothing, I am glad to say. They simply confined themselves to making a mess; and all they spoiled, to do them justice, was the panelling of a door.

Mr. Franklin's universal genius, dabbling in everything, dabbled in what he called 'decorative painting.' He had invented, he informed us, a new mixture to moisten paint with, which he described as a 'vehicle.' What it was made of, I don't know. What it did, I can tell you in two words—it stank. Miss Rachel being wild to try her hand at the new process, Mr. Franklin sent to London for the materials; mixed them up, with accompaniment of a smell which made the very dogs sneeze when they came into the room; put an apron and a bib over Miss Rachel's gown, and set her to work decorating her own little sitting-room—called, for want of English to name it in, her 'boudoir.' They began with the inside of the door. Mr. Franklin scraped off all the nice varnish with pumice-stone, and made what he described as a surface to work on. Miss Rachel then covered the surface, under his directions and with his help, with patterns and devices—griffins, birds, flowers, cupids, and such like—copied from designs made by a famous Italian painter, whose name escapes me: the one, I mean, who stocked the world with Virgin Maries, and had a sweetheart at the baker's. Viewed as work, this decoration was slow to do, and dirty to deal with. But our young lady and gentleman never seemed to tire of it. When they were not riding, or seeing company, or taking their meals, or piping their songs, there they were with their heads together, as busy as bees, spoiling the door. Who was the poet who said that Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do? If he had occupied my place in the family, and had seen Miss Rachel with her brush, and Mr. Franklin with his vehicle, he could have written nothing truer of either of them than that.

The next date worthy of notice is Sunday the fourth of June.

On that evening we, in the servants' hall, debated a domestic question for the first time, which, like the decoration of the door, has its bearing on something that is still to come.

Seeing the pleasure which Mr. Franklin and Miss Rachel took in each other's society, and noting what a pretty match they were in all personal respects, we naturally speculated on the chance of their putting their heads together with other objects in view besides the ornamenting of a door. Some of us said there would be a wedding in the house before the summer was over. Others (led by me) admitted it was likely enough Miss Rachel might be married; but we doubted (for reasons which will presently appear) whether her bridegroom would be Mr. Franklin Blake.

That Mr. Franklin was in love, on his side, nobody who saw and heard him could doubt. The difficulty was to fathom Miss Rachel. Let me do myself the honour of making you acquainted with her; after which, I

will leave you to fathom for yourself?if you can.

My young lady?s eighteenth birthday was the birthday now coming, on the twenty-first of June. If you happen to like dark women (who, I am informed, have gone out of fashion latterly in the gay world), and if you have no particular prejudice in favour of size, I answer for Miss Rachel as one of the prettiest girls your eyes ever looked on. She was small and slim, but all in fine proportion from top to toe. To see her sit down, to see her get up, and specially to see her walk, was enough to satisfy any man in his senses that the graces of her figure (if you will pardon me the expression) were in her flesh and not in her clothes. Her hair was the blackest I ever saw. Her eyes matched her hair. Her nose was not quite large enough, I admit. Her mouth and chin were (to quote Mr. Franklin) morsels for the gods; and her complexion (on the same undeniable authority) was as warm as the sun itself, with this great advantage over the sun, that it was always in nice order to look at. Add to the foregoing that she carried her head as upright as a dart, in a dashing, spirited, thoroughbred way?that she had a clear voice, with a ring of the right metal in it, and a smile that began very prettily in her eyes before it got to her lips?and there behold the portrait of her, to the best of my painting, as large as life!

And what about her disposition next? Had this charming creature no faults? She had just as many faults as you have, ma?am?neither more nor less.

To put it seriously, my dear pretty Miss Rachel, possessing a host of graces and attractions, had one defect, which strict impartiality compels me to acknowledge. She was unlike most other girls of her age, in this?that she had ideas of her own, and was stiff-necked enough to set the fashions themselves at defiance, if the fashions didn?t suit her views. In trifles, this independence of hers was all well enough; but in matters of importance, it carried her (as my lady thought, and as I thought) too far. She judged for herself, as few women of twice her age judge in general; never asked your advice; never told you beforehand what she was going to do; never came with secrets and confidences to anybody, from her mother downwards. In little things and great, with people she loved, and people she hated (and she did both with equal heartiness), Miss Rachel always went on a way of her own, sufficient for herself in the joys and sorrows of her life. Over and over again I have heard my lady say, ?Rachel?s best friend and Rachel?s worst enemy are, one and the other?Rachel herself.?

Add one thing more to this, and I have done.

With all her secrecy, and self-will, there was not so much as the shadow of anything false in her. I never remember her breaking her word; I never remember her saying No, and meaning Yes. I can call to mind, in her childhood, more than one occasion when the good little soul took the blame, and suffered the punishment, for some fault committed by a playfellow whom she loved. Nobody ever knew her to confess to it, when the thing was found out, and she was charged with it afterwards. But nobody ever knew her to lie about it, either. She looked you straight in the face, and shook her little saucy head, and

said plainly, 'I won't tell you!' Punished again for this, she would own to being sorry for saying 'won't'; but, bread and water notwithstanding, she never told you. Self-willed? devilish self-willed sometimes? I grant; but the finest creature, nevertheless, that ever walked the ways of this lower world. Perhaps you think you see a certain contradiction here? In that case, a word in your ear. Study your wife closely, for the next four-and-twenty hours. If your good lady doesn't exhibit something in the shape of a contradiction in that time, Heaven help you! you have married a monster.

I have now brought you acquainted with Miss Rachel, which you will find puts us face to face, next, with the question of that young lady's matrimonial views.

On June the twelfth, an invitation from my mistress was sent to a gentleman in London, to come and help to keep Miss Rachel's birthday. This was the fortunate individual on whom I believed her heart to be privately set! Like Mr. Franklin, he was a cousin of hers. His name was Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite.

My lady's second sister (don't be alarmed; we are not going very deep into family matters this time) my lady's second sister, I say, had a disappointment in love; and taking a husband afterwards, on the neck or nothing principle, made what they call a misalliance. There was terrible work in the family when the Honourable Caroline insisted on marrying plain Mr. Ablewhite, the banker at Frizinghall. He was very rich and very respectable, and he begot a prodigious large family? all in his favour, so far. But he had presumed to raise himself from a low station in the world? and that was against him. However, Time and the progress of modern enlightenment put things right; and the misalliance passed muster very well. We are all getting liberal now; and (provided you can scratch me, if I scratch you) what do I care, in or out of Parliament, whether you are a Dustman or a Duke? That's the modern way of looking at it? and I keep up with the modern way. The Ablewhites lived in a fine house and grounds, a little out of Frizinghall. Very worthy people, and greatly respected in the neighbourhood. We shall not be much troubled with them in these pages? excepting Mr. Godfrey, who was Mr. Ablewhite's second son, and who must take his proper place here, if you please, for Miss Rachel's sake.

With all his brightness and cleverness and general good qualities, Mr. Franklin's chance of topping Mr. Godfrey in our young lady's estimation was, in my opinion, a very poor chance indeed.

In the first place, Mr. Godfrey was, in point of size, the finest man by far of the two. He stood over six feet high; he had a beautiful red and white colour; a smooth round face, shaved as bare as your hand; and a head of lovely long flaxen hair, falling negligently over the poll of his neck. But why do I try to give you this personal description of him? If you ever subscribed to a Ladies' Charity in London, you know Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite as well as I do. He was a barrister by profession; a ladies' man by temperament; and a good Samaritan by choice. Female benevolence and female destitution could do nothing without him. Maternal societies for confining poor women; Magdalen

societies for rescuing poor women; strong-minded societies for putting poor women into poor men's places, and leaving the men to shift for themselves; he was vice-president, manager, referee to them all. Wherever there was a table with a committee of ladies sitting round it in council there was Mr. Godfrey at the bottom of the board, keeping the temper of the committee, and leading the dear creatures along the thorny ways of business, hat in hand. I do suppose this was the most accomplished philanthropist (on a small independence) that England ever produced. As a speaker at charitable meetings the like of him for drawing your tears and your money was not easy to find. He was quite a public character. The last time I was in London, my mistress gave me two treats. She sent me to the theatre to see a dancing woman who was all the rage; and she sent me to Exeter Hall to hear Mr. Godfrey. The lady did it, with a band of music. The gentleman did it, with a handkerchief and a glass of water. Crowds at the performance with the legs. Ditto at the performance with the tongue. And with all this, the sweetest tempered person (I allude to Mr. Godfrey) the simplest and pleasantest and easiest to please you ever met with. He loved everybody. And everybody loved him. What chance had Mr. Franklin what chance had anybody of average reputation and capacities against such a man as this?

On the fourteenth, came Mr. Godfrey's answer.

He accepted my mistress's invitation, from the Wednesday of the birthday to the evening of Friday when his duties to the Ladies' Charities would oblige him to return to town. He also enclosed a copy of verses on what he elegantly called his cousin's 'natal day.' Miss Rachel, I was informed, joined Mr. Franklin in making fun of the verses at dinner; and Penelope, who was all on Mr. Franklin's side, asked me, in great triumph, what I thought of that. 'Miss Rachel has led you off on a false scent, my dear,' I replied; 'but my nose is not so easily mystified. Wait till Mr. Ablewhite's verses are followed by Mr. Ablewhite himself.'

My daughter replied, that Mr. Franklin might strike in, and try his luck, before the verses were followed by the poet. In favour of this view, I must acknowledge that Mr. Franklin left no chance untried of winning Miss Rachel's good graces.

Though one of the most inveterate smokers I ever met with, he gave up his cigar, because she said, one day, she hated the stale smell of it in his clothes. He slept so badly, after this effort of self-denial, for want of the composing effect of the tobacco to which he was used, and came down morning after morning looking so haggard and worn, that Miss Rachel herself begged him to take to his cigars again. No! he would take to nothing again that could cause her a moment's annoyance; he would fight it out resolutely, and get back his sleep, sooner or later, by main force of patience in waiting for it. Such devotion as this, you may say (as some of them said downstairs), could never fail of producing the right effect on Miss Rachel backed up, too, as it was, by the decorating work every day on the door. All very well but she had a photograph of Mr. Godfrey in her bedroom; represented speaking at a public meeting, with all his hair blown out by the breath of his own

eloquence, and his eyes, most lovely, charming the money out of your pockets. What do you say to that? Every morning?as Penelope herself owned to me?there was the man whom the women couldn?t do without, looking on, in effigy, while Miss Rachel was having her hair combed. He would be looking on, in reality, before long?that was my opinion of it.

June the sixteenth brought an event which made Mr. Franklin?s chance look, to my mind, a worse chance than ever.

A strange gentleman, speaking English with a foreign accent, came that morning to the house, and asked to see Mr. Franklin Blake on business. The business could not possibly have been connected with the Diamond, for these two reasons?first, that Mr. Franklin told me nothing about it; secondly, that he communicated it (when the gentleman had gone, as I suppose) to my lady. She probably hinted something about it next to her daughter. At any rate, Miss Rachel was reported to have said some severe things to Mr. Franklin, at the piano that evening, about the people he had lived among, and the principles he had adopted in foreign parts. The next day, for the first time, nothing was done towards the decoration of the door. I suspect some imprudence of Mr. Franklin?s on the Continent?with a woman or a debt at the bottom of it?had followed him to England. But that is all guesswork. In this case, not only Mr. Franklin, but my lady too, for a wonder, left me in the dark.

On the seventeenth, to all appearance, the cloud passed away again. They returned to their decorating work on the door, and seemed to be as good friends as ever. If Penelope was to be believed, Mr. Franklin had seized the opportunity of the reconciliation to make an offer to Miss Rachel, and had neither been accepted nor refused. My girl was sure (from signs and tokens which I need not trouble you with) that her young mistress had fought Mr. Franklin off by declining to believe that he was in earnest, and had then secretly regretted treating him in that way afterwards. Though Penelope was admitted to more familiarity with her young mistress than maids generally are?for the two had been almost brought up together as children?still I knew Miss Rachel?s reserved character too well to believe that she would show her mind to anybody in this way. What my daughter told me, on the present occasion, was, as I suspected, more what she wished than what she really knew.

On the nineteenth another event happened. We had the doctor in the house professionally. He was summoned to prescribe for a person whom I have had occasion to present to you in these pages?our second housemaid, Rosanna Spearman.

This poor girl?who had puzzled me, as you know already, at the Shivering Sand?puzzled me more than once again, in the interval time of which I am now writing. Penelope?s notion that her fellow-servant was in love with Mr. Franklin (which my daughter, by my orders, kept strictly secret) seemed to be just as absurd as ever. But I must own that what I myself saw, and what my daughter saw also, of our second housemaid?s conduct, began to look mysterious, to say the least of it.

For example, the girl constantly put herself in Mr. Franklin?s way?very

slyly and quietly, but she did it. He took about as much notice of her as he took of the cat; it never seemed to occur to him to waste a look on Rosanna's plain face. The poor thing's appetite, never much, fell away dreadfully; and her eyes in the morning showed plain signs of waking and crying at night. One day Penelope made an awkward discovery, which we hushed up on the spot. She caught Rosanna at Mr. Franklin's dressing-table, secretly removing a rose which Miss Rachel had given him to wear in his button-hole, and putting another rose like it, of her own picking, in its place. She was, after that, once or twice impudent to me, when I gave her a well-meant general hint to be careful in her conduct; and, worse still, she was not over-respectful now, on the few occasions when Miss Rachel accidentally spoke to her.

My lady noticed the change, and asked me what I thought about it. I tried to screen the girl by answering that I thought she was out of health; and it ended in the doctor being sent for, as already mentioned, on the nineteenth. He said it was her nerves, and doubted if she was fit for service. My lady offered to remove her for change of air to one of our farms, inland. She begged and prayed, with the tears in her eyes, to be let to stop; and, in an evil hour, I advised my lady to try her for a little longer. As the event proved, and as you will soon see, this was the worst advice I could have given. If I could only have looked a little way into the future, I would have taken Rosanna Spearman out of the house, then and there, with my own hand.

On the twentieth, there came a note from Mr. Godfrey. He had arranged to stop at Frizinghall that night, having occasion to consult his father on business. On the afternoon of the next day, he and his two eldest sisters would ride over to us on horseback, in good time before dinner. An elegant little casket in china accompanied the note, presented to Miss Rachel, with her cousin's love and best wishes. Mr. Franklin had only given her a plain locket not worth half the money. My daughter Penelope, nevertheless—such is the obstinacy of women—still backed him to win.

Thanks be to Heaven, we have arrived at the eve of the birthday at last! You will own, I think, that I have got you over the ground this time, without much loitering by the way. Cheer up! I'll ease you with another new chapter here—and, what is more, that chapter shall take you straight into the thick of the story.

CHAPTER IX

June twenty-first, the day of the birthday, was cloudy and unsettled at sunrise, but towards noon it cleared up bravely.

We, in the servants' hall, began this happy anniversary, as usual, by offering our little presents to Miss Rachel, with the regular speech delivered annually by me as the chief. I follow the plan adopted by the Queen in opening Parliament—namely, the plan of saying much the same thing regularly every year. Before it is delivered, my speech (like the Queen's) is looked for as eagerly as if nothing of the kind had ever been heard before. When it is delivered, and turns out not to be the

novelty anticipated, though they grumble a little, they look forward hopefully to something newer next year. An easy people to govern, in the Parliament and in the Kitchen?that?s the moral of it.

After breakfast, Mr. Franklin and I had a private conference on the subject of the Moonstone?the time having now come for removing it from the bank at Frizinghall, and placing it in Miss Rachel?s own hands.

Whether he had been trying to make love to his cousin again, and had got a rebuff?or whether his broken rest, night after night, was aggravating the queer contradictions and uncertainties in his character?I don?t know. But certain it is, that Mr. Franklin failed to show himself at his best on the morning of the birthday. He was in twenty different minds about the Diamond in as many minutes. For my part, I stuck fast by the plain facts as we knew them. Nothing had happened to justify us in alarming my lady on the subject of the jewel; and nothing could alter the legal obligation that now lay on Mr. Franklin to put it in his cousin?s possession. That was my view of the matter; and, twist and turn it as he might, he was forced in the end to make it his view too. We arranged that he was to ride over, after lunch, to Frizinghall, and bring the Diamond back, with Mr. Godfrey and the two young ladies, in all probability, to keep him company on the way home again.

This settled, our young gentleman went back to Miss Rachel.

They consumed the whole morning, and part of the afternoon, in the everlasting business of decorating the door, Penelope standing by to mix the colours, as directed; and my lady, as luncheon time drew near, going in and out of the room, with her handkerchief to her nose (for they used a deal of Mr. Franklin?s vehicle that day), and trying vainly to get the two artists away from their work. It was three o?clock before they took off their aprons, and released Penelope (much the worse for the vehicle), and cleaned themselves of their mess. But they had done what they wanted?they had finished the door on the birthday, and proud enough they were of it. The griffins, cupids, and so on, were, I must own, most beautiful to behold; though so many in number, so entangled in flowers and devices, and so topsy-turvy in their actions and attitudes, that you felt them unpleasantly in your head for hours after you had done with the pleasure of looking at them. If I add that Penelope ended her part of the morning?s work by being sick in the back-kitchen, it is in no unfriendly spirit towards the vehicle. No! no! It left off stinking when it dried; and if Art requires these sort of sacrifices?though the girl is my own daughter?I say, let Art have them!

Mr. Franklin snatched a morsel from the luncheon-table, and rode off to Frizinghall?to escort his cousins, as he told my lady. To fetch the Moonstone, as was privately known to himself and to me.

This being one of the high festivals on which I took my place at the side-board, in command of the attendance at table, I had plenty to occupy my mind while Mr. Franklin was away. Having seen to the wine, and reviewed my men and women who were to wait at dinner, I retired to

collect myself before the company came. A whiff of?you know what, and a turn at a certain book which I have had occasion to mention in these pages, composed me, body and mind. I was aroused from what I am inclined to think must have been, not a nap, but a reverie, by the clatter of horses? hoofs outside; and, going to the door, received a cavalcade comprising Mr. Franklin and his three cousins, escorted by one of old Mr. Ablewhite?s grooms.

Mr. Godfrey struck me, strangely enough, as being like Mr. Franklin in this respect?that he did not seem to be in his customary spirits. He kindly shook hands with me as usual, and was most politely glad to see his old friend Betteredge wearing so well. But there was a sort of cloud over him, which I couldn?t at all account for; and when I asked how he had found his father in health, he answered rather shortly, ?Much as usual.? However, the two Miss Ablewhites were cheerful enough for twenty, which more than restored the balance. They were nearly as big as their brother; spanking, yellow-haired, rosy lasses, overflowing with super-abundant flesh and blood; bursting from head to foot with health and spirits. The legs of the poor horses trembled with carrying them; and when they jumped from their saddles (without waiting to be helped), I declare they bounced on the ground as if they were made of india-rubber. Everything the Miss Ablewhites said began with a large O; everything they did was done with a bang; and they giggled and screamed, in season and out of season, on the smallest provocation. Bouncers?that?s what I call them.

Under cover of the noise made by the young ladies, I had an opportunity of saying a private word to Mr. Franklin in the hall.

?Have you got the Diamond safe, sir??

He nodded, and tapped the breast-pocket of his coat.

?Have you seen anything of the Indians??

?Not a glimpse.? With that answer, he asked for my lady, and, hearing she was in the small drawing-room, went there straight. The bell rang, before he had been a minute in the room, and Penelope was sent to tell Miss Rachel that Mr. Franklin Blake wanted to speak to her.

Crossing the hall, about half an hour afterwards, I was brought to a sudden standstill by an outbreak of screams from the small drawing-room. I can?t say I was at all alarmed; for I recognised in the screams the favourite large O of the Miss Ablewhites. However, I went in (on pretence of asking for instructions about the dinner) to discover whether anything serious had really happened.

There stood Miss Rachel at the table, like a person fascinated, with the Colonel?s unlucky Diamond in her hand. There, on either side of her, knelt the two Bouncers, devouring the jewel with their eyes, and screaming with ecstasy every time it flashed on them in a new light. There, at the opposite side of the table, stood Mr. Godfrey, clapping his hands like a large child, and singing out softly, ?Exquisite! exquisite!? There sat Mr. Franklin in a chair by the bookcase, tugging

at his beard, and looking anxiously towards the window. And there, at the window, stood the object he was contemplating?my lady, having the extract from the Colonel?s Will in her hand, and keeping her back turned on the whole of the company.

She faced me, when I asked for my instructions; and I saw the family frown gathering over her eyes, and the family temper twitching at the corners of her mouth.

?Come to my room in half an hour,? she answered. ?I shall have something to say to you then.?

With those words, she went out. It was plain enough that she was posed by the same difficulty which had posed Mr. Franklin and me in our conference at the Shivering Sand. Was the legacy of the Moonstone a proof that she had treated her brother with cruel injustice? or was it a proof that he was worse than the worst she had ever thought of him? Serious questions those for my lady to determine, while her daughter, innocent of all knowledge of the Colonel?s character, stood there with the Colonel?s birthday gift in her hand.

Before I could leave the room in my turn, Miss Rachel, always considerate to the old servant who had been in the house when she was born, stopped me. ?Look, Gabriel!? she said, and flashed the jewel before my eyes in a ray of sunlight that poured through the window.

Lord bless us! it was a Diamond! As large, or nearly, as a plover?s egg! The light that streamed from it was like the light of the harvest moon. When you looked down into the stone, you looked into a yellow deep that drew your eyes into it so that they saw nothing else. It seemed unfathomable; this jewel, that you could hold between your finger and thumb, seemed unfathomable as the heavens themselves. We set it in the sun, and then shut the light out of the room, and it shone awfully out of the depths of its own brightness, with a moony gleam, in the dark. No wonder Miss Rachel was fascinated: no wonder her cousins screamed. The Diamond laid such a hold on me that I burst out with as large an ?O? as the Bouncers themselves. The only one of us who kept his senses was Mr. Godfrey. He put an arm round each of his sisters? waists, and, looking compassionately backwards and forwards between the Diamond and me, said, ?Carbon, Betteredge! mere carbon, my good friend, after all!?

His object, I suppose, was to instruct me. All he did, however, was to remind me of the dinner. I hobbled off to my army of waiters downstairs. As I went out, Mr. Godfrey said, ?Dear old Betteredge, I have the truest regard for him!? He was embracing his sisters, and ogling Miss Rachel, while he honoured me with that testimony of affection. Something like a stock of love to draw on there! Mr. Franklin was a perfect savage by comparison with him.

At the end of half an hour, I presented myself, as directed, in my lady?s room.

What passed between my mistress and me, on this occasion, was, in the

main, a repetition of what had passed between Mr. Franklin and me at the Shivering Sand?with this difference, that I took care to keep my own counsel about the jugglers, seeing that nothing had happened to justify me in alarming my lady on this head. When I received my dismissal, I could see that she took the blackest view possible of the Colonel?s motives, and that she was bent on getting the Moonstone out of her daughter?s possession at the first opportunity.

On my way back to my own part of the house, I was encountered by Mr. Franklin. He wanted to know if I had seen anything of his cousin Rachel. I had seen nothing of her. Could I tell him where his cousin Godfrey was? I didn?t know; but I began to suspect that cousin Godfrey might not be far away from cousin Rachel. Mr. Franklin?s suspicions apparently took the same turn. He tugged hard at his beard, and went and shut himself up in the library with a bang of the door that had a world of meaning in it.

I was interrupted no more in the business of preparing for the birthday dinner till it was time for me to smarten myself up for receiving the company. Just as I had got my white waistcoat on, Penelope presented herself at my toilet, on pretence of brushing what little hair I have got left, and improving the tie of my white cravat. My girl was in high spirits, and I saw she had something to say to me. She gave me a kiss on the top of my bald head, and whispered, ?News for you, father! Miss Rachel has refused him.?

?Who?s ?_him_?? I asked.

?The ladies? committee-man, father,? says Penelope. ?A nasty sly fellow! I hate him for trying to supplant Mr. Franklin!?

If I had had breath enough, I should certainly have protested against this indecent way of speaking of an eminent philanthropic character. But my daughter happened to be improving the tie of my cravat at that moment, and the whole strength of her feelings found its way into her fingers. I never was more nearly strangled in my life.

?I saw him take her away alone into the rose-garden,? says Penelope. ?And I waited behind the holly to see how they came back. They had gone out arm-in-arm, both laughing. They came back, walking separate, as grave as grave could be, and looking straight away from each other in a manner which there was no mistaking. I never was more delighted, father, in my life! There?s one woman in the world who can resist Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite, at any rate; and, if I was a lady, I should be another!?

Here I should have protested again. But my daughter had got the hair-brush by this time, and the whole strength of her feelings had passed into _that_. If you are bald, you will understand how she sacrificed me. If you are not, skip this bit, and thank God you have got something in the way of a defence between your hair-brush and your head.

?Just on the other side of the holly,? Penelope went on, ?Mr. Godfrey

came to a standstill. "You prefer," says he, "that I should stop here as if nothing had happened?" Miss Rachel turned on him like lightning. "You have accepted my mother's invitation," she said; "and you are here to meet her guests. Unless you wish to make a scandal in the house, you will remain, of course!" She went on a few steps, and then seemed to relent a little. "Let us forget what has passed, Godfrey," she said, "and let us remain cousins still." She gave him her hand. He kissed it, which I should have considered taking a liberty, and then she left him. He waited a little by himself, with his head down, and his heel grinding a hole slowly in the gravel walk; you never saw a man look more put out in your life. "Awkward!" he said between his teeth, when he looked up, and went on to the house?"very awkward!" If that was his opinion of himself, he was quite right. Awkward enough, I'm sure. And the end of it is, father, what I told you all along," cries Penelope, finishing me off with a last scarification, the hottest of all. "Mr. Franklin's the man!"

I got possession of the hair-brush, and opened my lips to administer the reproof which, you will own, my daughter's language and conduct richly deserved.

Before I could say a word, the crash of carriage-wheels outside struck in, and stopped me. The first of the dinner-company had come. Penelope instantly ran off. I put on my coat, and looked in the glass. My head was as red as a lobster; but, in other respects, I was as nicely dressed for the ceremonies of the evening as a man need be. I got into the hall just in time to announce the two first of the guests. You needn't feel particularly interested about them. Only the philanthropist's father and mother?Mr. and Mrs. Ablewhite.

CHAPTER X

One on the top of the other the rest of the company followed the Ablewhites, till we had the whole tale of them complete. Including the family, they were twenty-four in all. It was a noble sight to see, when they were settled in their places round the dinner-table, and the Rector of Frizinghall (with beautiful elocution) rose and said grace.

There is no need to worry you with a list of the guests. You will meet none of them a second time?in my part of the story, at any rate?with the exception of two.

Those two sat on either side of Miss Rachel, who, as queen of the day, was naturally the great attraction of the party. On this occasion she was more particularly the centre-point towards which everybody's eyes were directed; for (to my lady's secret annoyance) she wore her wonderful birthday present, which eclipsed all the rest?the Moonstone. It was without any setting when it had been placed in her hands; but that universal genius, Mr. Franklin, had contrived, with the help of his neat fingers and a little bit of silver wire, to fix it as a brooch in the bosom of her white dress. Everybody wondered at the prodigious size and beauty of the Diamond, as a matter of course. But the only two of the company who said anything out of the common way about it were

those two guests I have mentioned, who sat by Miss Rachel on her right hand and her left.

The guest on her left was Mr. Candy, our doctor at Frizinghall.

This was a pleasant, companionable little man, with the drawback, however, I must own, of being too fond, in season and out of season, of his joke, and of his plunging in rather a headlong manner into talk with strangers, without waiting to feel his way first. In society, he was constantly making mistakes, and setting people unintentionally by the ears together. In his medical practice he was a more prudent man; picking up his discretion (as his enemies said) by a kind of instinct, and proving to be generally right where more carefully conducted doctors turned out to be wrong. What he said about the Diamond to Miss Rachel was said, as usual, by way of a mystification or joke. He gravely entreated her (in the interests of science) to let him take it home and burn it. "We will first heat it, Miss Rachel," says the doctor, "to such and such a degree; then we will expose it to a current of air; and, little by little, puff! we evaporate the Diamond, and spare you a world of anxiety about the safe keeping of a valuable precious stone!" My lady, listening with rather a careworn expression on her face, seemed to wish that the doctor had been in earnest, and that he could have found Miss Rachel zealous enough in the cause of science to sacrifice her birthday gift.

The other guest, who sat on my young lady's right hand, was an eminent public character, being no other than the celebrated Indian traveller, Mr. Murthwaite, who, at risk of his life, had penetrated in disguise where no European had ever set foot before.

This was a long, lean, wiry, brown, silent man. He had a weary look, and a very steady, attentive eye. It was rumoured that he was tired of the humdrum life among the people in our parts, and longing to go back and wander off on the tramp again in the wild places of the East. Except what he said to Miss Rachel about her jewel, I doubt if he spoke six words or drank so much as a single glass of wine, all through the dinner. The Moonstone was the only object that interested him in the smallest degree. The fame of it seemed to have reached him, in some of those perilous Indian places where his wanderings had lain. After looking at it silently for so long a time that Miss Rachel began to get confused, he said to her in his cool immovable way, "If you ever go to India, Miss Verinder, don't take your uncle's birthday gift with you. A Hindoo diamond is sometimes part of a Hindoo religion. I know a certain city, and a certain temple in that city, where, dressed as you are now, your life would not be worth five minutes' purchase." Miss Rachel, safe in England, was quite delighted to hear of her danger in India. The Bouncers were more delighted still; they dropped their knives and forks with a crash, and burst out together vehemently, "O! how interesting!" My lady fidgeted in her chair, and changed the subject.

As the dinner got on, I became aware, little by little, that this festival was not prospering as other like festivals had prospered before it.

Looking back at the birthday now, by the light of what happened afterwards, I am half inclined to think that the cursed Diamond must have cast a blight on the whole company. I plied them well with wine; and being a privileged character, followed the unpopular dishes round the table, and whispered to the company confidentially, "Please to change your mind and try it; for I know it will do you good." Nine times out of ten they changed their minds—out of regard for their old original Betteredge, they were pleased to say—but all to no purpose. There were gaps of silence in the talk, as the dinner got on, that made me feel personally uncomfortable. When they did use their tongues again, they used them innocently, in the most unfortunate manner and to the worst possible purpose. Mr. Candy, the doctor, for instance, said more unlucky things than I ever knew him to say before. Take one sample of the way in which he went on, and you will understand what I had to put up with at the sideboard, officiating as I was in the character of a man who had the prosperity of the festival at heart.

One of our ladies present at dinner was worthy Mrs. Threadgall, widow of the late Professor of that name. Talking of her deceased husband perpetually, this good lady never mentioned to strangers that he was deceased. She thought, I suppose, that every able-bodied adult in England ought to know as much as that. In one of the gaps of silence, somebody mentioned the dry and rather nasty subject of human anatomy; whereupon good Mrs. Threadgall straightway brought in her late husband as usual, without mentioning that he was dead. Anatomy she described as the Professor's favourite recreation in his leisure hours. As ill-luck would have it, Mr. Candy, sitting opposite (who knew nothing of the deceased gentleman), heard her. Being the most polite of men, he seized the opportunity of assisting the Professor's anatomical amusements on the spot.

"They have got some remarkably fine skeletons lately at the College of Surgeons," says Mr. Candy, across the table, in a loud cheerful voice. "I strongly recommend the Professor, ma'am, when he next has an hour to spare, to pay them a visit."

You might have heard a pin fall. The company (out of respect to the Professor's memory) all sat speechless. I was behind Mrs. Threadgall at the time, plying her confidentially with a glass of hock. She dropped her head, and said in a very low voice, "My beloved husband is no more."

Unluckily Mr. Candy, hearing nothing, and miles away from suspecting the truth, went on across the table louder and politer than ever.

"The Professor may not be aware," says he, "that the card of a member of the College will admit him, on any day but Sunday, between the hours of ten and four."

Mrs. Threadgall dropped her head right into her tucker, and, in a lower voice still, repeated the solemn words, "My beloved husband is no more."

I winked hard at Mr. Candy across the table. Miss Rachel touched his

arm. My lady looked unutterable things at him. Quite useless! On he went, with a cordiality that there was no stopping anyhow. 'I shall be delighted,' says he, 'to send the Professor my card, if you will oblige me by mentioning his present address.'

'His present address, sir, is _the grave_,' says Mrs. Threadgall, suddenly losing her temper, and speaking with an emphasis and fury that made the glasses ring again. 'The Professor has been dead these ten years.'

'Oh, good Heavens!' says Mr. Candy. Excepting the Bouncers, who burst out laughing, such a blank now fell on the company, that they might all have been going the way of the Professor, and hailing as he did from the direction of the grave.

So much for Mr. Candy. The rest of them were nearly as provoking in their different ways as the doctor himself. When they ought to have spoken, they didn't speak; or when they did speak they were perpetually at cross purposes. Mr. Godfrey, though so eloquent in public, declined to exert himself in private. Whether he was sulky, or whether he was bashful, after his discomfiture in the rose-garden, I can't say. He kept all his talk for the private ear of the lady (a member of our family) who sat next to him. She was one of his committee-women—a spiritually-minded person, with a fine show of collar-bone and a pretty taste in champagne; liked it dry, you understand, and plenty of it. Being close behind these two at the sideboard, I can testify, from what I heard pass between them, that the company lost a good deal of very improving conversation, which I caught up while drawing the corks, and carving the mutton, and so forth. What they said about their Charities I didn't hear. When I had time to listen to them, they had got a long way beyond their women to be confined, and their women to be rescued, and were disputing on serious subjects. Religion (I understand Mr. Godfrey to say, between the corks and the carving) meant love. And love meant religion. And earth was heaven a little the worse for wear. And heaven was earth, done up again to look like new. Earth had some very objectionable people in it; but, to make amends for that, all the women in heaven would be members of a prodigious committee that never quarrelled, with all the men in attendance on them as ministering angels. Beautiful! beautiful! But why the mischief did Mr. Godfrey keep it all to his lady and himself?

Mr. Franklin again?surely, you will say, Mr. Franklin stirred the company up into making a pleasant evening of it?

Nothing of the sort! He had quite recovered himself, and he was in wonderful force and spirits, Penelope having informed him, I suspect, of Mr. Godfrey's reception in the rose-garden. But, talk as he might, nine times out of ten he pitched on the wrong subject, or he addressed himself to the wrong person; the end of it being that he offended some, and puzzled all of them. That foreign training of his—those French and German and Italian sides of him, to which I have already alluded—came out, at my lady's hospitable board, in a most bewildering manner.

What do you think, for instance, of his discussing the lengths to which

a married woman might let her admiration go for a man who was not her husband, and putting it in his clear-headed witty French way to the maiden aunt of the Vicar of Frizinghall? What do you think, when he shifted to the German side, of his telling the lord of the manor, while that great authority on cattle was quoting his experience in the breeding of bulls, that experience, properly understood, counted for nothing, and that the proper way to breed bulls was to look deep into your own mind, evolve out of it the idea of a perfect bull, and produce him? What do you say, when our county member, growing hot, at cheese and salad time, about the spread of democracy in England, burst out as follows: 'If we once lose our ancient safeguards, Mr. Blake, I beg to ask you, what have we got left???' what do you say to Mr. Franklin answering, from the Italian point of view: 'We have got three things left, sir? Love, Music, and Salad??' He not only terrified the company with such outbreaks as these, but, when the English side of him turned up in due course, he lost his foreign smoothness; and, getting on the subject of the medical profession, said such downright things in ridicule of doctors, that he actually put good-humoured little Mr. Candy in a rage.

The dispute between them began in Mr. Franklin being led? I forget how? to acknowledge that he had latterly slept very badly at night. Mr. Candy thereupon told him that his nerves were all out of order and that he ought to go through a course of medicine immediately. Mr. Franklin replied that a course of medicine, and a course of groping in the dark, meant, in his estimation, one and the same thing. Mr. Candy, hitting back smartly, said that Mr. Franklin himself was, constitutionally speaking, groping in the dark after sleep, and that nothing but medicine could help him to find it. Mr. Franklin, keeping the ball up on his side, said he had often heard of the blind leading the blind, and now, for the first time, he knew what it meant. In this way, they kept it going briskly, cut and thrust, till they both of them got hot? Mr. Candy, in particular, so completely losing his self-control, in defence of his profession, that my lady was obliged to interfere, and forbid the dispute to go on. This necessary act of authority put the last extinguisher on the spirits of the company. The talk spurted up again here and there, for a minute or two at a time; but there was a miserable lack of life and sparkle in it. The Devil (or the Diamond) possessed that dinner-party; and it was a relief to everybody when my mistress rose, and gave the ladies the signal to leave the gentlemen over their wine.

I had just ranged the decanters in a row before old Mr. Ablewhite (who represented the master of the house), when there came a sound from the terrace which startled me out of my company manners on the instant. Mr. Franklin and I looked at each other; it was the sound of the Indian drum. As I live by bread, here were the jugglers returning to us with the return of the Moonstone to the house!

As they rounded the corner of the terrace, and came in sight, I hobbled out to warn them off. But, as ill-luck would have it, the two Bouncers were beforehand with me. They whizzed out on to the terrace like a couple of skyrockets, wild to see the Indians exhibit their tricks. The other ladies followed; the gentlemen came out on their side. Before you

could say, 'Lord bless us!' the rogues were making their salaams; and the Bouncers were kissing the pretty little boy.

Mr. Franklin got on one side of Miss Rachel, and I put myself behind her. If our suspicions were right, there she stood, innocent of all knowledge of the truth, showing the Indians the Diamond in the bosom of her dress!

I can't tell you what tricks they performed, or how they did it. What with the vexation about the dinner, and what with the provocation of the rogues coming back just in the nick of time to see the jewel with their own eyes, I own I lost my head. The first thing that I remember noticing was the sudden appearance on the scene of the Indian traveller, Mr. Murthwaite. Skirting the half-circle in which the gentlefolks stood or sat, he came quietly behind the jugglers and spoke to them on a sudden in the language of their own country.

If he had pricked them with a bayonet, I doubt if the Indians could have started and turned on him with a more tigerish quickness than they did, on hearing the first words that passed his lips. The next moment they were bowing and salaaming to him in their most polite and snaky way. After a few words in the unknown tongue had passed on either side, Mr. Murthwaite withdrew as quietly as he had approached. The chief Indian, who acted as interpreter, thereupon wheeled about again towards the gentlefolks. I noticed that the fellow's coffee-coloured face had turned grey since Mr. Murthwaite had spoken to him. He bowed to my lady, and informed her that the exhibition was over. The Bouncers, indescribably disappointed, burst out with a loud 'O!' directed against Mr. Murthwaite for stopping the performance. The chief Indian laid his hand humbly on his breast, and said a second time that the juggling was over. The little boy went round with the hat. The ladies withdrew to the drawing-room; and the gentlemen (excepting Mr. Franklin and Mr. Murthwaite) returned to their wine. I and the footman followed the Indians, and saw them safe off the premises.

Going back by way of the shrubbery, I smelt tobacco, and found Mr. Franklin and Mr. Murthwaite (the latter smoking a cheroot) walking slowly up and down among the trees. Mr. Franklin beckoned to me to join them.

'This,' says Mr. Franklin, presenting me to the great traveller, 'is Gabriel Betteredge, the old servant and friend of our family of whom I spoke to you just now. Tell him, if you please, what you have just told me.'

Mr. Murthwaite took his cheroot out of his mouth, and leaned, in his weary way, against the trunk of a tree.

'Mr. Betteredge,' he began, 'those three Indians are no more jugglers than you and I are.'

Here was a new surprise! I naturally asked the traveller if he had ever met with the Indians before.

‘Never,’ says Mr. Murthwaite; ‘but I know what Indian juggling really is. All you have seen tonight is a very bad and clumsy imitation of it. Unless, after long experience, I am utterly mistaken, those men are high-caste Brahmins. I charged them with being disguised, and you saw how it told on them, clever as the Hindoo people are in concealing their feelings. There is a mystery about their conduct that I can’t explain. They have doubly sacrificed their caste—first, in crossing the sea; secondly, in disguising themselves as jugglers. In the land they live in that is a tremendous sacrifice to make. There must be some very serious motive at the bottom of it, and some justification of no ordinary kind to plead for them, in recovery of their caste, when they return to their own country.’

I was struck dumb. Mr. Murthwaite went on with his cheroot. Mr. Franklin, after what looked to me like a little private veering about between the different sides of his character, broke the silence as follows:

‘I feel some hesitation, Mr. Murthwaite, in troubling you with family matters, in which you can have no interest and which I am not very willing to speak of out of our own circle. But, after what you have said, I feel bound, in the interests of Lady Verinder and her daughter, to tell you something which may possibly put the clue into your hands. I speak to you in confidence; you will oblige me, I am sure, by not forgetting that?’

With this preface, he told the Indian traveller all that he had told me at the Shivering Sand. Even the immovable Mr. Murthwaite was so interested in what he heard, that he let his cheroot go out.

‘Now,’ says Mr. Franklin, when he had done, ‘what does your experience say?’

‘My experience,’ answered the traveller, ‘says that you have had more narrow escapes of your life, Mr. Franklin Blake, than I have had of mine; and that is saying a great deal.’

It was Mr. Franklin’s turn to be astonished now.

‘Is it really as serious as that?’ he asked.

‘In my opinion it is,’ answered Mr. Murthwaite. ‘I can’t doubt, after what you have told me, that the restoration of the Moonstone to its place on the forehead of the Indian idol, is the motive and the justification of that sacrifice of caste which I alluded to just now. Those men will wait their opportunity with the patience of cats, and will use it with the ferocity of tigers. How you have escaped them I can’t imagine,’ says the eminent traveller, lighting his cheroot again, and staring hard at Mr. Franklin. ‘You have been carrying the Diamond backwards and forwards, here and in London, and you are still a living man! Let us try and account for it. It was daylight, both times, I suppose, when you took the jewel out of the bank in London?’

‘Broad daylight,’ says Mr. Franklin.

?And plenty of people in the streets??

?Plenty.?

?You settled, of course, to arrive at Lady Verinder?s house at a certain time? It?s a lonely country between this and the station. Did you keep your appointment??

?No. I arrived four hours earlier than my appointment.?

?I beg to congratulate you on that proceeding! When did you take the Diamond to the bank at the town here??

?I took it an hour after I had brought it to this house?and three hours before anybody was prepared for seeing me in these parts.?

?I beg to congratulate you again! Did you bring it back here alone??

?No. I happened to ride back with my cousins and the groom.?

?I beg to congratulate you for the third time! If you ever feel inclined to travel beyond the civilised limits, Mr. Blake, let me know, and I will go with you. You are a lucky man.?

Here I struck in. This sort of thing didn?t at all square with my English ideas.

?You don?t really mean to say, sir,? I asked, ?that they would have taken Mr. Franklin?s life, to get their Diamond, if he had given them the chance??

?Do you smoke, Mr. Betteredge?? says the traveller.

?Yes, sir.

?Do you care much for the ashes left in your pipe when you empty it??

?No, sir.?

?In the country those men came from, they care just as much about killing a man, as you care about emptying the ashes out of your pipe. If a thousand lives stood between them and the getting back of their Diamond?and if they thought they could destroy those lives without discovery?they would take them all. The sacrifice of caste is a serious thing in India, if you like. The sacrifice of life is nothing at all.?

I expressed my opinion upon this, that they were a set of murdering thieves. Mr. Murthwaite expressed his opinion that they were a wonderful people. Mr. Franklin, expressing no opinion at all, brought us back to the matter in hand.

?They have seen the Moonstone on Miss Verinder?s dress,? he said. ?What is to be done??

‘What your uncle threatened to do,’ answered Mr. Murthwaite. ‘Colonel Herncastle understood the people he had to deal with. Send the Diamond tomorrow (under guard of more than one man) to be cut up at Amsterdam. Make half a dozen diamonds of it, instead of one. There is an end of its sacred identity as The Moonstone—and there is an end of the conspiracy.’

Mr. Franklin turned to me.

‘There is no help for it,’ he said. ‘We must speak to Lady Verinder tomorrow.’

‘What about tonight, sir?’ I asked. ‘Suppose the Indians come back?’

Mr. Murthwaite answered me before Mr. Franklin could speak.

‘The Indians won’t risk coming back tonight,’ he said. ‘The direct way is hardly ever the way they take to anything—let alone a matter like this, in which the slightest mistake might be fatal to their reaching their end.’

‘But suppose the rogues are bolder than you think, sir?’ I persisted.

‘In that case,’ says Mr. Murthwaite, ‘let the dogs loose. Have you got any big dogs in the yard?’

‘Two, sir. A mastiff and a bloodhound.’

‘They will do. In the present emergency, Mr. Betteredge, the mastiff and the bloodhound have one great merit—they are not likely to be troubled with your scruples about the sanctity of human life.’

The strumming of the piano reached us from the drawing-room, as he fired that shot at me. He threw away his cheroot, and took Mr. Franklin’s arm, to go back to the ladies. I noticed that the sky was clouding over fast, as I followed them to the house. Mr. Murthwaite noticed it too. He looked round at me, in his dry, droning way, and said:

‘The Indians will want their umbrellas, Mr. Betteredge, tonight!’

It was all very well for him to joke. But I was not an eminent traveller—and my way in this world had not led me into playing ducks and drakes with my own life, among thieves and murderers in the outlandish places of the earth. I went into my own little room, and sat down in my chair in a perspiration, and wondered helplessly what was to be done next. In this anxious frame of mind, other men might have ended by working themselves up into a fever; I ended in a different way. I lit my pipe, and took a turn at Robinson Crusoe.

Before I had been at it five minutes, I came to this amazing bit—page one hundred and sixty-one—as follows:

?Fear of Danger is ten thousand times more terrifying than Danger itself, when apparent to the Eyes; and we find the Burthen of Anxiety greater, by much, than the Evil which we are anxious about.?

The man who doesn't believe in *Robinson Crusoe*, after *that*, is a man with a screw loose in his understanding, or a man lost in the mist of his own self-conceit! Argument is thrown away upon him; and pity is better reserved for some person with a livelier faith.

I was far on with my second pipe, and still lost in admiration of that wonderful book, when Penelope (who had been handing round the tea) came in with her report from the drawing-room. She had left the Bouncers singing a duet?words beginning with a large *O*,? and music to correspond. She had observed that my lady made mistakes in her game of whist for the first time in our experience of her. She had seen the great traveller asleep in a corner. She had overheard Mr. Franklin sharpening his wits on Mr. Godfrey, at the expense of Ladies' Charities in general; and she had noticed that Mr. Godfrey hit him back again rather more smartly than became a gentleman of his benevolent character. She had detected Miss Rachel, apparently engaged in appeasing Mrs. Threadgall by showing her some photographs, and really occupied in stealing looks at Mr. Franklin, which no intelligent lady's maid could misinterpret for a single instant. Finally, she had missed Mr. Candy, the doctor, who had mysteriously disappeared from the drawing-room, and had then mysteriously returned, and entered into conversation with Mr. Godfrey. Upon the whole, things were prospering better than the experience of the dinner gave us any right to expect. If we could only hold on for another hour, old Father Time would bring up their carriages, and relieve us of them altogether.

Everything wears off in this world; and even the comforting effect of *Robinson Crusoe* wore off, after Penelope left me. I got fidgety again, and resolved on making a survey of the grounds before the rain came. Instead of taking the footman, whose nose was human, and therefore useless in any emergency, I took the bloodhound with me. *His* nose for a stranger was to be depended on. We went all round the premises, and out into the road?and returned as wise as we went, having discovered no such thing as a lurking human creature anywhere.

The arrival of the carriages was the signal for the arrival of the rain. It poured as if it meant to pour all night. With the exception of the doctor, whose gig was waiting for him, the rest of the company went home snugly, under cover, in close carriages. I told Mr. Candy that I was afraid he would get wet through. He told me, in return, that he wondered I had arrived at my time of life, without knowing that a doctor's skin was waterproof. So he drove away in the rain, laughing over his own little joke; and so we got rid of our dinner company.

The next thing to tell is the story of the night.

CHAPTER XI

When the last of the guests had driven away, I went back into the inner

hall and found Samuel at the side-table, presiding over the brandy and soda water. My lady and Miss Rachel came out of the drawing-room, followed by the two gentlemen. Mr. Godfrey had some brandy and soda water, Mr. Franklin took nothing. He sat down, looking dead tired; the talking on this birthday occasion had, I suppose, been too much for him.

My lady, turning round to wish them good-night, looked hard at the wicked Colonel's legacy shining in her daughter's dress.

"Rachel," she asked, "where are you going to put your Diamond tonight?"

Miss Rachel was in high good spirits, just in that humour for talking nonsense, and perversely persisting in it as if it was sense, which you may sometimes have observed in young girls, when they are highly wrought up, at the end of an exciting day. First, she declared she didn't know where to put the Diamond. Then she said, "on her dressing-table, of course, along with her other things." Then she remembered that the Diamond might take to shining of itself, with its awful moony light in the dark—and that would terrify her in the dead of night. Then she bethought herself of an Indian cabinet which stood in her sitting-room; and instantly made up her mind to put the Indian diamond in the Indian cabinet, for the purpose of permitting two beautiful native productions to admire each other. Having let her little flow of nonsense run on as far as that point, her mother interposed and stopped her.

"My dear! your Indian cabinet has no lock to it," says my lady.

"Good Heavens, mamma!" cried Miss Rachel, "is this an hotel? Are there thieves in the house?"

Without taking notice of this fantastic way of talking, my lady wished the gentlemen good-night. She next turned to Miss Rachel, and kissed her. "Why not let me keep the Diamond for you tonight?" she asked.

Miss Rachel received that proposal as she might, ten years since, have received a proposal to part her from a new doll. My lady saw there was no reasoning with her that night. "Come into my room, Rachel, the first thing tomorrow morning," she said. "I shall have something to say to you." With those last words she left us slowly; thinking her own thoughts, and, to all appearance, not best pleased with the way by which they were leading her.

Miss Rachel was the next to say good-night. She shook hands first with Mr. Godfrey, who was standing at the other end of the hall, looking at a picture. Then she turned back to Mr. Franklin, still sitting weary and silent in a corner.

What words passed between them I can't say. But standing near the old oak frame which holds our large looking-glass, I saw her reflected in it, slyly slipping the locket which Mr. Franklin had given to her, out of the bosom of her dress, and showing it to him for a moment, with a smile which certainly meant something out of the common, before she

tripped off to bed. This incident staggered me a little in the reliance I had previously felt on my own judgment. I began to think that Penelope might be right about the state of her young lady's affections, after all.

As soon as Miss Rachel left him eyes to see with, Mr. Franklin noticed me. His variable humour, shifting about everything, had shifted about the Indians already.

'Betteredge,' he said, 'I'm half inclined to think I took Mr. Murthwaite too seriously, when we had that talk in the shrubbery. I wonder whether he has been trying any of his traveller's tales on us? Do you really mean to let the dogs loose??

'I'll relieve them of their collars, sir,' I answered, 'and leave them free to take a turn in the night, if they smell a reason for it.'

'All right,' says Mr. Franklin. 'We'll see what is to be done tomorrow. I am not at all disposed to alarm my aunt, Betteredge, without a very pressing reason for it. Good-night.'

He looked so worn and pale as he nodded to me, and took his candle to go upstairs, that I ventured to advise his having a drop of brandy-and-water, by way of night-cap. Mr. Godfrey, walking towards us from the other end of the hall, backed me. He pressed Mr. Franklin, in the friendliest manner, to take something, before he went to bed.

I only note these trifling circumstances, because, after all I had seen and heard, that day, it pleased me to observe that our two gentlemen were on just as good terms as ever. Their warfare of words (heard by Penelope in the drawing-room), and their rivalry for the best place in Miss Rachel's good graces, seemed to have set no serious difference between them. But there! they were both good-tempered, and both men of the world. And there is certainly this merit in people of station, that they are not nearly so quarrelsome among each other as people of no station at all.

Mr. Franklin declined the brandy-and-water, and went upstairs with Mr. Godfrey, their rooms being next door to each other. On the landing, however, either his cousin persuaded him, or he veered about and changed his mind as usual. 'Perhaps I may want it in the night,' he called down to me. 'Send up some brandy-and-water into my room.'

I sent up Samuel with the brandy-and-water; and then went out and unbuckled the dogs' collars. They both lost their heads with astonishment on being set loose at that time of night, and jumped upon me like a couple of puppies! However, the rain soon cooled them down again: they lapped a drop of water each, and crept back into their kennels. As I went into the house, I noticed signs in the sky which betokened a break in the weather for the better. For the present, it still poured heavily, and the ground was in a perfect sop.

Samuel and I went all over the house, and shut up as usual. I examined everything myself, and trusted nothing to my deputy on this occasion.

All was safe and fast when I rested my old bones in bed, between midnight and one in the morning.

The worries of the day had been a little too much for me, I suppose. At any rate, I had a touch of Mr. Franklin's malady that night. It was sunrise before I fell off at last into a sleep. All the time I lay awake the house was as quiet as the grave. Not a sound stirred but the splash of the rain, and the sighing of the wind among the trees as a breeze sprang up with the morning.

About half-past seven I woke, and opened my window on a fine sunshiny day. The clock had struck eight, and I was just going out to chain up the dogs again, when I heard a sudden whisking of petticoats on the stairs behind me.

I turned about, and there was Penelope flying down after me like mad. 'Father!' she screamed, 'come upstairs, for God's sake! _The Diamond is gone!_'

'Are you out of your mind?' I asked her.

'Gone!' says Penelope. 'Gone, nobody knows how! Come up and see.'

She dragged me after her into our young lady's sitting-room, which opened into her bedroom. There, on the threshold of her bedroom door, stood Miss Rachel, almost as white in the face as the white dressing-gown that clothed her. There also stood the two doors of the Indian cabinet, wide open. One of the drawers inside was pulled out as far as it would go.

'Look!' says Penelope. 'I myself saw Miss Rachel put the Diamond into that drawer last night.' I went to the cabinet. The drawer was empty.

'Is this true, miss?' I asked.

With a look that was not like herself, with a voice that was not like her own, Miss Rachel answered as my daughter had answered:

'The Diamond is gone!'

Having said those words, she withdrew into her bedroom, and shut and locked the door.

Before we knew which way to turn next, my lady came in, hearing my voice in her daughter's sitting-room, and wondering what had happened. The news of the loss of the Diamond seemed to petrify her. She went straight to Miss Rachel's bedroom, and insisted on being admitted. Miss Rachel let her in.

The alarm, running through the house like fire, caught the two gentlemen next.

Mr. Godfrey was the first to come out of his room. All he did when he

heard what had happened was to hold up his hands in a state of bewilderment, which didn't say much for his natural strength of mind. Mr. Franklin, whose clear head I had confidently counted on to advise us, seemed to be as helpless as his cousin when he heard the news in his turn. For a wonder, he had had a good night's rest at last; and the unaccustomed luxury of sleep had, as he said himself, apparently stupefied him. However, when he had swallowed his cup of coffee—which he always took, on the foreign plan, some hours before he ate any breakfast—his brains brightened; the clear-headed side of him turned up, and he took the matter in hand, resolutely and cleverly, much as follows:

He first sent for the servants, and told them to leave all the lower doors and windows (with the exception of the front door, which I had opened) exactly as they had been left when we locked up over night. He next proposed to his cousin and to me to make quite sure, before we took any further steps, that the Diamond had not accidentally dropped somewhere out of sight—say at the back of the cabinet, or down behind the table on which the cabinet stood. Having searched in both places, and found nothing—having also questioned Penelope, and discovered from her no more than the little she had already told me—Mr. Franklin suggested next extending our inquiries to Miss Rachel, and sent Penelope to knock at her bedroom door.

My lady answered the knock, and closed the door behind her. The moment after we heard it locked inside by Miss Rachel. My mistress came out among us, looking sorely puzzled and distressed. "The loss of the Diamond seems to have quite overwhelmed Rachel," she said, in reply to Mr. Franklin. "She shrinks, in the strangest manner, from speaking of it, even to me. It is impossible you can see her for the present."

Having added to our perplexities by this account of Miss Rachel, my lady, after a little effort, recovered her usual composure, and acted with her usual decision.

"I suppose there is no help for it?" she said, quietly. "I suppose I have no alternative but to send for the police?"

"And the first thing for the police to do," added Mr. Franklin, catching her up, "is to lay hands on the Indian jugglers who performed here last night."

My lady and Mr. Godfrey (not knowing what Mr. Franklin and I knew) both started, and both looked surprised.

"I can't stop to explain myself now," Mr. Franklin went on. "I can only tell you that the Indians have certainly stolen the Diamond. Give me a letter of introduction," says he, addressing my lady, "to one of the magistrates at Frizinghall—merely telling him that I represent your interests and wishes, and let me ride off with it instantly. Our chance of catching the thieves may depend on our not wasting one unnecessary minute." (Nota bene: Whether it was the French side or the English, the right side of Mr. Franklin seemed to be uppermost now. The only question was, How long would it last?)

He put pen, ink, and paper before his aunt, who (as it appeared to me) wrote the letter he wanted a little unwillingly. If it had been possible to overlook such an event as the loss of a jewel worth twenty thousand pounds, I believe—with my lady's opinion of her late brother, and her distrust of his birthday-gift—it would have been privately a relief to her to let the thieves get off with the Moonstone scot free.

I went out with Mr. Franklin to the stables, and took the opportunity of asking him how the Indians (whom I suspected, of course, as shrewdly as he did) could possibly have got into the house.

“One of them might have slipped into the hall, in the confusion, when the dinner company were going away,” says Mr. Franklin. “The fellow may have been under the sofa while my aunt and Rachel were talking about where the Diamond was to be put for the night. He would only have to wait till the house was quiet, and there it would be in the cabinet, to be had for the taking.” With those words, he called to the groom to open the gate, and galloped off.

This seemed certainly to be the only rational explanation. But how had the thief contrived to make his escape from the house? I had found the front door locked and bolted, as I had left it at night, when I went to open it, after getting up. As for the other doors and windows, there they were still, all safe and fast, to speak for themselves. The dogs, too? Suppose the thief had got away by dropping from one of the upper windows, how had he escaped the dogs? Had he come provided for them with drugged meat? As the doubt crossed my mind, the dogs themselves came galloping at me round a corner, rolling each other over on the wet grass, in such lively health and spirits that it was with no small difficulty I brought them to reason, and chained them up again. The more I turned it over in my mind, the less satisfactory Mr. Franklin's explanation appeared to be.

We had our breakfasts—whatever happens in a house, robbery or murder, it doesn't matter, you must have your breakfast. When we had done, my lady sent for me; and I found myself compelled to tell her all that I had hitherto concealed, relating to the Indians and their plot. Being a woman of a high courage, she soon got over the first startling effect of what I had to communicate. Her mind seemed to be far more perturbed about her daughter than about the heathen rogues and their conspiracy. “You know how odd Rachel is, and how differently she behaves sometimes from other girls,” my lady said to me. “But I have never, in all my experience, seen her so strange and so reserved as she is now. The loss of her jewel seems almost to have turned her brain. Who would have thought that horrible Diamond could have laid such a hold on her in so short a time??”

It was certainly strange. Taking toys and trinkets in general, Miss Rachel was nothing like so mad after them as most young girls. Yet there she was, still locked up inconsolably in her bedroom. It is but fair to add that she was not the only one of us in the house who was thrown out of the regular groove. Mr. Godfrey, for instance—though professionally a sort of consoler-general—seemed to be at a loss where

to look for his own resources. Having no company to amuse him, and getting no chance of trying what his experience of women in distress could do towards comforting Miss Rachel, he wandered hither and thither about the house and gardens in an aimless uneasy way. He was in two different minds about what it became him to do, after the misfortune that had happened to us. Ought he to relieve the family, in their present situation, of the responsibility of him as a guest, or ought he to stay on the chance that even his humble services might be of some use? He decided ultimately that the last course was perhaps the most customary and considerate course to take, in such a very peculiar case of family distress as this was. Circumstances try the metal a man is really made of. Mr. Godfrey, tried by circumstances, showed himself of weaker metal than I had thought him to be. As for the women-servants excepting Rosanna Spearman, who kept by herself? they took to whispering together in corners, and staring at nothing suspiciously, as is the manner of that weaker half of the human family, when anything extraordinary happens in a house. I myself acknowledge to have been fidgety and ill-tempered. The cursed Moonstone had turned us all upside down.

A little before eleven Mr. Franklin came back. The resolute side of him had, to all appearance, given way, in the interval since his departure, under the stress that had been laid on it. He had left us at a gallop; he came back to us at a walk. When he went away, he was made of iron. When he returned, he was stuffed with cotton, as limp as limp could be.

?Well,? says my lady, ?are the police coming??

?Yes,? says Mr. Franklin; ?they said they would follow me in a fly. Superintendent Seegrave, of your local police force, and two of his men. A mere form! The case is hopeless.?

?What! have the Indians escaped, sir?? I asked.

?The poor ill-used Indians have been most unjustly put in prison,? says Mr. Franklin. ?They are as innocent as the babe unborn. My idea that one of them was hidden in the house has ended, like all the rest of my ideas, in smoke. It?s been proved,? says Mr. Franklin, dwelling with great relish on his own incapacity, ?to be simply impossible.?

After astonishing us by announcing this totally new turn in the matter of the Moonstone, our young gentleman, at his aunt?s request, took a seat, and explained himself.

It appeared that the resolute side of him had held out as far as Frizinghall. He had put the whole case plainly before the magistrate, and the magistrate had at once sent for the police. The first inquiries instituted about the Indians showed that they had not so much as attempted to leave the town. Further questions addressed to the police, proved that all three had been seen returning to Frizinghall with their boy, on the previous night between ten and eleven?which (regard being had to hours and distances) also proved that they had walked straight back after performing on our terrace. Later still, at midnight, the police, having occasion to search the common lodging-house where they

lived, had seen them all three again, and their little boy with them, as usual. Soon after midnight I myself had safely shut up the house. Plain evidence than this, in favour of the Indians, there could not well be. The magistrate said there was not even a case of suspicion against them so far. But, as it was just possible, when the police came to investigate the matter, that discoveries affecting the jugglers might be made, he would contrive, by committing them as rogues and vagabonds, to keep them at our disposal, under lock and key, for a week. They had ignorantly done something (I forget what) in the town, which barely brought them within the operation of the law. Every human institution (justice included) will stretch a little, if you only pull it the right way. The worthy magistrate was an old friend of my lady's, and the Indians were committed for a week, as soon as the court opened that morning.

Such was Mr. Franklin's narrative of events at Frizinghall. The Indian clue to the mystery of the lost jewel was now, to all appearance, a clue that had broken in our hands. If the jugglers were innocent, who, in the name of wonder, had taken the Moonstone out of Miss Rachel's drawer?

Ten minutes later, to our infinite relief, Superintendent Seegrave arrived at the house. He reported passing Mr. Franklin on the terrace, sitting in the sun (I suppose with the Italian side of him uppermost), and warning the police, as they went by, that the investigation was hopeless, before the investigation had begun.

For a family in our situation, the Superintendent of the Frizinghall police was the most comforting officer you could wish to see. Mr. Seegrave was tall and portly, and military in his manners. He had a fine commanding voice, and a mighty resolute eye, and a grand frock-coat which buttoned beautifully up to his leather stock. "I'm the man you want!" was written all over his face; and he ordered his two inferior police men about with a severity which convinced us all that there was no trifling with him.

He began by going round the premises, outside and in; the result of that investigation proving to him that no thieves had broken in upon us from outside, and that the robbery, consequently, must have been committed by some person in the house. I leave you to imagine the state the servants were in when this official announcement first reached their ears. The Superintendent decided to begin by examining the boudoir, and, that done, to examine the servants next. At the same time, he posted one of his men on the staircase which led to the servants' bedrooms, with instructions to let nobody in the house pass him, till further orders.

At this latter proceeding, the weaker half of the human family went distracted on the spot. They bounced out of their corners, whisked upstairs in a body to Miss Rachel's room (Rosanna Spearman being carried away among them this time), burst in on Superintendent Seegrave, and, all looking equally guilty, summoned him to say which of them he suspected, at once.

Mr. Superintendent proved equal to the occasion; he looked at them with his resolute eye, and he cowed them with his military voice.

“Now, then, you women, go downstairs again, every one of you. I won’t have you here. Look!” says Mr. Superintendent, suddenly pointing to a little smear of the decorative painting on Miss Rachel’s door, at the outer edge, just under the lock. “Look what mischief the petticoats of some of you have done already. Clear out! clear out!” Rosanna Spearman, who was nearest to him, and nearest to the little smear on the door, set the example of obedience, and slipped off instantly to her work. The rest followed her out. The Superintendent finished his examination of the room, and, making nothing of it, asked me who had first discovered the robbery. My daughter had first discovered it. My daughter was sent for.

Mr. Superintendent proved to be a little too sharp with Penelope at starting. “Now, young woman, attend to me, and mind you speak the truth.” Penelope fired up instantly. “I’ve never been taught to tell lies Mr. Policeman! and if father can stand there and hear me accused of falsehood and thieving, and my own bedroom shut against me, and my character taken away, which is all a poor girl has left, he’s not the good father I take him for!” A timely word from me put Justice and Penelope on a pleasanter footing together. The questions and answers went swimmingly, and ended in nothing worth mentioning. My daughter had seen Miss Rachel put the Diamond in the drawer of the cabinet the last thing at night. She had gone in with Miss Rachel’s cup of tea at eight the next morning, and had found the drawer open and empty. Upon that, she had alarmed the house—and there was an end of Penelope’s evidence.

Mr. Superintendent next asked to see Miss Rachel herself. Penelope mentioned his request through the door. The answer reached us by the same road: “I have nothing to tell the policeman! I can’t see anybody.” Our experienced officer looked equally surprised and offended when he heard that reply. I told him my young lady was ill, and begged him to wait a little and see her later. We thereupon went downstairs again, and were met by Mr. Godfrey and Mr. Franklin crossing the hall.

The two gentlemen, being inmates of the house, were summoned to say if they could throw any light on the matter. Neither of them knew anything about it. Had they heard any suspicious noises during the previous night? They had heard nothing but the pattering of the rain. Had I, lying awake longer than either of them, heard nothing either? Nothing! Released from examination, Mr. Franklin, still sticking to the helpless view of our difficulty, whispered to me: “That man will be of no earthly use to us. Superintendent Seegrave is an ass.” Released in his turn, Mr. Godfrey whispered to me: “Evidently a most competent person. Better edge, I have the greatest faith in him!” Many men, many opinions, as one of the ancients said, before my time.

Mr. Superintendent’s next proceeding took him back to the “boudoir” again, with my daughter and me at his heels. His object was to discover whether any of the furniture had been moved, during the night, out of its customary place—his previous investigation in the room having, apparently, not gone quite far enough to satisfy his mind on this

point.

While we were still poking about among the chairs and tables, the door of the bedroom was suddenly opened. After having denied herself to everybody, Miss Rachel, to our astonishment, walked into the midst of us of her own accord. She took up her garden hat from a chair, and then went straight to Penelope with this question:?

?Mr. Franklin Blake sent you with a message to me this morning??

?Yes, miss.?

?He wished to speak to me, didn?t he??

?Yes, miss.?

?Where is he now??

Hearing voices on the terrace below, I looked out of window, and saw the two gentlemen walking up and down together. Answering for my daughter, I said, ?Mr. Franklin is on the terrace, miss.?

Without another word, without heeding Mr. Superintendent, who tried to speak to her, pale as death, and wrapped up strangely in her own thoughts, she left the room, and went down to her cousins on the terrace.

It showed a want of due respect, it showed a breach of good manners, on my part, but, for the life of me, I couldn?t help looking out of window when Miss Rachel met the gentlemen outside. She went up to Mr. Franklin without appearing to notice Mr. Godfrey, who thereupon drew back and left them by themselves. What she said to Mr. Franklin appeared to be spoken vehemently. It lasted but for a short time, and, judging by what I saw of his face from the window, seemed to astonish him beyond all power of expression. While they were still together, my lady appeared on the terrace. Miss Rachel saw her?said a few last words to Mr. Franklin?and suddenly went back into the house again, before her mother came up with her. My lady, surprised herself, and noticing Mr. Franklin?s surprise, spoke to him. Mr. Godfrey joined them, and spoke also. Mr. Franklin walked away a little between the two, telling them what had happened I suppose, for they both stopped short, after taking a few steps, like persons struck with amazement. I had just seen as much as this, when the door of the sitting-room was opened violently. Miss Rachel walked swiftly through to her bedroom, wild and angry, with fierce eyes and flaming cheeks. Mr. Superintendent once more attempted to question her. She turned round on him at her bedroom door. ?_I_ have not sent for you!? she cried out vehemently. ?_I_ don?t want you. My Diamond is lost. Neither you nor anybody else will ever find it!? With those words she went in, and locked the door in our faces. Penelope, standing nearest to it, heard her burst out crying the moment she was alone again.

In a rage, one moment; in tears, the next! What did it mean?

I told the Superintendent it meant that Miss Rachel's temper was upset by the loss of her jewel. Being anxious for the honour of the family, it distressed me to see my young lady forget herself—even with a police-officer—and I made the best excuse I could, accordingly. In my own private mind I was more puzzled by Miss Rachel's extraordinary language and conduct than words can tell. Taking what she had said at her bedroom door as a guide to guess by, I could only conclude that she was mortally offended by our sending for the police, and that Mr. Franklin's astonishment on the terrace was caused by her having expressed herself to him (as the person chiefly instrumental in fetching the police) to that effect. If this guess was right, why—having lost her Diamond—should she object to the presence in the house of the very people whose business it was to recover it for her? And how, in Heaven's name, could she know that the Moonstone would never be found again?

As things stood, at present, no answer to those questions was to be hoped for from anybody in the house. Mr. Franklin appeared to think it a point of honour to forbear repeating to a servant—even to so old a servant as I was—what Miss Rachel had said to him on the terrace. Mr. Godfrey, who, as a gentleman and a relative, had been probably admitted into Mr. Franklin's confidence, respected that confidence as he was bound to do. My lady, who was also in the secret no doubt, and who alone had access to Miss Rachel, owned openly that she could make nothing of her. "You madden me when you talk of the Diamond!" All her mother's influence failed to extract from her a word more than that.

Here we were, then, at a dead-lock about Miss Rachel—and at a dead-lock about the Moonstone. In the first case, my lady was powerless to help us. In the second (as you shall presently judge), Mr. Seegrave was fast approaching the condition of a superintendent at his wits' end.

Having ferreted about all over the "boudoir," without making any discoveries among the furniture, our experienced officer applied to me to know, whether the servants in general were or were not acquainted with the place in which the Diamond had been put for the night.

"I knew where it was put, sir," I said, "to begin with. Samuel, the footman, knew also—for he was present in the hall, when they were talking about where the Diamond was to be kept that night. My daughter knew, as she has already told you. She or Samuel may have mentioned the thing to the other servants—or the other servants may have heard the talk for themselves, through the side-door of the hall, which might have been open to the back staircase. For all I can tell, everybody in the house may have known where the jewel was, last night."

My answer presenting rather a wide field for Mr. Superintendent's suspicions to range over, he tried to narrow it by asking about the servants' characters next.

I thought directly of Rosanna Spearman. But it was neither my place nor my wish to direct suspicion against a poor girl, whose honesty had been above all doubt as long as I had known her. The matron at the Reformatory had reported her to my lady as a sincerely penitent and

thoroughly trustworthy girl. It was the Superintendent's business to discover reason for suspecting her first?and then, and not till then, it would be my duty to tell him how she came into my lady's service. ?All our people have excellent characters,? I said. ?And all have deserved the trust their mistress has placed in them.? After that, there was but one thing left for Mr. Seegrave to do?namely, to set to work, and tackle the servants' characters himself.

One after another, they were examined. One after another, they proved to have nothing to say?and said it (so far as the women were concerned) at great length, and with a very angry sense of the embargo laid on their bedrooms. The rest of them being sent back to their places downstairs, Penelope was then summoned, and examined separately a second time.

My daughter's little outbreak of temper in the ?boudoir,? and her readiness to think herself suspected, appeared to have produced an unfavourable impression on Superintendent Seegrave. It seemed also to dwell a little on his mind, that she had been the last person who saw the Diamond at night. When the second questioning was over, my girl came back to me in a frenzy. There was no doubt of it any longer?the police-officer had almost as good as told her she was the thief! I could scarcely believe him (taking Mr. Franklin's view) to be quite such an ass as that. But, though he said nothing, the eye with which he looked at my daughter was not a very pleasant eye to see. I laughed it off with poor Penelope, as something too ridiculous to be treated seriously?which it certainly was. Secretly, I am afraid I was foolish enough to be angry too. It was a little trying?it was, indeed. My girl sat down in a corner, with her apron over her head, quite broken-hearted. Foolish of her, you will say. She might have waited till he openly accused her. Well, being a man of just an equal temper, I admit that. Still Mr. Superintendent might have remembered?never mind what he might have remembered. The devil take him!

The next and last step in the investigation brought matters, as they say, to a crisis. The officer had an interview (at which I was present) with my lady. After informing her that the Diamond _must_ have been taken by somebody in the house, he requested permission for himself and his men to search the servants' rooms and boxes on the spot. My good mistress, like the generous high-bred woman she was, refused to let us be treated like thieves. ?I will never consent to make such a return as that,? she said, ?for all I owe to the faithful servants who are employed in my house.?

Mr. Superintendent made his bow, with a look in my direction, which said plainly, ?Why employ me, if you are to tie my hands in this way?? As head of the servants, I felt directly that we were bound, in justice to all parties, not to profit by our mistress's generosity. ?We gratefully thank your ladyship,? I said; ?but we ask your permission to do what is right in this matter by giving up our keys. When Gabriel Betteredge sets the example,? says I, stopping Superintendent Seegrave at the door, ?the rest of the servants will follow, I promise you. There are my keys, to begin with! My lady took me by the hand, and thanked me with the tears in her eyes. Lord! what would I not have

given, at that moment, for the privilege of knocking Superintendent Seegrave down!

As I had promised for them, the other servants followed my lead, sorely against the grain, of course, but all taking the view that I took. The women were a sight to see, while the police-officers were rummaging among their things. The cook looked as if she could grill Mr. Superintendent alive on a furnace, and the other women looked as if they could eat him when he was done.

The search over, and no Diamond or sign of a Diamond being found, of course, anywhere, Superintendent Seegrave retired to my little room to consider with himself what he was to do next. He and his men had now been hours in the house, and had not advanced us one inch towards a discovery of how the Moonstone had been taken, or of whom we were to suspect as the thief.

While the police-officer was still pondering in solitude, I was sent for to see Mr. Franklin in the library. To my unutterable astonishment, just as my hand was on the door, it was suddenly opened from the inside, and out walked Rosanna Spearman!

After the library had been swept and cleaned in the morning, neither first nor second housemaid had any business in that room at any later period of the day. I stopped Rosanna Spearman, and charged her with a breach of domestic discipline on the spot.

'What might you want in the library at this time of day?' I inquired.

'Mr. Franklin Blake dropped one of his rings upstairs,' says Rosanna; 'and I have been into the library to give it to him.' The girl's face was all in a flush as she made me that answer; and she walked away with a toss of her head and a look of self-importance which I was quite at a loss to account for. The proceedings in the house had doubtless upset all the women-servants more or less; but none of them had gone clean out of their natural characters, as Rosanna, to all appearance, had now gone out of hers.

I found Mr. Franklin writing at the library-table. He asked for a conveyance to the railway station the moment I entered the room. The first sound of his voice informed me that we now had the resolute side of him uppermost once more. The man made of cotton had disappeared; and the man made of iron sat before me again.

'Going to London, sir?' I asked.

'Going to telegraph to London,' says Mr. Franklin. 'I have convinced my aunt that we must have a cleverer head than Superintendent Seegrave's to help us; and I have got her permission to despatch a telegram to my father. He knows the Chief Commissioner of Police, and the Commissioner can lay his hand on the right man to solve the mystery of the Diamond. Talking of mysteries, by-the-bye,' says Mr. Franklin, dropping his voice, 'I have another word to say to you before you go to the stables. Don't breathe a word of it to anybody as yet; but either Rosanna

Spearman's head is not quite right, or I am afraid she knows more about the Moonstone than she ought to know.?

I can hardly tell whether I was more startled or distressed at hearing him say that. If I had been younger, I might have confessed as much to Mr. Franklin. But when you are old, you acquire one excellent habit. In cases where you don't see your way clearly, you hold your tongue.

'She came in here with a ring I dropped in my bedroom,' Mr. Franklin went on. 'When I had thanked her, of course I expected her to go. Instead of that, she stood opposite to me at the table, looking at me in the oddest manner—half frightened, and half familiar—I couldn't make it out. 'This is a strange thing about the Diamond, sir,' she said, in a curiously sudden, headlong way. I said, 'Yes, it was,' and wondered what was coming next. Upon my honour, Betteredge, I think she must be wrong in the head! She said, 'They will never find the Diamond, sir, will they? No! nor the person who took it?' I'll answer for that.' She actually nodded and smiled at me! Before I could ask her what she meant, we heard your step outside. I suppose she was afraid of your catching her here. At any rate, she changed colour, and left the room. What on earth does it mean??

I could not bring myself to tell him the girl's story, even then. It would have been almost as good as telling him that she was the thief. Besides, even if I had made a clean breast of it, and even supposing she was the thief, the reason why she should let out her secret to Mr. Franklin, of all the people in the world, would have been still as far to seek as ever.

'I can't bear the idea of getting the poor girl into a scrape, merely because she has a flighty way with her, and talks very strangely,' Mr. Franklin went on. 'And yet if she had said to the Superintendent what she said to me, fool as he is, I'm afraid???' He stopped there, and left the rest unspoken.

'The best way, sir,' I said, 'will be for me to say two words privately to my mistress about it at the first opportunity. My lady has a very friendly interest in Rosanna; and the girl may only have been forward and foolish, after all. When there's a mess of any kind in a house, sir, the women-servants like to look at the gloomy side—it gives the poor wretches a kind of importance in their own eyes. If there's anybody ill, trust the women for prophesying that the person will die. If it's a jewel lost, trust them for prophesying that it will never be found again.'

This view (which I am bound to say, I thought a probable view myself, on reflection) seemed to relieve Mr. Franklin mightily: he folded up his telegram, and dismissed the subject. On my way to the stables, to order the pony-chaise, I looked in at the servants' hall, where they were at dinner. Rosanna Spearman was not among them. On inquiry, I found that she had been suddenly taken ill, and had gone upstairs to her own room to lie down.

'Curious! She looked well enough when I saw her last,' I remarked.

Penelope followed me out. 'Don't talk in that way before the rest of them, father,' she said. 'You only make them harder on Rosanna than ever. The poor thing is breaking her heart about Mr. Franklin Blake.'

Here was another view of the girl's conduct. If it was possible for Penelope to be right, the explanation of Rosanna's strange language and behaviour might have been all in this—that she didn't care what she said, so long as she could surprise Mr. Franklin into speaking to her. Granting that to be the right reading of the riddle, it accounted, perhaps, for her flighty, self-conceited manner when she passed me in the hall. Though he had only said three words, still she had carried her point, and Mr. Franklin had spoken to her.

I saw the pony harnessed myself. In the infernal network of mysteries and uncertainties that now surrounded us, I declare it was a relief to observe how well the buckles and straps understood each other! When you had seen the pony backed into the shafts of the chaise, you had seen something there was no doubt about. And that, let me tell you, was becoming a treat of the rarest kind in our household.

Going round with the chaise to the front door, I found not only Mr. Franklin, but Mr. Godfrey and Superintendent Seegrave also waiting for me on the steps.

Mr. Superintendent's reflections (after failing to find the Diamond in the servants' rooms or boxes) had led him, it appeared, to an entirely new conclusion. Still sticking to his first text, namely, that somebody in the house had stolen the jewel, our experienced officer was now of the opinion that the thief (he was wise enough not to name poor Penelope, whatever he might privately think of her!) had been acting in concert with the Indians; and he accordingly proposed shifting his inquiries to the jugglers in the prison at Frizinghall. Hearing of this new move, Mr. Franklin had volunteered to take the Superintendent back to the town, from which he could telegraph to London as easily as from our station. Mr. Godfrey, still devoutly believing in Mr. Seegrave, and greatly interested in witnessing the examination of the Indians, had begged leave to accompany the officer to Frizinghall. One of the two inferior policemen was to be left at the house, in case anything happened. The other was to go back with the Superintendent to the town. So the four places in the pony-chaise were just filled.

Before he took the reins to drive off, Mr. Franklin walked me away a few steps out of hearing of the others.

'I will wait to telegraph to London,' he said, 'till I see what comes of our examination of the Indians. My own conviction is, that this muddle-headed local police-officer is as much in the dark as ever, and is simply trying to gain time. The idea of any of the servants being in league with the Indians is a preposterous absurdity, in my opinion. Keep about the house, Betteredge, till I come back, and try what you can make of Rosanna Spearman. I don't ask you to do anything degrading to your own self-respect, or anything cruel towards the girl. I only ask you to exercise your observation more carefully than usual. We will

make as light of it as we can before my aunt?but this is a more important matter than you may suppose.?

?It is a matter of twenty thousand pounds, sir,? I said, thinking of the value of the Diamond.

?It?s a matter of quieting Rachel?s mind,? answered Mr. Franklin gravely. ?I am very uneasy about her.?

He left me suddenly; as if he desired to cut short any further talk between us. I thought I understood why. Further talk might have let me into the secret of what Miss Rachel had said to him on the terrace.

So they drove away to Frizinghall. I was ready enough, in the girl?s own interest, to have a little talk with Rosanna in private. But the needful opportunity failed to present itself. She only came downstairs again at tea-time. When she did appear, she was flighty and excited, had what they call an hysterical attack, took a dose of sal-volatile by my lady?s order, and was sent back to her bed.

The day wore on to its end drearily and miserably enough, I can tell you. Miss Rachel still kept her room, declaring that she was too ill to come down to dinner that day. My lady was in such low spirits about her daughter, that I could not bring myself to make her additionally anxious, by reporting what Rosanna Spearman had said to Mr. Franklin. Penelope persisted in believing that she was to be forthwith tried, sentenced, and transported for theft. The other women took to their Bibles and hymn-books, and looked as sour as verjuice over their reading?a result, which I have observed, in my sphere of life, to follow generally on the performance of acts of piety at unaccustomed periods of the day. As for me, I hadn?t even heart enough to open my _Robinson Crusoe_. I went out into the yard, and, being hard up for a little cheerful society, set my chair by the kennels, and talked to the dogs.

Half an hour before dinner-time, the two gentlemen came back from Frizinghall, having arranged with Superintendent Seegrave that he was to return to us the next day. They had called on Mr. Murthwaite, the Indian traveller, at his present residence, near the town. At Mr. Franklin?s request, he had kindly given them the benefit of his knowledge of the language, in dealing with those two, out of the three Indians, who knew nothing of English. The examination, conducted carefully, and at great length, had ended in nothing; not the shadow of a reason being discovered for suspecting the jugglers of having tampered with any of our servants. On reaching that conclusion, Mr. Franklin had sent his telegraphic message to London, and there the matter now rested till tomorrow came.

So much for the history of the day that followed the birthday. Not a glimmer of light had broken in on us, so far. A day or two after, however, the darkness lifted a little. How, and with what result, you shall presently see.

CHAPTER XII

The Thursday night passed, and nothing happened. With the Friday morning came two pieces of news.

Item the first: the baker's man declared he had met Rosanna Spearman, on the previous afternoon, with a thick veil on, walking towards Frizinghall by the foot-path way over the moor. It seemed strange that anybody should be mistaken about Rosanna, whose shoulder marked her out pretty plainly, poor thing?but mistaken the man must have been; for Rosanna, as you know, had been all the Thursday afternoon ill upstairs in her room.

Item the second came through the postman. Worthy Mr. Candy had said one more of his many unlucky things, when he drove off in the rain on the birthday night, and told me that a doctor's skin was waterproof. In spite of his skin, the wet had got through him. He had caught a chill that night, and was now down with a fever. The last accounts, brought by the postman, represented him to be light-headed?talking nonsense as glibly, poor man, in his delirium as he often talked it in his sober senses. We were all sorry for the little doctor; but Mr. Franklin appeared to regret his illness, chiefly on Miss Rachel's account. From what he said to my lady, while I was in the room at breakfast-time, he appeared to think that Miss Rachel?if the suspense about the Moonstone was not soon set at rest?might stand in urgent need of the best medical advice at our disposal.

Breakfast had not been over long, when a telegram from Mr. Blake, the elder, arrived, in answer to his son. It informed us that he had laid hands (by help of his friend, the Commissioner) on the right man to help us. The name of him was Sergeant Cuff; and the arrival of him from London might be expected by the morning train.

At reading the name of the new police-officer, Mr. Franklin gave a start. It seems that he had heard some curious anecdotes about Sergeant Cuff, from his father's lawyer, during his stay in London.

?I begin to hope we are seeing the end of our anxieties already,? he said. ?If half the stories I have heard are true, when it comes to unravelling a mystery, there isn't the equal in England of Sergeant Cuff!?

We all got excited and impatient as the time drew near for the appearance of this renowned and capable character. Superintendent Seegrave, returning to us at his appointed time, and hearing that the Sergeant was expected, instantly shut himself up in a room, with pen, ink, and paper, to make notes of the Report which would be certainly expected from him. I should have liked to have gone to the station myself, to fetch the Sergeant. But my lady's carriage and horses were not to be thought of, even for the celebrated Cuff; and the pony-chaise was required later for Mr. Godfrey. He deeply regretted being obliged to leave his aunt at such an anxious time; and he kindly put off the hour of his departure till as late as the last train, for the purpose of hearing what the clever London police-officer thought of the case.

But on Friday night he must be in town, having a Ladies' Charity, in difficulties, waiting to consult him on Saturday morning.

When the time came for the Sergeant's arrival, I went down to the gate to look out for him.

A fly from the railway drove up as I reached the lodge; and out got a grizzled, elderly man, so miserably lean that he looked as if he had not got an ounce of flesh on his bones in any part of him. He was dressed all in decent black, with a white cravat round his neck. His face was as sharp as a hatchet, and the skin of it was as yellow and dry and withered as an autumn leaf. His eyes, of a steely light grey, had a very disconcerting trick, when they encountered your eyes, of looking as if they expected something more from you than you were aware of yourself. His walk was soft; his voice was melancholy; his long lanky fingers were hooked like claws. He might have been a parson, or an undertaker, or anything else you like, except what he really was. A more complete opposite to Superintendent Seegrave than Sergeant Cuff, and a less comforting officer to look at, for a family in distress, I defy you to discover, search where you may.

'Is this Lady Verinder's?' he asked.

'Yes, sir.'

'I am Sergeant Cuff.'

'This way, sir, if you please.'

On our road to the house, I mentioned my name and position in the family, to satisfy him that he might speak to me about the business on which my lady was to employ him. Not a word did he say about the business, however, for all that. He admired the grounds, and remarked that he felt the sea air very brisk and refreshing. I privately wondered, on my side, how the celebrated Cuff had got his reputation. We reached the house, in the temper of two strange dogs, coupled up together for the first time in their lives by the same chain.

Asking for my lady, and hearing that she was in one of the conservatories, we went round to the gardens at the back, and sent a servant to seek her. While we were waiting, Sergeant Cuff looked through the evergreen arch on our left, spied out our rosery, and walked straight in, with the first appearance of anything like interest that he had shown yet. To the gardener's astonishment, and to my disgust, this celebrated policeman proved to be quite a mine of learning on the trumpery subject of rose-gardens.

'Ah, you've got the right exposure here to the south and south-west,' says the Sergeant, with a wag of his grizzled head, and a streak of pleasure in his melancholy voice. 'This is the shape for a rosery—nothing like a circle set in a square. Yes, yes; with walks between all the beds. But they oughtn't to be gravel walks like these. Grass, Mr. Gardener? grass walks between your roses; gravel's too hard for them. That's a sweet pretty bed of white roses and blush roses.'

They always mix well together, don't they? Here's the white musk rose, Mr. Betteredge?our old English rose holding up its head along with the best and the newest of them. Pretty dear! says the Sergeant, fondling the Musk Rose with his lanky fingers, and speaking to it as if he was speaking to a child.

This was a nice sort of man to recover Miss Rachel's Diamond, and to find out the thief who stole it!

?You seem to be fond of roses, Sergeant?? I remarked.

?I haven't much time to be fond of anything,? says Sergeant Cuff. ?But when I _have_ a moment's fondness to bestow, most times, Mr. Betteredge, the roses get it. I began my life among them in my father's nursery garden, and I shall end my life among them, if I can. Yes. One of these days (please God) I shall retire from catching thieves, and try my hand at growing roses. There will be grass walks, Mr. Gardener, between my beds,? says the Sergeant, on whose mind the gravel paths of our rosery seemed to dwell unpleasantly.

?It seems an odd taste, sir,? I ventured to say, ?for a man in your line of life.?

?If you will look about you (which most people won't do),? says Sergeant Cuff, ?you will see that the nature of a man's tastes is, most times, as opposite as possible to the nature of a man's business. Show me any two things more opposite one from the other than a rose and a thief; and I'll correct my tastes accordingly?if it isn't too late at my time of life. You find the damask rose a goodish stock for most of the tender sorts, don't you, Mr. Gardener? Ah! I thought so. Here's a lady coming. Is it Lady Verinder??

He had seen her before either I or the gardener had seen her, though we knew which way to look, and he didn't. I began to think him rather a quicker man than he appeared to be at first sight.

The Sergeant's appearance, or the Sergeant's errand?one or both?seemed to cause my lady some little embarrassment. She was, for the first time in all my experience of her, at a loss what to say at an interview with a stranger. Sergeant Cuff put her at her ease directly. He asked if any other person had been employed about the robbery before we sent for him; and hearing that another person had been called in, and was now in the house, begged leave to speak to him before anything else was done.

My lady led the way back. Before he followed her, the Sergeant relieved his mind on the subject of the gravel walks by a parting word to the gardener. ?Get her ladyship to try grass,? he said, with a sour look at the paths. ?No gravel! no gravel!?

Why Superintendent Seegrave should have appeared to be several sizes smaller than life, on being presented to Sergeant Cuff, I can't undertake to explain. I can only state the fact. They retired together; and remained a weary long time shut up from all mortal intrusion. When they came out, Mr. Superintendent was excited, and Mr. Sergeant was

yawning.

‘The Sergeant wishes to see Miss Verinder’s sitting-room,’ says Mr. Seegrave, addressing me with great pomp and eagerness. ‘The Sergeant may have some questions to ask. Attend the Sergeant, if you please!’

While I was being ordered about in this way, I looked at the great Cuff. The great Cuff, on his side, looked at Superintendent Seegrave in that quietly expecting way which I have already noticed. I can’t affirm that he was on the watch for his brother officer’s speedy appearance in the character of an Ass? I can only say that I strongly suspected it.

I led the way upstairs. The Sergeant went softly all over the Indian cabinet and all round the ‘boudoir,’ asking questions (occasionally only of Mr. Superintendent, and continually of me), the drift of which I believe to have been equally unintelligible to both of us. In due time, his course brought him to the door, and put him face to face with the decorative painting that you know of. He laid one lean inquiring finger on the small smear, just under the lock, which Superintendent Seegrave had already noticed, when he reprovved the women-servants for all crowding together into the room.

‘That’s a pity,’ says Sergeant Cuff. ‘How did it happen?’

He put the question to me. I answered that the women-servants had crowded into the room on the previous morning, and that some of their petticoats had done the mischief, ‘Superintendent Seegrave ordered them out, sir,’ I added, ‘before they did any more harm.’

‘Right!’ says Mr. Superintendent in his military way. ‘I ordered them out. The petticoats did it, Sergeant? the petticoats did it.’

‘Did you notice which petticoat did it?’ asked Sergeant Cuff, still addressing himself, not to his brother-officer, but to me.

‘No, sir.’

He turned to Superintendent Seegrave upon that, and said, ‘_You_ noticed, I suppose?’

Mr. Superintendent looked a little taken aback; but he made the best of it. ‘I can’t charge my memory, Sergeant,’ he said, ‘a mere trifle? a mere trifle.’

Sergeant Cuff looked at Mr. Seegrave, as he had looked at the gravel walks in the rosery, and gave us, in his melancholy way, the first taste of his quality which we had had yet.

‘I made a private inquiry last week, Mr. Superintendent,’ he said. ‘At one end of the inquiry there was a murder, and at the other end there was a spot of ink on a table cloth that nobody could account for. In all my experience along the dirtiest ways of this dirty little world, I have never met with such a thing as a trifle yet. Before we go a step further in this business we must see the petticoat that made the smear,

and we must know for certain when that paint was wet.?

Mr. Superintendent?taking his set-down rather sulkily?asked if he should summon the women. Sergeant Cuff, after considering a minute, sighed, and shook his head.

?No,? he said, ?we?ll take the matter of the paint first. It?s a question of Yes or No with the paint?which is short. It?s a question of petticoats with the women?which is long. What o?clock was it when the servants were in this room yesterday morning? Eleven o?clock?eh? Is there anybody in the house who knows whether that paint was wet or dry, at eleven yesterday morning??

?Her ladyship?s nephew, Mr. Franklin Blake, knows,? I said.

?Is the gentleman in the house??

Mr. Franklin was as close at hand as could be?waiting for his first chance of being introduced to the great Cuff. In half a minute he was in the room, and was giving his evidence as follows:

?That door, Sergeant,? he said, ?has been painted by Miss Verinder, under my inspection, with my help, and in a vehicle of my own composition. The vehicle dries whatever colours may be used with it, in twelve hours.?

?Do you remember when the smeared bit was done, sir?? asked the Sergeant.

?Perfectly,? answered Mr. Franklin. ?That was the last morsel of the door to be finished. We wanted to get it done, on Wednesday last?and I myself completed it by three in the afternoon, or soon after.?

?Today is Friday,? said Sergeant Cuff, addressing himself to Superintendent Seegrave. ?Let us reckon back, sir. At three on the Wednesday afternoon, that bit of the painting was completed. The vehicle dried it in twelve hours?that is to say, dried it by three o?clock on Thursday morning. At eleven on Thursday morning you held your inquiry here. Take three from eleven, and eight remains. That paint had been _eight hours dry_, Mr. Superintendent, when you supposed that the women-servants? petticoats smeared it.?

First knock-down blow for Mr. Seegrave! If he had not suspected poor Penelope, I should have pitied him.

Having settled the question of the paint, Sergeant Cuff, from that moment, gave his brother-officer up as a bad job?and addressed himself to Mr. Franklin, as the more promising assistant of the two.

?It?s quite on the cards, sir,? he said, ?that you have put the clue into our hands.?

As the words passed his lips, the bedroom door opened, and Miss Rachel came out among us suddenly.

She addressed herself to the Sergeant, without appearing to notice (or to heed) that he was a perfect stranger to her.

‘Did you say,’ she asked, pointing to Mr. Franklin, ‘that he had put the clue into your hands?’

(‘This is Miss Verinder,’ I whispered, behind the Sergeant.)

‘That gentleman, miss,’ says the Sergeant ‘with his steely-grey eyes carefully studying my young lady’s face?’ ‘has possibly put the clue into our hands.’

She turned for one moment, and tried to look at Mr. Franklin. I say, tried, for she suddenly looked away again before their eyes met. There seemed to be some strange disturbance in her mind. She coloured up, and then she turned pale again. With the paleness, there came a new look into her face—a look which it startled me to see.

‘Having answered your question, miss,’ says the Sergeant, ‘I beg leave to make an inquiry in my turn. There is a smear on the painting of your door, here. Do you happen to know when it was done? or who did it?’

Instead of making any reply, Miss Rachel went on with her questions, as if he had not spoken, or as if she had not heard him.

‘Are you another police-officer?’ she asked.

‘I am Sergeant Cuff, miss, of the Detective Police.’

‘Do you think a young lady’s advice worth having?’

‘I shall be glad to hear it, miss.’

‘Do your duty by yourself—and don’t allow Mr. Franklin Blake to help you!’

She said those words so spitefully, so savagely, with such an extraordinary outbreak of ill-will towards Mr. Franklin, in her voice and in her look, that though I had known her from a baby, though I loved and honoured her next to my lady herself—I was ashamed of Miss Rachel for the first time in my life.

Sergeant Cuff’s immovable eyes never stirred from off her face. ‘Thank you, miss,’ he said. ‘Do you happen to know anything about the smear? Might you have done it by accident yourself?’

‘I know nothing about the smear.’

With that answer, she turned away, and shut herself up again in her bedroom. This time, I heard her—as Penelope had heard her before—burst out crying as soon as she was alone again.

I couldn’t bring myself to look at the Sergeant—I looked at Mr.

Franklin, who stood nearest to me. He seemed to be even more sorely distressed at what had passed than I was.

"I told you I was uneasy about her," he said. "And now you see why."

"Miss Verinder appears to be a little out of temper about the loss of her Diamond," remarked the Sergeant. "It's a valuable jewel. Natural enough! natural enough!"

Here was the excuse that I had made for her (when she forgot herself before Superintendent Seegrave, on the previous day) being made for her over again, by a man who couldn't have had my interest in making it for he was a perfect stranger! A kind of cold shudder ran through me, which I couldn't account for at the time. I know, now, that I must have got my first suspicion, at that moment, of a new light (and horrid light) having suddenly fallen on the case, in the mind of Sergeant Cuff—purely and entirely in consequence of what he had seen in Miss Rachel, and heard from Miss Rachel, at that first interview between them.

"A young lady's tongue is a privileged member, sir," says the Sergeant to Mr. Franklin. "Let us forget what has passed, and go straight on with this business. Thanks to you, we know when the paint was dry. The next thing to discover is when the paint was last seen without that smear. You have got a head on your shoulders—and you understand what I mean."

Mr. Franklin composed himself, and came back with an effort from Miss Rachel to the matter in hand.

"I think I do understand," he said. "The more we narrow the question of time, the more we also narrow the field of inquiry."

"That's it, sir," said the Sergeant. "Did you notice your work here, on the Wednesday afternoon, after you had done it?"

Mr. Franklin shook his head, and answered, "I can't say I did."

"Did you?" inquired Sergeant Cuff, turning to me.

"I can't say I did either, sir."

"Who was the last person in the room, the last thing on Wednesday night?"

"Miss Rachel, I suppose, sir."

Mr. Franklin struck in there, "Or possibly your daughter, Betteredge." He turned to Sergeant Cuff, and explained that my daughter was Miss Verinder's maid.

"Mr. Betteredge, ask your daughter to step up. Stop!" says the Sergeant, taking me away to the window, out of earshot. "Your Superintendent here," he went on, in a whisper, "has made a pretty full

report to me of the manner in which he has managed this case. Among other things, he has, by his own confession, set the servants' backs up. It's very important to smooth them down again. Tell your daughter, and tell the rest of them, these two things, with my compliments: First, that I have no evidence before me, yet, that the Diamond has been stolen; I only know that the Diamond has been lost. Second, that my business here with the servants is simply to ask them to lay their heads together and help me to find it.?

My experience of the women-servants, when Superintendent Seegrave laid his embargo on their rooms, came in handy here.

?May I make so bold, Sergeant, as to tell the women a third thing?? I asked. ?Are they free (with your compliments) to fidget up and downstairs, and whisk in and out of their bedrooms, if the fit takes them??

?Perfectly free,? said the Sergeant.

?_That_ will smooth them down, sir,? I remarked, ?from the cook to the scullion.?

?Go, and do it at once, Mr. Betteredge.?

I did it in less than five minutes. There was only one difficulty when I came to the bit about the bedrooms. It took a pretty stiff exertion of my authority, as chief, to prevent the whole of the female household from following me and Penelope upstairs, in the character of volunteer witnesses in a burning fever of anxiety to help Sergeant Cuff.

The Sergeant seemed to approve of Penelope. He became a trifle less dreary; and he looked much as he had looked when he noticed the white musk rose in the flower-garden. Here is my daughter's evidence, as drawn off from her by the Sergeant. She gave it, I think, very prettily?but, there! she is my child all over: nothing of her mother in her; Lord bless you, nothing of her mother in her!

Penelope examined: Took a lively interest in the painting on the door, having helped to mix the colours. Noticed the bit of work under the lock, because it was the last bit done. Had seen it, some hours afterwards, without a smear. Had left it, as late as twelve at night, without a smear. Had, at that hour, wished her young lady good-night in the bedroom; had heard the clock strike in the ?boudoir?; had her hand at the time on the handle of the painted door; knew the paint was wet (having helped to mix the colours, as aforesaid); took particular pains not to touch it; could swear that she held up the skirts of her dress, and that there was no smear on the paint then; could not swear that her dress mightn't have touched it accidentally in going out; remembered the dress she had on, because it was new, a present from Miss Rachel; her father remembered, and could speak to it, too; could, and would, and did fetch it; dress recognised by her father as the dress she wore that night; skirts examined, a long job from the size of them; not the ghost of a paint-stain discovered anywhere. End of Penelope's evidence?and very pretty and convincing, too. Signed,

Gabriel Betteredge.

The Sergeant's next proceeding was to question me about any large dogs in the house who might have got into the room, and done the mischief with a whisk of their tails. Hearing that this was impossible, he next sent for a magnifying-glass, and tried how the smear looked, seen that way. No skin-mark (as of a human hand) printed off on the paint. All the signs visible—signs which told that the paint had been smeared by some loose article of somebody's dress touching it in going by. That somebody (putting together Penelope's evidence and Mr. Franklin's evidence) must have been in the room, and done the mischief, between midnight and three o'clock on the Thursday morning.

Having brought his investigation to this point, Sergeant Cuff discovered that such a person as Superintendent Seegrave was still left in the room, upon which he summed up the proceedings for his brother-officer's benefit, as follows:

"This trifle of yours, Mr. Superintendent," says the Sergeant, pointing to the place on the door, "has grown a little in importance since you noticed it last. At the present stage of the inquiry there are, as I take it, three discoveries to make, starting from that smear. Find out (first) whether there is any article of dress in this house with the smear of the paint on it. Find out (second) who that dress belongs to. Find out (third) how the person can account for having been in this room, and smeared the paint, between midnight and three in the morning. If the person can't satisfy you, you haven't far to look for the hand that has got the Diamond. I'll work this by myself, if you please, and detain you no longer from your regular business in the town. You have got one of your men here, I see. Leave him here at my disposal, in case I want him—and allow me to wish you good morning."

Superintendent Seegrave's respect for the Sergeant was great; but his respect for himself was greater still. Hit hard by the celebrated Cuff, he hit back smartly, to the best of his ability, on leaving the room.

"I have abstained from expressing any opinion, so far," says Mr. Superintendent, with his military voice still in good working order. "I have now only one remark to offer on leaving this case in your hands. There is such a thing, Sergeant, as making a mountain out of a molehill. Good morning."

"There is also such a thing as making nothing out of a molehill, in consequence of your head being too high to see it." Having returned his brother-officer's compliments in those terms, Sergeant Cuff wheeled about, and walked away to the window by himself.

Mr. Franklin and I waited to see what was coming next. The Sergeant stood at the window with his hands in his pockets, looking out, and whistling the tune of "The Last Rose of Summer" softly to himself. Later in the proceedings, I discovered that he only forgot his manners so far as to whistle, when his mind was hard at work, seeing its way inch by inch to its own private ends, on which occasions "The Last Rose of Summer" evidently helped and encouraged him. I suppose it fitted in

somehow with his character. It reminded him, you see, of his favourite roses, and, as _he_ whistled it, it was the most melancholy tune going.

Turning from the window, after a minute or two, the Sergeant walked into the middle of the room, and stopped there, deep in thought, with his eyes on Miss Rachel's bedroom door. After a little he roused himself, nodded his head, as much as to say, "That will do," and, addressing me, asked for ten minutes' conversation with my mistress, at her ladyship's earliest convenience.

Leaving the room with this message, I heard Mr. Franklin ask the Sergeant a question, and stopped to hear the answer also at the threshold of the door.

"Can you guess yet," inquired Mr. Franklin, "who has stolen the Diamond?"

"_Nobody_ has stolen the Diamond," answered Sergeant Cuff.

We both started at that extraordinary view of the case, and both earnestly begged him to tell us what he meant.

"Wait a little," said the Sergeant. "The pieces of the puzzle are not all put together yet."

CHAPTER XIII

I found my lady in her own sitting room. She started and looked annoyed when I mentioned that Sergeant Cuff wished to speak to her.

"_Must_ I see him?" she asked. "Can't you represent me, Gabriel?"

I felt at a loss to understand this, and showed it plainly, I suppose, in my face. My lady was so good as to explain herself.

"I am afraid my nerves are a little shaken," she said. "There is something in that police-officer from London which I recoil from! I don't know why. I have a presentiment that he is bringing trouble and misery with him into the house. Very foolish, and very unlike _me_?but so it is."

I hardly knew what to say to this. The more I saw of Sergeant Cuff, the better I liked him. My lady rallied a little after having opened her heart to me?being, naturally, a woman of a high courage, as I have already told you.

"If I must see him, I must," she said. "But I can't prevail on myself to see him alone. Bring him in, Gabriel, and stay here as long as he stays."

This was the first attack of the megrims that I remembered in my mistress since the time when she was a young girl. I went back to the "boudoir." Mr. Franklin strolled out into the garden, and joined Mr.

Godfrey, whose time for departure was now drawing near. Sergeant Cuff and I went straight to my mistress's room.

I declare my lady turned a shade paler at the sight of him! She commanded herself, however, in other respects, and asked the Sergeant if he had any objection to my being present. She was so good as to add, that I was her trusted adviser, as well as her old servant, and that in anything which related to the household I was the person whom it might be most profitable to consult. The Sergeant politely answered that he would take my presence as a favour, having something to say about the servants in general, and having found my experience in that quarter already of some use to him. My lady pointed to two chairs, and we set in for our conference immediately.

'I have already formed an opinion on this case,' says Sergeant Cuff, 'which I beg your ladyship's permission to keep to myself for the present. My business now is to mention what I have discovered upstairs in Miss Verinder's sitting-room, and what I have decided (with your ladyship's leave) on doing next.'

He then went into the matter of the smear on the paint, and stated the conclusions he drew from it—just as he had stated them (only with greater respect of language) to Superintendent Seegrave. 'One thing,' he said, in conclusion, 'is certain. The Diamond is missing out of the drawer in the cabinet. Another thing is next to certain. The marks from the smear on the door must be on some article of dress belonging to somebody in this house. We must discover that article of dress before we go a step further.'

'And that discovery,' remarked my mistress, 'implies, I presume, the discovery of the thief?'

'I beg your ladyship's pardon—I don't say the Diamond is stolen. I only say, at present, that the Diamond is missing. The discovery of the stained dress may lead the way to finding it.'

Her ladyship looked at me. 'Do you understand this?' she said.

'Sergeant Cuff understands it, my lady,' I answered.

'How do you propose to discover the stained dress?' inquired my mistress, addressing herself once more to the Sergeant. 'My good servants, who have been with me for years, have, I am ashamed to say, had their boxes and rooms searched already by the other officer. I can't and won't permit them to be insulted in that way a second time!'

(There was a mistress to serve! There was a woman in ten thousand, if you like!)

'That is the very point I was about to put to your ladyship,' said the Sergeant. 'The other officer has done a world of harm to this inquiry, by letting the servants see that he suspected them. If I give them cause to think themselves suspected a second time, there's no knowing what obstacles they may not throw in my way—the women especially. At

the same time, their boxes _must_ be searched again?for this plain reason, that the first investigation only looked for the Diamond, and that the second investigation must look for the stained dress. I quite agree with you, my lady, that the servants? feelings ought to be consulted. But I am equally clear that the servants? wardrobes ought to be searched.?

This looked very like a dead-lock. My lady said so, in choicer language than mine.

?I have got a plan to meet the difficulty,? said Sergeant Cuff, ?if your ladyship will consent to it. I propose explaining the case to the servants.?

?The women will think themselves suspected directly,? I said, interrupting him.

?The women won?t, Mr. Betteredge,? answered the Sergeant, ?if I can tell them I am going to examine the wardrobes of _everybody_?from her ladyship downwards?who slept in the house on Wednesday night. It?s a mere formality,? he added, with a side look at my mistress; ?but the servants will accept it as even dealing between them and their betters; and, instead of hindering the investigation, they will make a point of honour of assisting it.?

I saw the truth of that. My lady, after her first surprise was over, saw the truth of it also.

?You are certain the investigation is necessary?? she said.

?It?s the shortest way that I can see, my lady, to the end we have in view.?

My mistress rose to ring the bell for her maid. ?You shall speak to the servants,? she said, ?with the keys of my wardrobe in your hand.?

Sergeant Cuff stopped her by a very unexpected question.

?Hadn?t we better make sure first,? he asked, ?that the other ladies and gentlemen in the house will consent, too??

?The only other lady in the house is Miss Verinder,? answered my mistress, with a look of surprise. ?The only gentlemen are my nephews, Mr. Blake and Mr. Ablewhite. There is not the least fear of a refusal from any of the three.?

I reminded my lady here that Mr. Godfrey was going away. As I said the words, Mr. Godfrey himself knocked at the door to say good-bye, and was followed in by Mr. Franklin, who was going with him to the station. My lady explained the difficulty. Mr. Godfrey settled it directly. He called to Samuel, through the window, to take his portmanteau upstairs again, and he then put the key himself into Sergeant Cuff?s hand. ?My luggage can follow me to London,? he said, ?when the inquiry is over.? The Sergeant received the key with a becoming apology. ?I am sorry to

put you to any inconvenience, sir, for a mere formality; but the example of their betters will do wonders in reconciling the servants to this inquiry. Mr. Godfrey, after taking leave of my lady, in a most sympathising manner, left a farewell message for Miss Rachel, the terms of which made it clear to my mind that he had not taken No for an answer, and that he meant to put the marriage question to her once more, at the next opportunity. Mr. Franklin, on following his cousin out, informed the Sergeant that all his clothes were open to examination, and that nothing he possessed was kept under lock and key. Sergeant Cuff made his best acknowledgments. His views, you will observe, had been met with the utmost readiness by my lady, by Mr. Godfrey, and by Mr. Franklin. There was only Miss Rachel now wanting to follow their lead, before we called the servants together, and began the search for the stained dress.

My lady's unaccountable objection to the Sergeant seemed to make our conference more distasteful to her than ever, as soon as we were left alone again. 'If I send you down Miss Verinder's keys,' she said to him, 'I presume I shall have done all you want of me for the present?'

'I beg your ladyship's pardon,' said Sergeant Cuff. 'Before we begin, I should like, if convenient, to have the washing-book. The stained article of dress may be an article of linen. If the search leads to nothing, I want to be able to account next for all the linen in the house, and for all the linen sent to the wash. If there is an article missing, there will be at least a presumption that it has got the paint-stain on it, and that it has been purposely made away with, yesterday or today, by the person owning it. Superintendent Seegrave,' added the Sergeant, turning to me, 'pointed the attention of the women-servants to the smear, when they all crowded into the room on Thursday morning. That _may_ turn out, Mr. Betteredge, to have been one more of Superintendent Seegrave's many mistakes.'

My lady desired me to ring the bell, and order the washing-book. She remained with us until it was produced, in case Sergeant Cuff had any further request to make of her after looking at it.

The washing-book was brought in by Rosanna Spearman. The girl had come down to breakfast that morning miserably pale and haggard, but sufficiently recovered from her illness of the previous day to do her usual work. Sergeant Cuff looked attentively at our second housemaid at her face, when she came in; at her crooked shoulder, when she went out.

'Have you anything more to say to me?'' asked my lady, still as eager as ever to be out of the Sergeant's society.

The great Cuff opened the washing-book, understood it perfectly in half a minute, and shut it up again. 'I venture to trouble your ladyship with one last question,' he said. 'Has the young woman who brought us this book been in your employment as long as the other servants?'

'Why do you ask?'' said my lady.

'The last time I saw her,' answered the Sergeant, 'she was in prison

for theft.?

After that, there was no help for it, but to tell him the truth. My mistress dwelt strongly on Rosanna's good conduct in her service, and on the high opinion entertained of her by the matron at the Reformatory. "You don't suspect her, I hope?" my lady added, in conclusion, very earnestly.

"I have already told your ladyship that I don't suspect any person in the house of thieving?up to the present time.?"

After that answer, my lady rose to go upstairs, and ask for Miss Rachel's keys. The Sergeant was beforehand with me in opening the door for her. He made a very low bow. My lady shuddered as she passed him.

We waited, and waited, and no keys appeared. Sergeant Cuff made no remark to me. He turned his melancholy face to the window; he put his lanky hands into his pockets; and he whistled "The Last Rose of Summer" softly to himself.

At last, Samuel came in, not with the keys, but with a morsel of paper for me. I got at my spectacles, with some fumbling and difficulty, feeling the Sergeant's dismal eyes fixed on me all the time. There were two or three lines on the paper, written in pencil by my lady. They informed me that Miss Rachel flatly refused to have her wardrobe examined. Asked for her reasons, she had burst out crying. Asked again, she had said: "I won't, because I won't. I must yield to force if you use it, but I will yield to nothing else." I understood my lady's disinclination to face Sergeant Cuff with such an answer from her daughter as that. If I had not been too old for the amiable weaknesses of youth, I believe I should have blushed at the notion of facing him myself.

"Any news of Miss Verinder's keys?" asked the Sergeant.

"My young lady refuses to have her wardrobe examined.?"

"Ah!" said the Sergeant.

His voice was not quite in such a perfect state of discipline as his face. When he said "Ah!" he said it in the tone of a man who had heard something which he expected to hear. He half angered and half frightened me?why, I couldn't tell, but he did it.

"Must the search be given up?" I asked.

"Yes," said the Sergeant, "the search must be given up, because your young lady refuses to submit to it like the rest. We must examine all the wardrobes in the house or none. Send Mr. Ablewhite's portmanteau to London by the next train, and return the washing-book, with my compliments and thanks, to the young woman who brought it in.?"

He laid the washing-book on the table, and taking out his penknife, began to trim his nails.

"You don't seem to be much disappointed," I said.

"No," said Sergeant Cuff; "I am not much disappointed."

I tried to make him explain himself.

"Why should Miss Rachel put an obstacle in your way?" I inquired.
"Isn't it her interest to help you?"

"Wait a little, Mr. Betteredge—wait a little."

Cleverer heads than mine might have seen his drift. Or a person less fond of Miss Rachel than I was, might have seen his drift. My lady's horror of him might (as I have since thought) have meant that she saw his drift (as the scripture says) "in a glass darkly." I didn't see it yet—that's all I know.

"What's to be done next?" I asked.

Sergeant Cuff finished the nail on which he was then at work, looked at it for a moment with a melancholy interest, and put up his penknife.

"Come out into the garden," he said, "and let's have a look at the roses."

CHAPTER XIV

The nearest way to the garden, on going out of my lady's sitting-room, was by the shrubbery path, which you already know of. For the sake of your better understanding of what is now to come, I may add to this, that the shrubbery path was Mr. Franklin's favourite walk. When he was out in the grounds, and when we failed to find him anywhere else, we generally found him here.

I am afraid I must own that I am rather an obstinate old man. The more firmly Sergeant Cuff kept his thoughts shut up from me, the more firmly I persisted in trying to look in at them. As we turned into the shrubbery path, I attempted to circumvent him in another way.

"As things are now," I said, "if I was in your place, I should be at my wits' end."

"If you were in my place," answered the Sergeant, "you would have formed an opinion—and, as things are now, any doubt you might previously have felt about your own conclusions would be completely set at rest. Never mind for the present what those conclusions are, Mr. Betteredge. I haven't brought you out here to draw me like a badger; I have brought you out here to ask for some information. You might have given it to me no doubt, in the house, instead of out of it. But doors and listeners have a knack of getting together; and, in my line of life, we cultivate a healthy taste for the open air."

Who was to circumvent this man? I gave in?and waited as patiently as I could to hear what was coming next.

?We won?t enter into your young lady?s motives,? the Sergeant went on; ?we will only say it?s a pity she declines to assist me, because, by so doing, she makes this investigation more difficult than it might otherwise have been. We must now try to solve the mystery of the smear on the door?which, you may take my word for it, means the mystery of the Diamond also?in some other way. I have decided to see the servants, and to search their thoughts and actions, Mr. Betteredge, instead of searching their wardrobes. Before I begin, however, I want to ask you a question or two. You are an observant man?did you notice anything strange in any of the servants (making due allowance, of course, for fright and fluster), after the loss of the Diamond was found out? Any particular quarrel among them? Anyone of them not in his or her usual spirits? Unexpectedly out of temper, for instance? or unexpectedly taken ill??

I had just time to think of Rosanna Spearman?s sudden illness at yesterday?s dinner?but not time to make any answer?when I saw Sergeant Cuff?s eyes suddenly turn aside towards the shrubbery; and I heard him say softly to himself, ?Hullo!?

?What?s the matter?? I asked.

?A touch of the rheumatics in my back,? said the Sergeant, in a loud voice, as if he wanted some third person to hear us. ?We shall have a change in the weather before long.?

A few steps further brought us to the corner of the house. Turning off sharp to the right, we entered on the terrace, and went down, by the steps in the middle, into the garden below. Sergeant Cuff stopped there, in the open space, where we could see round us on every side.

?About that young person, Rosanna Spearman?? he said. ?It isn?t very likely, with her personal appearance, that she has got a lover. But, for the girl?s own sake, I must ask you at once whether she has provided herself with a sweetheart, poor wretch, like the rest of them??

What on earth did he mean, under present circumstances, by putting such a question to me as that? I stared at him, instead of answering him.

?I saw Rosanna Spearman hiding in the shrubbery as we went by,? said the Sergeant.

?When you said ?Hullo???

?Yes?when I said ?Hullo!? If there?s a sweetheart in the case, the hiding doesn?t much matter. If there isn?t?as things are in this house?the hiding is a highly suspicious circumstance, and it will be my painful duty to act on it accordingly.?

What, in God?s name, was I to say to him? I knew the shrubbery was Mr.

Franklin's favourite walk; I knew he would most likely turn that way when he came back from the station; I knew that Penelope had over and over again caught her fellow-servant hanging about there, and had always declared to me that Rosanna's object was to attract Mr. Franklin's attention. If my daughter was right, she might well have been lying in wait for Mr. Franklin's return when the Sergeant noticed her. I was put between the two difficulties of mentioning Penelope's fanciful notion as if it was mine, or of leaving an unfortunate creature to suffer the consequences, the very serious consequences, of exciting the suspicion of Sergeant Cuff. Out of pure pity for the girl—on my soul and my character, out of pure pity for the girl—I gave the Sergeant the necessary explanations, and told him that Rosanna had been mad enough to set her heart on Mr. Franklin Blake.

Sergeant Cuff never laughed. On the few occasions when anything amused him, he curled up a little at the corners of the lips, nothing more. He curled up now.

‘Hadn't you better say she's mad enough to be an ugly girl and only a servant?’ he asked. ‘The falling in love with a gentleman of Mr. Franklin Blake's manners and appearance doesn't seem to me to be the maddest part of her conduct by any means. However, I'm glad the thing is cleared up: it relieves one's mind to have things cleared up. Yes, I'll keep it a secret, Mr. Betteredge. I like to be tender to human infirmity—though I don't get many chances of exercising that virtue in my line of life. You think Mr. Franklin Blake hasn't got a suspicion of the girl's fancy for him? Ah! he would have found it out fast enough if she had been nice-looking. The ugly women have a bad time of it in this world; let's hope it will be made up to them in another. You have got a nice garden here, and a well-kept lawn. See for yourself how much better the flowers look with grass about them instead of gravel. No, thank you. I won't take a rose. It goes to my heart to break them off the stem. Just as it goes to your heart, you know, when there's something wrong in the servants' hall. Did you notice anything you couldn't account for in any of the servants when the loss of the Diamond was first found out?’

I had got on very fairly well with Sergeant Cuff so far. But the slyness with which he slipped in that last question put me on my guard. In plain English, I didn't at all relish the notion of helping his inquiries, when those inquiries took him (in the capacity of snake in the grass) among my fellow-servants.

‘I noticed nothing,’ I said, ‘except that we all lost our heads together, myself included.’

‘Oh,’ says the Sergeant, ‘that's all you have to tell me, is it?’

I answered, with (as I flattered myself) an unmoved countenance, ‘That is all.’

Sergeant Cuff's dismal eyes looked me hard in the face.

‘Mr. Betteredge,’ he said, ‘have you any objection to oblige me by

shaking hands? I have taken an extraordinary liking to you.?

(Why he should have chosen the exact moment when I was deceiving him to give me that proof of his good opinion, is beyond all comprehension! I felt a little proud?I really did feel a little proud of having been one too many at last for the celebrated Cuff!)

We went back to the house; the Sergeant requesting that I would give him a room to himself, and then send in the servants (the indoor servants only), one after another, in the order of their rank, from first to last.

I showed Sergeant Cuff into my own room, and then called the servants together in the hall. Rosanna Spearman appeared among them, much as usual. She was as quick in her way as the Sergeant in his, and I suspect she had heard what he said to me about the servants in general, just before he discovered her. There she was, at any rate, looking as if she had never heard of such a place as the shrubbery in her life.

I sent them in, one by one, as desired. The cook was the first to enter the Court of Justice, otherwise my room. She remained but a short time. Report, on coming out: ?Sergeant Cuff is depressed in his spirits; but Sergeant Cuff is a perfect gentleman.? My lady?s own maid followed. Remained much longer. Report, on coming out: ?If Sergeant Cuff doesn?t believe a respectable woman, he might keep his opinion to himself, at any rate!? Penelope went next. Remained only a moment or two. Report, on coming out: ?Sergeant Cuff is much to be pitied. He must have been crossed in love, father, when he was a young man.? The first housemaid followed Penelope. Remained, like my lady?s maid, a long time. Report, on coming out: ?I didn?t enter her ladyship?s service, Mr. Betteredge, to be doubted to my face by a low police-officer!? Rosanna Spearman went next. Remained longer than any of them. No report on coming out?dead silence, and lips as pale as ashes. Samuel, the footman, followed Rosanna. Remained a minute or two. Report, on coming out: ?Whoever blacks Sergeant Cuff?s boots ought to be ashamed of himself.? Nancy, the kitchen-maid, went last. Remained a minute or two. Report, on coming out: ?Sergeant Cuff has a heart; _he_ doesn?t cut jokes, Mr. Betteredge, with a poor hard-working girl.?

Going into the Court of Justice, when it was all over, to hear if there were any further commands for me, I found the Sergeant at his old trick?looking out of window, and whistling ?The Last Rose of Summer? to himself.

?Any discoveries, sir?? I inquired.

?If Rosanna Spearman asks leave to go out,? said the Sergeant, ?let the poor thing go; but let me know first.?

I might as well have held my tongue about Rosanna and Mr. Franklin! It was plain enough; the unfortunate girl had fallen under Sergeant Cuff?s suspicions, in spite of all I could do to prevent it.

?I hope you don?t think Rosanna is concerned in the loss of the

Diamond?? I ventured to say.

The corners of the Sergeant's melancholy mouth curled up, and he looked hard in my face, just as he had looked in the garden.

?I think I had better not tell you, Mr. Betteredge,? he said. ?You might lose your head, you know, for the second time.?

I began to doubt whether I had been one too many for the celebrated Cuff, after all! It was rather a relief to me that we were interrupted here by a knock at the door, and a message from the cook. Rosanna Spearman _had_ asked to go out, for the usual reason, that her head was bad, and she wanted a breath of fresh air. At a sign from the Sergeant, I said, Yes. ?Which is the servants' way out?? he asked, when the messenger had gone. I showed him the servants' way out. ?Lock the door of your room,? says the Sergeant; ?and if anybody asks for me, say I'm in there, composing my mind.? He curled up again at the corners of the lips, and disappeared.

Left alone, under those circumstances, a devouring curiosity pushed me on to make some discoveries for myself.

It was plain that Sergeant Cuff's suspicions of Rosanna had been roused by something that he had found out at his examination of the servants in my room. Now, the only two servants (excepting Rosanna herself) who had remained under examination for any length of time, were my lady's own maid and the first housemaid, those two being also the women who had taken the lead in persecuting their unfortunate fellow-servant from the first. Reaching these conclusions, I looked in on them, casually as it might be, in the servants' hall, and, finding tea going forward, instantly invited myself to that meal. (For, _nota bene_, a drop of tea is to a woman's tongue what a drop of oil is to a wasting lamp.)

My reliance on the tea-pot, as an ally, did not go unrewarded. In less than half an hour I knew as much as the Sergeant himself.

My lady's maid and the housemaid, had, it appeared, neither of them believed in Rosanna's illness of the previous day. These two devils?I ask your pardon; but how else _can_ you describe a couple of spiteful women?? had stolen upstairs, at intervals during the Thursday afternoon; had tried Rosanna's door, and found it locked; had knocked, and not been answered; had listened, and not heard a sound inside. When the girl had come down to tea, and had been sent up, still out of sorts, to bed again, the two devils aforesaid had tried her door once more, and found it locked; had looked at the keyhole, and found it stopped up; had seen a light under the door at midnight, and had heard the crackling of a fire (a fire in a servant's bedroom in the month of June!) at four in the morning. All this they had told Sergeant Cuff, who, in return for their anxiety to enlighten him, had eyed them with sour and suspicious looks, and had shown them plainly that he didn't believe either one or the other. Hence, the unfavourable reports of him which these two women had brought out with them from the examination. Hence, also (without reckoning the influence of the tea-pot), their readiness to let their tongues run to any length on the subject of the

Sergeant's ungracious behaviour to them.

Having had some experience of the great Cuff's roundabout ways, and having last seen him evidently bent on following Rosanna privately when she went out for her walk, it seemed clear to me that he had thought it unadvisable to let the lady's maid and the housemaid know how materially they had helped him. They were just the sort of women, if he had treated their evidence as trustworthy, to have been puffed up by it, and to have said or done something which would have put Rosanna Spearman on her guard.

I walked out in the fine summer afternoon, very sorry for the poor girl, and very uneasy in my mind at the turn things had taken. Drifting towards the shrubbery, some time later, there I met Mr. Franklin. After returning from seeing his cousin off at the station, he had been with my lady, holding a long conversation with her. She had told him of Miss Rachel's unaccountable refusal to let her wardrobe be examined; and had put him in such low spirits about my young lady that he seemed to shrink from speaking on the subject. The family temper appeared in his face that evening, for the first time in my experience of him.

"Well, Betteredge," he said, "how does the atmosphere of mystery and suspicion in which we are all living now, agree with you? Do you remember that morning when I first came here with the Moonstone? I wish to God we had thrown it into the quicksand!"

After breaking out in that way, he abstained from speaking again until he had composed himself. We walked silently, side by side, for a minute or two, and then he asked me what had become of Sergeant Cuff. It was impossible to put Mr. Franklin off with the excuse of the Sergeant being in my room, composing his mind. I told him exactly what had happened, mentioning particularly what my lady's maid and the house-maid had said about Rosanna Spearman.

Mr. Franklin's clear head saw the turn the Sergeant's suspicions had taken, in the twinkling of an eye.

"Didn't you tell me this morning," he said, "that one of the tradespeople declared he had met Rosanna yesterday, on the footway to Frizinghall, when we supposed her to be ill in her room?"

"Yes, sir."

"If my aunt's maid and the other woman have spoken the truth, you may depend upon it the tradesman did meet her. The girl's attack of illness was a blind to deceive us. She had some guilty reason for going to the town secretly. The paint-stained dress is a dress of hers; and the fire heard crackling in her room at four in the morning was a fire lit to destroy it. Rosanna Spearman has stolen the Diamond. I'll go in directly, and tell my aunt the turn things have taken."

"Not just yet, if you please, sir," said a melancholy voice behind us.

We both turned about, and found ourselves face to face with Sergeant

Cuff.

‘Why not just yet?’ asked Mr. Franklin.

‘Because, sir, if you tell her ladyship, her ladyship will tell Miss Verinder.’

‘Suppose she does. What then?’ Mr. Franklin said those words with a sudden heat and vehemence, as if the Sergeant had mortally offended him.

‘Do you think it’s wise, sir,’ said Sergeant Cuff, quietly, ‘to put such a question as that to me at such a time as this?’

There was a moment’s silence between them: Mr. Franklin walked close up to the Sergeant. The two looked each other straight in the face. Mr. Franklin spoke first, dropping his voice as suddenly as he had raised it.

‘I suppose you know, Mr. Cuff,’ he said, ‘that you are treading on delicate ground?’

‘It isn’t the first time, by a good many hundreds, that I find myself treading on delicate ground,’ answered the other, as immovable as ever.

‘I am to understand that you forbid me to tell my aunt what has happened?’

‘You are to understand, if you please, sir, that I throw up the case, if you tell Lady Verinder, or tell anybody, what has happened, until I give you leave.’

That settled it. Mr. Franklin had no choice but to submit. He turned away in anger and left us.

I had stood there listening to them, all in a tremble; not knowing whom to suspect, or what to think next. In the midst of my confusion, two things, however, were plain to me. First, that my young lady was, in some unaccountable manner, at the bottom of the sharp speeches that had passed between them. Second, that they thoroughly understood each other, without having previously exchanged a word of explanation on either side.

‘Mr. Betteredge,’ says the Sergeant, ‘you have done a very foolish thing in my absence. You have done a little detective business on your own account. For the future, perhaps you will be so obliging as to do your detective business along with me.’

He took me by the arm, and walked me away with him along the road by which he had come. I dare say I had deserved his reproof but I was not going to help him to set traps for Rosanna Spearman, for all that. Thief or no thief, legal or not legal, I don’t care! I pitied her.

‘What do you want of me?’ I asked, shaking him off, and stopping short.

‘Only a little information about the country round here,’ said the Sergeant.

I couldn’t well object to improve Sergeant Cuff in his geography.

‘Is there any path, in that direction, leading to the sea-beach from this house?’ asked the Sergeant. He pointed, as he spoke, to the fir-plantation which led to the Shivering Sand.

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘there is a path.’

‘Show it to me.’

Side by side, in the grey of the summer evening, Sergeant Cuff and I set forth for the Shivering Sand.

CHAPTER XV

The Sergeant remained silent, thinking his own thoughts, till we entered the plantation of firs which led to the quicksand. There he roused himself, like a man whose mind was made up, and spoke to me again.

‘Mr. Betteredge,’ he said, ‘as you have honoured me by taking an oar in my boat, and as you may, I think, be of some assistance to me before the evening is out, I see no use in our mystifying one another any longer, and I propose to set you an example of plain speaking on my side. You are determined to give me no information to the prejudice of Rosanna Spearman, because she has been a good girl to you, and because you pity her heartily. Those humane considerations do you a world of credit, but they happen in this instance to be humane considerations clean thrown away. Rosanna Spearman is not in the slightest danger of getting into trouble?no, not if I fix her with being concerned in the disappearance of the Diamond, on evidence which is as plain as the nose on your face!’

‘Do you mean that my lady won’t prosecute?’ I asked.

‘I mean that your lady can’t prosecute,’ said the Sergeant. ‘Rosanna Spearman is simply an instrument in the hands of another person, and Rosanna Spearman will be held harmless for that other person’s sake.’

He spoke like a man in earnest?there was no denying that. Still, I felt something stirring uneasily against him in my mind. ‘Can’t you give that other person a name?’ I said.

‘Can’t you, Mr. Betteredge?’

‘No.’

Sergeant Cuff stood stock-still, and surveyed me with a look of melancholy interest.

‘It’s always a pleasure to me to be tender towards human infirmity,’ he said. ‘I feel particularly tender at the present moment, Mr. Betteredge, towards you. And you, with the same excellent motive, feel particularly tender towards Rosanna Spearman, don’t you? Do you happen to know whether she has had a new outfit of linen lately?’

What he meant by slipping in this extraordinary question unawares, I was at a total loss to imagine. Seeing no possible injury to Rosanna if I owned the truth, I answered that the girl had come to us rather sparsely provided with linen, and that my lady, in recompense for her good conduct (I laid a stress on her good conduct), had given her a new outfit not a fortnight since.

‘This is a miserable world,’ says the Sergeant. ‘Human life, Mr. Betteredge, is a sort of target—misfortune is always firing at it, and always hitting the mark. But for that outfit, we should have discovered a new nightgown or petticoat among Rosanna’s things, and have nailed her in that way. You’re not at a loss to follow me, are you? You have examined the servants yourself, and you know what discoveries two of them made outside Rosanna’s door. Surely you know what the girl was about yesterday, after she was taken ill? You can’t guess? Oh dear me, it’s as plain as that strip of light there, at the end of the trees. At eleven, on Thursday morning, Superintendent Seegrave (who is a mass of human infirmity) points out to all the women servants the smear on the door. Rosanna has her own reasons for suspecting her own things; she takes the first opportunity of getting to her room, finds the paint-stain on her night-gown, or petticoat, or what not, shams ill and slips away to the town, gets the materials for making a new petticoat or nightgown, makes it alone in her room on the Thursday night, lights a fire (not to destroy it; two of her fellow-servants are prying outside her door, and she knows better than to make a smell of burning, and to have a lot of tinder to get rid of)—lights a fire, I say, to dry and iron the substitute dress after wringing it out, keeps the stained dress hidden (probably on her), and is at this moment occupied in making away with it, in some convenient place, on that lonely bit of beach ahead of us. I have traced her this evening to your fishing village, and to one particular cottage, which we may possibly have to visit, before we go back. She stopped in the cottage for some time, and she came out with (as I believe) something hidden under her cloak. A cloak (on a woman’s back) is an emblem of charity—it covers a multitude of sins. I saw her set off northwards along the coast, after leaving the cottage. Is your sea-shore here considered a fine specimen of marine landscape, Mr. Betteredge?’

I answered, ‘Yes,’ as shortly as might be.

‘Tastes differ,’ says Sergeant Cuff. ‘Looking at it from my point of view, I never saw a marine landscape that I admired less. If you happen to be following another person along your sea-coast, and if that person happens to look round, there isn’t a scrap of cover to hide you anywhere. I had to choose between taking Rosanna in custody on suspicion, or leaving her, for the time being, with her little game in her own hands. For reasons which I won’t trouble you with, I decided on

making any sacrifice rather than give the alarm as soon as tonight to a certain person who shall be nameless between us. I came back to the house to ask you to take me to the north end of the beach by another way. Sand?in respect of its printing off people?s footsteps?is one of the best detective officers I know. If we don?t meet with Rosanna Spearman by coming round on her in this way, the sand may tell us what she has been at, if the light only lasts long enough. Here is the sand. If you will excuse my suggesting it?suppose you hold your tongue, and let me go first??

If there is such a thing known at the doctor?s shop as a detective-fever, that disease had now got fast hold of your humble servant. Sergeant Cuff went on between the hillocks of sand, down to the beach. I followed him (with my heart in my mouth); and waited at a little distance for what was to happen next.

As it turned out, I found myself standing nearly in the same place where Rosanna Spearman and I had been talking together when Mr. Franklin suddenly appeared before us, on arriving at our house from London. While my eyes were watching the Sergeant, my mind wandered away in spite of me to what had passed, on that former occasion, between Rosanna and me. I declare I almost felt the poor thing slip her hand again into mine, and give it a little grateful squeeze to thank me for speaking kindly to her. I declare I almost heard her voice telling me again that the Shivering Sand seemed to draw her to it against her own will, whenever she went out?almost saw her face brighten again, as it brightened when she first set eyes upon Mr. Franklin coming briskly out on us from among the hillocks. My spirits fell lower and lower as I thought of these things?and the view of the lonesome little bay, when I looked about to rouse myself, only served to make me feel more uneasy still.

The last of the evening light was fading away; and over all the desolate place there hung a still and awful calm. The heave of the main ocean on the great sandbank out in the bay, was a heave that made no sound. The inner sea lay lost and dim, without a breath of wind to stir it. Patches of nasty ooze floated, yellow-white, on the dead surface of the water. Scum and slime shone faintly in certain places, where the last of the light still caught them on the two great spits of rock jutting out, north and south, into the sea. It was now the time of the turn of the tide: and even as I stood there waiting, the broad brown face of the quicksand began to dimple and quiver?the only moving thing in all the horrid place.

I saw the Sergeant start as the shiver of the sand caught his eye. After looking at it for a minute or so, he turned and came back to me.

?A treacherous place, Mr. Betteredge,? he said; ?and no signs of Rosanna Spearman anywhere on the beach, look where you may.?

He took me down lower on the shore, and I saw for myself that his footsteps and mine were the only footsteps printed off on the sand.

?How does the fishing village bear, standing where we are now?? asked

Sergeant Cuff.

"Cobb's Hole," I answered (that being the name of the place), "bears as near as may be, due south."

"I saw the girl this evening, walking northward along the shore, from Cobb's Hole," said the Sergeant. "Consequently, she must have been walking towards this place. Is Cobb's Hole on the other side of that point of land there? And can we get to it now it's low water by the beach?"

I answered, "Yes," to both those questions.

"If you'll excuse my suggesting it, we'll step out briskly," said the Sergeant. "I want to find the place where she left the shore, before it gets dark."

We had walked, I should say, a couple of hundred yards towards Cobb's Hole, when Sergeant Cuff suddenly went down on his knees on the beach, to all appearance seized with a sudden frenzy for saying his prayers.

"There's something to be said for your marine landscape here, after all," remarked the Sergeant. "Here are a woman's footsteps, Mr. Betteredge! Let us call them Rosanna's footsteps, until we find evidence to the contrary that we can't resist. Very confused footsteps, you will please to observe—purposely confused, I should say. Ah, poor soul, she understands the detective virtues of sand as well as I do! But hasn't she been in rather too great a hurry to tread out the marks thoroughly? I think she has. Here's one footstep going from Cobb's Hole; and here is another going back to it. Isn't that the toe of her shoe pointing straight to the water's edge? And don't I see two heel-marks further down the beach, close at the water's edge also? I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I'm afraid Rosanna is sly. It looks as if she had determined to get to that place you and I have just come from, without leaving any marks on the sand to trace her by. Shall we say that she walked through the water from this point till she got to that ledge of rocks behind us, and came back the same way, and then took to the beach again where those two heel marks are still left? Yes, we'll say that. It seems to fit in with my notion that she had something under her cloak, when she left the cottage. No! not something to destroy—for, in that case, where would have been the need of all these precautions to prevent my tracing the place at which her walk ended? Something to hide is, I think, the better guess of the two. Perhaps, if we go on to the cottage, we may find out what that something is?"

At this proposal, my detective-fever suddenly cooled. "You don't want me," I said. "What good can I do?"

"The longer I know you, Mr. Betteredge," said the Sergeant, "the more virtues I discover. Modesty—oh dear me, how rare modesty is in this world! and how much of that rarity you possess! If I go alone to the cottage, the people's tongues will be tied at the first question I put to them. If I go with you, I go introduced by a justly respected

neighbour, and a flow of conversation is the necessary result. It strikes me in that light; how does it strike you??

Not having an answer of the needful smartness as ready as I could have wished, I tried to gain time by asking him what cottage he wanted to go to.

On the Sergeant describing the place, I recognised it as a cottage inhabited by a fisherman named Yolland, with his wife and two grown-up children, a son and a daughter. If you will look back, you will find that, in first presenting Rosanna Spearman to your notice, I have described her as occasionally varying her walk to the Shivering Sand, by a visit to some friends of hers at Cobb's Hole. Those friends were the Yollands?respectable, worthy people, a credit to the neighbourhood. Rosanna's acquaintance with them had begun by means of the daughter, who was afflicted with a misshapen foot, and who was known in our parts by the name of Limping Lucy. The two deformed girls had, I suppose, a kind of fellow-feeling for each other. Anyway, the Yollands and Rosanna always appeared to get on together, at the few chances they had of meeting, in a pleasant and friendly manner. The fact of Sergeant Cuff having traced the girl to their cottage, set the matter of my helping his inquiries in quite a new light. Rosanna had merely gone where she was in the habit of going; and to show that she had been in company with the fisherman and his family was as good as to prove that she had been innocently occupied so far, at any rate. It would be doing the girl a service, therefore, instead of an injury, if I allowed myself to be convinced by Sergeant Cuff's logic. I professed myself convinced by it accordingly.

We went on to Cobb's Hole, seeing the footsteps on the sand, as long as the light lasted.

On reaching the cottage, the fisherman and his son proved to be out in the boat; and Limping Lucy, always weak and weary, was resting on her bed upstairs. Good Mrs. Yolland received us alone in her kitchen. When she heard that Sergeant Cuff was a celebrated character in London, she clapped a bottle of Dutch gin and a couple of clean pipes on the table, and stared as if she could never see enough of him.

I sat quiet in a corner, waiting to hear how the Sergeant would find his way to the subject of Rosanna Spearman. His usual roundabout manner of going to work proved, on this occasion, to be more roundabout than ever. How he managed it is more than I could tell at the time, and more than I can tell now. But this is certain, he began with the Royal Family, the Primitive Methodists, and the price of fish; and he got from that (in his dismal, underground way) to the loss of the Moonstone, the spitefulness of our first house-maid, and the hard behaviour of the women-servants generally towards Rosanna Spearman. Having reached his subject in this fashion, he described himself as making his inquiries about the lost Diamond, partly with a view to find it, and partly for the purpose of clearing Rosanna from the unjust suspicions of her enemies in the house. In about a quarter of an hour from the time when we entered the kitchen, good Mrs. Yolland was persuaded that she was talking to Rosanna's best friend, and was

pressing Sergeant Cuff to comfort his stomach and revive his spirits out of the Dutch bottle.

Being firmly persuaded that the Sergeant was wasting his breath to no purpose on Mrs. Yolland, I sat enjoying the talk between them, much as I have sat, in my time, enjoying a stage play. The great Cuff showed a wonderful patience; trying his luck drearly this way and that way, and firing shot after shot, as it were, at random, on the chance of hitting the mark. Everything to Rosanna's credit, nothing to Rosanna's prejudice—that was how it ended, try as he might; with Mrs. Yolland talking nineteen to the dozen, and placing the most entire confidence in him. His last effort was made, when we had looked at our watches, and had got on our legs previous to taking leave.

‘I shall now wish you good-night, ma’am,’ says the Sergeant. ‘And I shall only say, at parting, that Rosanna Spearman has a sincere well-wisher in myself, your obedient servant. But, oh dear me! she will never get on in her present place; and my advice to her is—leave it.’

‘Bless your heart alive! she is going to leave it!’ cries Mrs. Yolland. (‘Nota bene’! I translate Mrs. Yolland out of the Yorkshire language into the English language. When I tell you that the all-accomplished Cuff was every now and then puzzled to understand her until I helped him, you will draw your own conclusions as to what your state of mind would be if I reported her in her native tongue.)

Rosanna Spearman going to leave us! I pricked up my ears at that. It seemed strange, to say the least of it, that she should have given no warning, in the first place, to my lady or to me. A certain doubt came up in my mind whether Sergeant Cuff's last random shot might not have hit the mark. I began to question whether my share in the proceedings was quite as harmless a one as I had thought it. It might be all in the way of the Sergeant's business to mystify an honest woman by wrapping her round in a network of lies but it was my duty to have remembered, as a good Protestant, that the father of lies is the Devil—and that mischief and the Devil are never far apart. Beginning to smell mischief in the air, I tried to take Sergeant Cuff out. He sat down again instantly, and asked for a little drop of comfort out of the Dutch bottle. Mrs. Yolland sat down opposite to him, and gave him his nip. I went on to the door, excessively uncomfortable, and said I thought I must bid them good-night—and yet I didn't go.

‘So she means to leave?’ says the Sergeant. ‘What is she to do when she does leave? Sad, sad! The poor creature has got no friends in the world, except you and me.’

‘Ah, but she has though!’ says Mrs. Yolland. ‘She came in here, as I told you, this evening; and, after sitting and talking a little with my girl Lucy and me she asked to go upstairs by herself, into Lucy's room. It's the only room in our place where there's pen and ink. ‘I want to write a letter to a friend,’ she says ‘and I can't do it for the prying and peeping of the servants up at the house.’ Who the letter was written to I can't tell you: it must have been a mortal long one, judging by the time she stopped upstairs over it. I offered her a

postage-stamp when she came down. She hadn't got the letter in her hand, and she didn't accept the stamp. A little close, poor soul (as you know), about herself and her doings. But a friend she has got somewhere, I can tell you; and to that friend you may depend upon it, she will go.

'Soon?' asked the Sergeant.

'As soon as she can,' says Mrs. Yolland.

Here I stepped in again from the door. As chief of my lady's establishment, I couldn't allow this sort of loose talk about a servant of ours going, or not going, to proceed any longer in my presence, without noticing it.

'You must be mistaken about Rosanna Spearman,' I said. 'If she had been going to leave her present situation, she would have mentioned it, in the first place, to me.'

'Mistaken?' cries Mrs. Yolland. 'Why, only an hour ago she bought some things she wanted for travelling?of my own self, Mr. Betteredge, in this very room. And that reminds me,' says the wearisome woman, suddenly beginning to feel in her pocket, 'of something I have got it on my mind to say about Rosanna and her money. Are you either of you likely to see her when you go back to the house?'

'I'll take a message to the poor thing, with the greatest pleasure,' answered Sergeant Cuff, before I could put in a word edgewise.

Mrs. Yolland produced out of her pocket, a few shillings and sixpences, and counted them out with a most particular and exasperating carefulness in the palm of her hand. She offered the money to the Sergeant, looking mighty loth to part with it all the while.

'Might I ask you to give this back to Rosanna, with my love and respects?' says Mrs. Yolland. 'She insisted on paying me for the one or two things she took a fancy to this evening?and money's welcome enough in our house, I don't deny it. Still, I'm not easy in my mind about taking the poor thing's little savings. And to tell you the truth, I don't think my man would like to hear that I had taken Rosanna Spearman's money, when he comes back tomorrow morning from his work. Please say she's heartily welcome to the things she bought of me?as a gift. And don't leave the money on the table,' says Mrs. Yolland, putting it down suddenly before the Sergeant, as if it burnt her fingers?'don't, there's a good man! For times are hard, and flesh is weak; and I might feel tempted to put it back in my pocket again.'

'Come along!' I said, 'I can't wait any longer: I must go back to the house.'

'I'll follow you directly,' says Sergeant Cuff.

For the second time, I went to the door; and, for the second time, try as I might, I couldn't cross the threshold.

‘It’s a delicate matter, ma’am,’ I heard the Sergeant say, ‘giving money back. You charged her cheap for the things, I’m sure?’

‘Cheap!’ says Mrs. Yolland. ‘Come and judge for yourself.’

She took up the candle and led the Sergeant to a corner of the kitchen. For the life of me, I couldn’t help following them. Shaken down in the corner was a heap of odds and ends (mostly old metal), which the fisherman had picked up at different times from wrecked ships, and which he hadn’t found a market for yet, to his own mind. Mrs. Yolland dived into this rubbish, and brought up an old japanned tin case, with a cover to it, and a hasp to hang it up by the sort of thing they use, on board ship, for keeping their maps and charts, and such-like, from the wet.

‘There!’ says she. ‘When Rosanna came in this evening, she bought the fellow to that. ‘It will just do,’ she says, ‘to put my cuffs and collars in, and keep them from being crumpled in my box.’ One and ninepence, Mr. Cuff. As I live by bread, not a halfpenny more!’

‘Dirt cheap!’ says the Sergeant, with a heavy sigh.

He weighed the case in his hand. I thought I heard a note or two of ‘The Last Rose of Summer’ as he looked at it. There was no doubt now! He had made another discovery to the prejudice of Rosanna Spearman, in the place of all others where I thought her character was safest, and all through me! I leave you to imagine what I felt, and how sincerely I repented having been the medium of introduction between Mrs. Yolland and Sergeant Cuff.

‘That will do,’ I said. ‘We really must go.’

Without paying the least attention to me, Mrs. Yolland took another dive into the rubbish, and came up out of it, this time, with a dog-chain.

‘Weigh it in your hand, sir,’ she said to the Sergeant. ‘We had three of these; and Rosanna has taken two of them. ‘What can you want, my dear, with a couple of dog’s chains?’ says I. ‘If I join them together they’ll go round my box nicely,’ says she. ‘Rope’s cheapest,’ says I. ‘Chain’s surest,’ says she. ‘Who ever heard of a box corded with chain,’ says I. ‘Oh, Mrs. Yolland, don’t make objections!’ says she; ‘let me have my chains!’ A strange girl, Mr. Cuff? good as gold, and kinder than a sister to my Lucy? but always a little strange. There! I humoured her. Three and sixpence. On the word of an honest woman, three _and_ sixpence, Mr. Cuff!’

‘Each?’ says the Sergeant.

‘Both together!’ says Mrs. Yolland. ‘Three and sixpence for the two.’

‘Given away, ma’am,’ says the Sergeant, shaking his head. ‘Clean given away!’

‘There’s the money,’ says Mrs. Yolland, getting back sideways to the little heap of silver on the table, as if it drew her in spite of herself. ‘The tin case and the dog chains were all she bought, and all she took away. One and ninepence and three and sixpence—total, five and three. With my love and respects—and I can’t find it in my conscience to take a poor girl’s savings, when she may want them herself.’

‘I can’t find it in my conscience, ma’am, to give the money back,’ says Sergeant Cuff. ‘You have as good as made her a present of the things—you have indeed.’

‘Is that your sincere opinion, sir?’ says Mrs. Yolland brightening up wonderfully.

‘There can’t be a doubt about it,’ answered the Sergeant. ‘Ask Mr. Betteredge.’

It was no use asking me. All they got out of me was, ‘Good-night.’

‘Bother the money!’ says Mrs. Yolland. With these words, she appeared to lose all command over herself; and, making a sudden snatch at the heap of silver, put it back, holus-bolus, in her pocket. ‘It upsets one’s temper, it does, to see it lying there, and nobody taking it,’ cries this unreasonable woman, sitting down with a thump, and looking at Sergeant Cuff, as much as to say, ‘It’s in my pocket again now? get it out if you can!’

This time, I not only went to the door, but went fairly out on the road back. Explain it how you may, I felt as if one or both of them had mortally offended me. Before I had taken three steps down the village, I heard the Sergeant behind me.

‘Thank you for your introduction, Mr. Betteredge,’ he said. ‘I am indebted to the fisherman’s wife for an entirely new sensation. Mrs. Yolland has puzzled me.’

It was on the tip of my tongue to have given him a sharp answer, for no better reason than this—that I was out of temper with him, because I was out of temper with myself. But when he owned to being puzzled, a comforting doubt crossed my mind whether any great harm had been done after all. I waited in discreet silence to hear more.

‘Yes,’ says the Sergeant, as if he was actually reading my thoughts in the dark. ‘Instead of putting me on the scent, it may console you to know, Mr. Betteredge (with your interest in Rosanna), that you have been the means of throwing me off. What the girl has done, tonight, is clear enough, of course. She has joined the two chains, and has fastened them to the hasp in the tin case. She has sunk the case, in the water or in the quicksand. She has made the loose end of the chain fast to some place under the rocks, known only to herself. And she will leave the case secure at its anchorage till the present proceedings have come to an end; after which she can privately pull it up again out of its hiding-place, at her own leisure and convenience. All perfectly

plain, so far. But, says the Sergeant, with the first tone of impatience in his voice that I had heard yet, 'the mystery is? what the devil has she hidden in the tin case?'

I thought to myself, 'The Moonstone!' But I only said to Sergeant Cuff, 'Can't you guess?'

'It's not the Diamond,' says the Sergeant. 'The whole experience of my life is at fault, if Rosanna Spearman has got the Diamond.'

On hearing those words, the infernal detective-fever began, I suppose, to burn in me again. At any rate, I forgot myself in the interest of guessing this new riddle. I said rashly, 'The stained dress!'

Sergeant Cuff stopped short in the dark, and laid his hand on my arm.

'Is anything thrown into that quicksand of yours, ever thrown up on the surface again?' he asked.

'Never,' I answered. 'Light or heavy, whatever goes into the Shivering Sand is sucked down, and seen no more.'

'Does Rosanna Spearman know that?'

'She knows it as well as I do.'

'Then,' says the Sergeant, 'what on earth has she got to do but to tie up a bit of stone in the stained dress and throw it into the quicksand? There isn't the shadow of a reason why she should have hidden it? and yet she _must_ have hidden it. Query,' says the Sergeant, walking on again, 'is the paint-stained dress a petticoat or a night-gown? or is it something else which there is a reason for preserving at any risk? Mr. Betteredge, if nothing occurs to prevent it, I must go to Frizinghall tomorrow, and discover what she bought in the town, when she privately got the materials for making the substitute dress. It's a risk to leave the house, as things are now? but it's a worse risk still to stir another step in this matter in the dark. Excuse my being a little out of temper; I'm degraded in my own estimation? I have let Rosanna Spearman puzzle me.'

When we got back, the servants were at supper. The first person we saw in the outer yard was the policeman whom Superintendent Seegrave had left at the Sergeant's disposal. The Sergeant asked if Rosanna Spearman had returned. Yes. When? Nearly an hour since. What had she done? She had gone upstairs to take off her bonnet and cloak? and she was now at supper quietly with the rest.

Without making any remark, Sergeant Cuff walked on, sinking lower and lower in his own estimation, to the back of the house. Missing the entrance in the dark, he went on (in spite of my calling to him) till he was stopped by a wicket-gate which led into the garden. When I joined him to bring him back by the right way, I found that he was looking up attentively at one particular window, on the bedroom floor, at the back of the house.

Looking up, in my turn, I discovered that the object of his contemplation was the window of Miss Rachel's room, and that lights were passing backwards and forwards there as if something unusual was going on.

'Isn't that Miss Verinder's room?' asked Sergeant Cuff.

I replied that it was, and invited him to go in with me to supper. The Sergeant remained in his place, and said something about enjoying the smell of the garden at night. I left him to his enjoyment. Just as I was turning in at the door, I heard 'The Last Rose of Summer' at the wicket-gate. Sergeant Cuff had made another discovery! And my young lady's window was at the bottom of it this time!

The latter reflection took me back again to the Sergeant, with a polite intimation that I could not find it in my heart to leave him by himself. 'Is there anything you don't understand up there?' I added, pointing to Miss Rachel's window.

Judging by his voice, Sergeant Cuff had suddenly risen again to the right place in his own estimation. 'You are great people for betting in Yorkshire, are you not?' he asked.

'Well?' I said. 'Suppose we are?'

'If I was a Yorkshireman,' proceeded the Sergeant, taking my arm, 'I would lay you an even sovereign, Mr. Betteredge, that your young lady has suddenly resolved to leave the house. If I won on that event, I should offer to lay another sovereign, that the idea has occurred to her within the last hour.' The first of the Sergeant's guesses startled me. The second mixed itself up somehow in my head with the report we had heard from the policeman, that Rosanna Spearman had returned from the sands within the last hour. The two together had a curious effect on me as we went in to supper. I shook off Sergeant Cuff's arm, and, forgetting my manners, pushed by him through the door to make my own inquiries for myself.

Samuel, the footman, was the first person I met in the passage.

'Her ladyship is waiting to see you and Sergeant Cuff,' he said, before I could put any questions to him.

'How long has she been waiting?' asked the Sergeant's voice behind me.

'For the last hour, sir.'

There it was again! Rosanna had come back; Miss Rachel had taken some resolution out of the common; and my lady had been waiting to see the Sergeant—all within the last hour! It was not pleasant to find these very different persons and things linking themselves together in this way. I went on upstairs, without looking at Sergeant Cuff, or speaking to him. My hand took a sudden fit of trembling as I lifted it to knock at my mistress's door.

‘I shouldn’t be surprised,’ whispered the Sergeant over my shoulder, ‘if a scandal was to burst up in the house tonight. Don’t be alarmed! I have put the muzzle on worse family difficulties than this, in my time.’

As he said the words I heard my mistress’s voice calling to us to come in.

CHAPTER XVI

We found my lady with no light in the room but the reading-lamp. The shade was screwed down so as to overshadow her face. Instead of looking up at us in her usual straightforward way, she sat close at the table, and kept her eyes fixed obstinately on an open book.

‘Officer,’ she said, ‘is it important to the inquiry you are conducting, to know beforehand if any person now in this house wishes to leave it?’

‘Most important, my lady.’

‘I have to tell you, then, that Miss Verinder proposes going to stay with her aunt, Mrs. Ablewhite, of Frizinghall. She has arranged to leave us the first thing tomorrow morning.’

Sergeant Cuff looked at me. I made a step forward to speak to my mistress—and, feeling my heart fail me (if I must own it), took a step back again, and said nothing.

‘May I ask your ladyship _when_ Miss Verinder informed you that she was going to her aunt’s?’ inquired the Sergeant.

‘About an hour since,’ answered my mistress.

Sergeant Cuff looked at me once more. They say old people’s hearts are not very easily moved. _My_ heart couldn’t have thumped much harder than it did now, if I had been five-and-twenty again!

‘I have no claim, my lady,’ says the Sergeant, ‘to control Miss Verinder’s actions. All I can ask you to do is to put off her departure, if possible, till later in the day. I must go to Frizinghall myself tomorrow morning—and I shall be back by two o’clock, if not before. If Miss Verinder can be kept here till that time, I should wish to say two words to her—unexpectedly—before she goes.’

My lady directed me to give the coachman her orders, that the carriage was not to come for Miss Rachel until two o’clock. ‘Have you more to say?’ she asked of the Sergeant, when this had been done.

‘Only one thing, your ladyship. If Miss Verinder is surprised at this change in the arrangements, please not to mention Me as being the cause of putting off her journey.’

My mistress lifted her head suddenly from her book as if she was going to say something?checked herself by a great effort?and, looking back again at the open page, dismissed us with a sign of her hand.

?That?s a wonderful woman,? said Sergeant Cuff, when we were out in the hall again. ?But for her self-control, the mystery that puzzles you, Mr. Betteredge, would have been at an end tonight.?

At those words, the truth rushed at last into my stupid old head. For the moment, I suppose I must have gone clean out of my senses. I seized the Sergeant by the collar of his coat, and pinned him against the wall.

?Damn you!? I cried out, ?there?s something wrong about Miss Rachel?and you have been hiding it from me all this time!?

Sergeant Cuff looked up at me?flat against the wall?without stirring a hand, or moving a muscle of his melancholy face.

?Ah,? he said, ?you?ve guessed it at last.?

My hand dropped from his collar, and my head sunk on my breast. Please to remember, as some excuse for my breaking out as I did, that I had served the family for fifty years. Miss Rachel had climbed upon my knees, and pulled my whiskers, many and many a time when she was a child. Miss Rachel, with all her faults, had been, to my mind, the dearest and prettiest and best young mistress that ever an old servant waited on, and loved. I begged Sergeant?s Cuff?s pardon, but I am afraid I did it with watery eyes, and not in a very becoming way.

?Don?t distress yourself, Mr. Betteredge,? says the Sergeant, with more kindness than I had any right to expect from him. ?In my line of life if we were quick at taking offence, we shouldn?t be worth salt to our porridge. If it?s any comfort to you, collar me again. You don?t in the least know how to do it; but I?ll overlook your awkwardness in consideration of your feelings.?

He curled up at the corners of his lips, and, in his own dreary way, seemed to think he had delivered himself of a very good joke.

I led him into my own little sitting-room, and closed the door.

?Tell me the truth, Sergeant,? I said. ?What do you suspect? It?s no kindness to hide it from me now.?

?I don?t suspect,? said Sergeant Cuff. ?I know.?

My unlucky temper began to get the better of me again.

?Do you mean to tell me, in plain English,? I said, ?that Miss Rachel has stolen her own Diamond??

?Yes,? says the Sergeant; ?that is what I mean to tell you, in so many

words. Miss Verinder has been in secret possession of the Moonstone from first to last; and she has taken Rosanna Spearman into her confidence, because she has calculated on our suspecting Rosanna Spearman of the theft. There is the whole case in a nutshell. Collar me again, Mr. Betteredge. If it's any vent to your feelings, collar me again.?

God help me! my feelings were not to be relieved in that way. ?Give me your reasons! That was all I could say to him.

?You shall hear my reasons tomorrow,? said the Sergeant. ?If Miss Verinder refuses to put off her visit to her aunt (which you will find Miss Verinder will do), I shall be obliged to lay the whole case before your mistress tomorrow. And, as I don't know what may come of it, I shall request you to be present, and to hear what passes on both sides. Let the matter rest for tonight. No, Mr. Betteredge, you don't get a word more on the subject of the Moonstone out of me. There is your table spread for supper. That's one of the many human infirmities which I always treat tenderly. If you will ring the bell, I'll say grace. ?For what we are going to receive????

?I wish you a good appetite to it, Sergeant,? I said. ?_My_ appetite is gone. I'll wait and see you served, and then I'll ask you to excuse me, if I go away, and try to get the better of this by myself.?

I saw him served with the best of everything?and I shouldn't have been sorry if the best of everything had choked him. The head gardener (Mr. Begbie) came in at the same time, with his weekly account. The Sergeant got on the subject of roses and the merits of grass walks and gravel walks immediately. I left the two together, and went out with a heavy heart. This was the first trouble I remember for many a long year which wasn't to be blown off by a whiff of tobacco, and which was even beyond the reach of _Robinson Crusoe_.

Being restless and miserable, and having no particular room to go to, I took a turn on the terrace, and thought it over in peace and quietness by myself. It doesn't much matter what my thoughts were. I felt wretchedly old, and worn out, and unfit for my place?and began to wonder, for the first time in my life, when it would please God to take me. With all this, I held firm, notwithstanding, to my belief in Miss Rachel. If Sergeant Cuff had been Solomon in all his glory, and had told me that my young lady had mixed herself up in a mean and guilty plot, I should have had but one answer for Solomon, wise as he was, ?You don't know her; and I do.?

My meditations were interrupted by Samuel. He brought me a written message from my mistress.

Going into the house to get a light to read it by, Samuel remarked that there seemed a change coming in the weather. My troubled mind had prevented me from noticing it before. But, now my attention was roused, I heard the dogs uneasy, and the wind moaning low. Looking up at the sky, I saw the rack of clouds getting blacker and blacker, and hurrying faster and faster over a watery moon. Wild weather coming?Samuel was

right, wild weather coming.

The message from my lady informed me, that the magistrate at Frizinghall had written to remind her about the three Indians. Early in the coming week, the rogues must needs be released, and left free to follow their own devices. If we had any more questions to ask them, there was no time to lose. Having forgotten to mention this, when she had last seen Sergeant Cuff, my mistress now desired me to supply the omission. The Indians had gone clean out of my head (as they have, no doubt, gone clean out of yours). I didn't see much use in stirring that subject again. However, I obeyed my orders on the spot, as a matter of course.

I found Sergeant Cuff and the gardener, with a bottle of Scotch whisky between them, head over ears in an argument on the growing of roses. The Sergeant was so deeply interested that he held up his hand, and signed to me not to interrupt the discussion, when I came in. As far as I could understand it, the question between them was, whether the white moss rose did, or did not, require to be budded on the dog-rose to make it grow well. Mr. Begbie said, Yes; and Sergeant Cuff said, No. They appealed to me, as hotly as a couple of boys. Knowing nothing whatever about the growing of roses, I steered a middle course—just as her Majesty's judges do, when the scales of justice bother them by hanging even to a hair. "Gentlemen," I remarked, "there is much to be said on both sides." In the temporary lull produced by that impartial sentence, I laid my lady's written message on the table, under the eyes of Sergeant Cuff.

I had got by this time, as nearly as might be, to hate the Sergeant. But truth compels me to acknowledge that, in respect of readiness of mind, he was a wonderful man.

In half a minute after he had read the message, he had looked back into his memory for Superintendent Seegrave's report; had picked out that part of it in which the Indians were concerned; and was ready with his answer. A certain great traveller, who understood the Indians and their language, had figured in Mr. Seegrave's report, hadn't he? Very well. Did I know the gentleman's name and address? Very well again. Would I write them on the back of my lady's message? Much obliged to me. Sergeant Cuff would look that gentleman up, when he went to Frizinghall in the morning.

"Do you expect anything to come of it?" I asked. "Superintendent Seegrave found the Indians as innocent as the babe unborn."

"Superintendent Seegrave has been proved wrong, up to this time, in all his conclusions," answered the Sergeant. "It may be worth while to find out tomorrow whether Superintendent Seegrave was wrong about the Indians as well." With that he turned to Mr. Begbie, and took up the argument again exactly at the place where it had left off. "This question between us is a question of soils and seasons, and patience and pains, Mr. Gardener. Now let me put it to you from another point of view. You take your white moss rose???"

By that time, I had closed the door on them, and was out of hearing of the rest of the dispute.

In the passage, I met Penelope hanging about, and asked what she was waiting for.

She was waiting for her young lady's bell, when her young lady chose to call her back to go on with the packing for the next day's journey. Further inquiry revealed to me, that Miss Rachel had given it as a reason for wanting to go to her aunt at Frizinghall, that the house was unendurable to her, and that she could bear the odious presence of a policeman under the same roof with herself no longer. On being informed, half an hour since, that her departure would be delayed till two in the afternoon, she had flown into a violent passion. My lady, present at the time, had severely rebuked her, and then (having apparently something to say, which was reserved for her daughter's private ear) had sent Penelope out of the room. My girl was in wretchedly low spirits about the changed state of things in the house. 'Nothing goes right, father; nothing is like what it used to be. I feel as if some dreadful misfortune was hanging over us all.'

That was my feeling too. But I put a good face on it, before my daughter. Miss Rachel's bell rang while we were talking. Penelope ran up the back stairs to go on with the packing. I went by the other way to the hall, to see what the glass said about the change in the weather.

Just as I approached the swing-door leading into the hall from the servants' offices, it was violently opened from the other side, and Rosanna Spearman ran by me, with a miserable look of pain in her face, and one of her hands pressed hard over her heart, as if the pang was in that quarter. 'What's the matter, my girl?' I asked, stopping her. 'Are you ill?' 'For God's sake, don't speak to me,' she answered, and twisted herself out of my hands, and ran on towards the servants' staircase. I called to the cook (who was within hearing) to look after the poor girl. Two other persons proved to be within hearing, as well as the cook. Sergeant Cuff darted softly out of my room, and asked what was the matter. I answered, 'Nothing.' Mr. Franklin, on the other side, pulled open the swing-door, and beckoning me into the hall, inquired if I had seen anything of Rosanna Spearman.

'She has just passed me, sir, with a very disturbed face, and in a very odd manner.'

'I am afraid I am innocently the cause of that disturbance, Betteredge.'

'You, sir!'

'I can't explain it,' says Mr. Franklin; 'but, if the girl is concerned in the loss of the Diamond, I do really believe she was on the point of confessing everything to me, of all the people in the world not two minutes since.'

Looking towards the swing-door, as he said those last words, I fancied I saw it opened a little way from the inner side.

Was there anybody listening? The door fell to, before I could get to it. Looking through, the moment after, I thought I saw the tails of Sergeant Cuff's respectable black coat disappearing round the corner of the passage. He knew, as well as I did, that he could expect no more help from me, now that I had discovered the turn which his investigations were really taking. Under those circumstances, it was quite in his character to help himself, and to do it by the underground way.

Not feeling sure that I had really seen the Sergeant—and not desiring to make needless mischief, where, Heaven knows, there was mischief enough going on already—I told Mr. Franklin that I thought one of the dogs had got into the house—and then begged him to describe what had happened between Rosanna and himself.

“Were you passing through the hall, sir?” I asked. “Did you meet her accidentally, when she spoke to you?”

Mr. Franklin pointed to the billiard-table.

“I was knocking the balls about,” he said, “and trying to get this miserable business of the Diamond out of my mind. I happened to look up—and there stood Rosanna Spearman at the side of me, like a ghost! Her stealing on me in that way was so strange, that I hardly knew what to do at first. Seeing a very anxious expression in her face, I asked her if she wished to speak to me. She answered, “Yes, if I dare.” Knowing what suspicion attached to her, I could only put one construction on such language as that. I confess it made me uncomfortable. I had no wish to invite the girl's confidence. At the same time, in the difficulties that now beset us, I could hardly feel justified in refusing to listen to her, if she was really bent on speaking to me. It was an awkward position; and I dare say I got out of it awkwardly enough. I said to her, “I don't quite understand you. Is there anything you want me to do?” Mind, Betteredge, I didn't speak unkindly! The poor girl can't help being ugly—I felt that, at the time. The cue was still in my hand, and I went on knocking the balls about, to take off the awkwardness of the thing. As it turned out, I only made matters worse still. I'm afraid I mortified her without meaning it! She suddenly turned away. “He looks at the billiard balls,” I heard her say. “Anything rather than look at _me!_” Before I could stop her, she had left the hall. I am not quite easy about it, Betteredge. Would you mind telling Rosanna that I meant no unkindness? I have been a little hard on her, perhaps, in my own thoughts—I have almost hoped that the loss of the Diamond might be traced to _her_. Not from any ill-will to the poor girl: but?? He stopped there, and going back to the billiard-table, began to knock the balls about once more.

After what had passed between the Sergeant and me, I knew what it was that he had left unspoken as well as he knew it himself.

Nothing but the tracing of the Moonstone to our second housemaid could

now raise Miss Rachel above the infamous suspicion that rested on her in the mind of Sergeant Cuff. It was no longer a question of quieting my young lady's nervous excitement; it was a question of proving her innocence. If Rosanna had done nothing to compromise herself, the hope which Mr. Franklin confessed to having felt would have been hard enough on her in all conscience. But this was not the case. She had pretended to be ill, and had gone secretly to Frizinghall. She had been up all night, making something or destroying something, in private. And she had been at the Shivering Sand, that evening, under circumstances which were highly suspicious, to say the least of them. For all these reasons (sorry as I was for Rosanna) I could not but think that Mr. Franklin's way of looking at the matter was neither unnatural nor unreasonable, in Mr. Franklin's position. I said a word to him to that effect.

"Yes, yes!" he said in return. "But there is just a chance—a very poor one, certainly—that Rosanna's conduct may admit of some explanation which we don't see at present. I hate hurting a woman's feelings, Betteredge! Tell the poor creature what I told you to tell her. And if she wants to speak to me—I don't care whether I get into a scrape or not—send her to me in the library." With those kind words he laid down the cue and left me.

Inquiry at the servants' offices informed me that Rosanna had retired to her own room. She had declined all offers of assistance with thanks, and had only asked to be left to rest in quiet. Here, therefore, was an end of any confession on her part (supposing she really had a confession to make) for that night. I reported the result to Mr. Franklin, who, thereupon, left the library, and went up to bed.

I was putting the lights out, and making the windows fast, when Samuel came in with news of the two guests whom I had left in my room.

The argument about the white moss rose had apparently come to an end at last. The gardener had gone home, and Sergeant Cuff was nowhere to be found in the lower regions of the house.

I looked into my room. Quite true—nothing was to be discovered there but a couple of empty tumblers and a strong smell of hot grog. Had the Sergeant gone of his own accord to the bedchamber that was prepared for him? I went upstairs to see.

After reaching the second landing, I thought I heard a sound of quiet and regular breathing on my left-hand side. My left-hand side led to the corridor which communicated with Miss Rachel's room. I looked in, and there, coiled up on three chairs placed right across the passage—there, with a red handkerchief tied round his grizzled head, and his respectable black coat rolled up for a pillow, lay and slept Sergeant Cuff!

He woke, instantly and quietly, like a dog, the moment I approached him.

"Good-night, Mr. Betteredge," he said. "And mind, if you ever take to growing roses, the white moss rose is all the better for _not_ being

budded on the dog-rose, whatever the gardener may say to the contrary!?

?What are you doing here?? I asked. ?Why are you not in your proper bed??

?I am not in my proper bed,? answered the Sergeant, ?because I am one of the many people in this miserable world who can?t earn their money honestly and easily at the same time. There was a coincidence, this evening, between the period of Rosanna Spearman?s return from the Sands and the period when Miss Verinder stated her resolution to leave the house. Whatever Rosanna may have hidden, it?s clear to my mind that your young lady couldn?t go away until she knew that it was hidden. The two must have communicated privately once already tonight. If they try to communicate again, when the house is quiet, I want to be in the way, and stop it. Don?t blame me for upsetting your sleeping arrangements, Mr. Betteredge?blame the Diamond.?

?I wish to God the Diamond had never found its way into this house!? I broke out.

Sergeant Cuff looked with a rueful face at the three chairs on which he had condemned himself to pass the night.

?So do I,? he said, gravely.

CHAPTER XVII

Nothing happened in the night; and (I am happy to add) no attempt at communication between Miss Rachel and Rosanna rewarded the vigilance of Sergeant Cuff.

I had expected the Sergeant to set off for Frizinghall the first thing in the morning. He waited about, however, as if he had something else to do first. I left him to his own devices; and going into the grounds shortly after, met Mr. Franklin on his favourite walk by the shrubbery side.

Before we had exchanged two words, the Sergeant unexpectedly joined us. He made up to Mr. Franklin, who received him, I must own, haughtily enough. ?Have you anything to say to me?? was all the return he got for politely wishing Mr. Franklin good morning.

?I have something to say to you, sir,? answered the Sergeant, ?on the subject of the inquiry I am conducting here. You detected the turn that inquiry was really taking, yesterday. Naturally enough, in your position, you are shocked and distressed. Naturally enough, also, you visit your own angry sense of your own family scandal upon Me.?

?What do you want?? Mr. Franklin broke in, sharply enough.

?I want to remind you, sir, that I have at any rate, thus far, not been proved to be wrong. Bearing that in mind, be pleased to remember, at the same time, that I am an officer of the law acting here under the

sanction of the mistress of the house. Under these circumstances, is it, or is it not, your duty as a good citizen, to assist me with any special information which you may happen to possess??

?I possess no special information,? says Mr. Franklin.

Sergeant Cuff put that answer by him, as if no answer had been made.

?You may save my time, sir, from being wasted on an inquiry at a distance,? he went on, ?if you choose to understand me and speak out.?

?I don?t understand you,? answered Mr. Franklin; ?and I have nothing to say.?

?One of the female servants (I won?t mention names) spoke to you privately, sir, last night.?

Once more Mr. Franklin cut him short; once more Mr. Franklin answered, ?I have nothing to say.?

Standing by in silence, I thought of the movement in the swing-door on the previous evening, and of the coat-tails which I had seen disappearing down the passage. Sergeant Cuff had, no doubt, just heard enough, before I interrupted him, to make him suspect that Rosanna had relieved her mind by confessing something to Mr. Franklin Blake.

This notion had barely struck me?when who should appear at the end of the shrubbery walk but Rosanna Spearman in her own proper person! She was followed by Penelope, who was evidently trying to make her retrace her steps to the house. Seeing that Mr. Franklin was not alone, Rosanna came to a standstill, evidently in great perplexity what to do next. Penelope waited behind her. Mr. Franklin saw the girls as soon as I saw them. The Sergeant, with his devilish cunning, took on not to have noticed them at all. All this happened in an instant. Before either Mr. Franklin or I could say a word, Sergeant Cuff struck in smoothly, with an appearance of continuing the previous conversation.

?You needn?t be afraid of harming the girl, sir,? he said to Mr. Franklin, speaking in a loud voice, so that Rosanna might hear him. ?On the contrary, I recommend you to honour me with your confidence, if you feel any interest in Rosanna Spearman.?

Mr. Franklin instantly took on not to have noticed the girls either. He answered, speaking loudly on his side:

?I take no interest whatever in Rosanna Spearman.?

I looked towards the end of the walk. All I saw at the distance was that Rosanna suddenly turned round, the moment Mr. Franklin had spoken. Instead of resisting Penelope, as she had done the moment before, she now let my daughter take her by the arm and lead her back to the house.

The breakfast-bell rang as the two girls disappeared?and even Sergeant Cuff was now obliged to give it up as a bad job! He said to me quietly,

?I shall go to Frizinghall, Mr. Betteredge; and I shall be back before two.? He went his way without a word more?and for some few hours we were well rid of him.

?You must make it right with Rosanna,? Mr. Franklin said to me, when we were alone. ?I seem to be fated to say or do something awkward, before that unlucky girl. You must have seen yourself that Sergeant Cuff laid a trap for both of us. If he could confuse _me_, or irritate _her_ into breaking out, either she or I might have said something which would answer his purpose. On the spur of the moment, I saw no better way out of it than the way I took. It stopped the girl from saying anything, and it showed the Sergeant that I saw through him. He was evidently listening, Betteredge, when I was speaking to you last night.?

He had done worse than listen, as I privately thought to myself. He had remembered my telling him that the girl was in love with Mr. Franklin; and he had calculated on _that_, when he appealed to Mr. Franklin?s interest in Rosanna?in Rosanna?s hearing.

?As to listening, sir,? I remarked (keeping the other point to myself), ?we shall all be rowing in the same boat if this sort of thing goes on much longer. Prying, and peeping, and listening are the natural occupations of people situated as we are. In another day or two, Mr. Franklin, we shall all be struck dumb together?for this reason, that we shall all be listening to surprise each other?s secrets, and all know it. Excuse my breaking out, sir. The horrid mystery hanging over us in this house gets into my head like liquor, and makes me wild. I won?t forget what you have told me. I?ll take the first opportunity of making it right with Rosanna Spearman.?

?You haven?t said anything to her yet about last night, have you?? Mr. Franklin asked.

?No, sir.?

?Then say nothing now. I had better not invite the girl?s confidence, with the Sergeant on the look-out to surprise us together. My conduct is not very consistent, Betteredge?is it? I see no way out of this business, which isn?t dreadful to think of, unless the Diamond is traced to Rosanna. And yet I can?t, and won?t, help Sergeant Cuff to find the girl out.?

Unreasonable enough, no doubt. But it was my state of mind as well. I thoroughly understood him. If you will, for once in your life, remember that you are mortal, perhaps you will thoroughly understand him too.

The state of things, indoors and out, while Sergeant Cuff was on his way to Frizinghall, was briefly this:

Miss Rachel waited for the time when the carriage was to take her to her aunt?s, still obstinately shut up in her own room. My lady and Mr. Franklin breakfasted together. After breakfast, Mr. Franklin took one of his sudden resolutions, and went out precipitately to quiet his mind by a long walk. I was the only person who saw him go; and he told me he

should be back before the Sergeant returned. The change in the weather, foreshadowed overnight, had come. Heavy rain had been followed soon after dawn, by high wind. It was blowing fresh, as the day got on. But though the clouds threatened more than once, the rain still held off. It was not a bad day for a walk, if you were young and strong, and could breast the great gusts of wind which came sweeping in from the sea.

I attended my lady after breakfast, and assisted her in the settlement of our household accounts. She only once alluded to the matter of the Moonstone, and that was in the way of forbidding any present mention of it between us. 'Wait till that man comes back,' she said, meaning the Sergeant. 'We _must_ speak of it then: we are not obliged to speak of it now.'

After leaving my mistress, I found Penelope waiting for me in my room.

'I wish, father, you would come and speak to Rosanna,' she said. 'I am very uneasy about her.'

I suspected what was the matter readily enough. But it is a maxim of mine that men (being superior creatures) are bound to improve women if they can. When a woman wants me to do anything (my daughter, or not, it doesn't matter), I always insist on knowing why. The oftener you make them rummage their own minds for a reason, the more manageable you will find them in all the relations of life. It isn't their fault (poor wretches!) that they act first and think afterwards; it's the fault of the fools who humour them.

Penelope's reason why, on this occasion, may be given in her own words. 'I am afraid, father,' she said, 'Mr. Franklin has hurt Rosanna cruelly, without intending it.'

'What took Rosanna into the shrubbery walk?' I asked.

'Her own madness,' says Penelope; 'I can call it nothing else. She was bent on speaking to Mr. Franklin, this morning, come what might of it. I did my best to stop her; you saw that. If I could only have got her away before she heard those dreadful words!'

'There! there!' I said, 'don't lose your head. I can't call to mind that anything happened to alarm Rosanna.'

'Nothing to alarm her, father. But Mr. Franklin said he took no interest whatever in her—and, oh, he said it in such a cruel voice!'

'He said it to stop the Sergeant's mouth,' I answered.

'I told her that,' says Penelope. 'But you see, father (though Mr. Franklin isn't to blame), he's been mortifying and disappointing her for weeks and weeks past; and now this comes on the top of it all! She has no right, of course, to expect him to take any interest in her. It's quite monstrous that she should forget herself and her station in that way. But she seems to have lost pride, and proper feeling, and

everything. She frightened me, father, when Mr. Franklin said those words. They seemed to turn her into stone. A sudden quiet came over her, and she has gone about her work, ever since, like a woman in a dream.?

I began to feel a little uneasy. There was something in the way Penelope put it which silenced my superior sense. I called to mind, now my thoughts were directed that way, what had passed between Mr. Franklin and Rosanna overnight. She looked cut to the heart on that occasion; and now, as ill-luck would have it, she had been unavoidably stung again, poor soul, on the tender place. Sad! sad! all the more sad because the girl had no reason to justify her, and no right to feel it.

I had promised Mr. Franklin to speak to Rosanna, and this seemed the fittest time for keeping my word.

We found the girl sweeping the corridor outside the bedrooms, pale and composed, and neat as ever in her modest print dress. I noticed a curious dimness and dullness in her eyes?not as if she had been crying but as if she had been looking at something too long. Possibly, it was a misty something raised by her own thoughts. There was certainly no object about her to look at which she had not seen already hundreds on hundreds of times.

?Cheer up, Rosanna!? I said. ?You mustn?t fret over your own fancies. I have got something to say to you from Mr. Franklin.?

I thereupon put the matter in the right view before her, in the friendliest and most comforting words I could find. My principles, in regard to the other sex, are, as you may have noticed, very severe. But somehow or other, when I come face to face with the women, my practice (I own) is not conformable.

?Mr. Franklin is very kind and considerate. Please to thank him.? That was all the answer she made me.

My daughter had already noticed that Rosanna went about her work like a woman in a dream. I now added to this observation, that she also listened and spoke like a woman in a dream. I doubted if her mind was in a fit condition to take in what I had said to her.

?Are you quite sure, Rosanna, that you understand me?? I asked.

?Quite sure.?

She echoed me, not like a living woman, but like a creature moved by machinery. She went on sweeping all the time. I took away the broom as gently and as kindly as I could.

?Come, come, my girl!? I said, ?this is not like yourself. You have got something on your mind. I?m your friend?and I?ll stand your friend, even if you have done wrong. Make a clean breast of it, Rosanna?make a clean breast of it!?

The time had been, when my speaking to her in that way would have brought the tears into her eyes. I could see no change in them now.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I’ll make a clean breast of it.’

‘To my lady?’ I asked.

‘No.’

‘To Mr. Franklin?’

‘Yes; to Mr. Franklin.’

I hardly knew what to say to that. She was in no condition to understand the caution against speaking to him in private, which Mr. Franklin had directed me to give her. Feeling my way, little by little, I only told her Mr. Franklin had gone out for a walk.

‘It doesn’t matter,’ she answered. ‘I shan’t trouble Mr. Franklin, today.’

‘Why not speak to my lady?’ I said. ‘The way to relieve your mind is to speak to the merciful and Christian mistress who has always been kind to you.’

She looked at me for a moment with a grave and steady attention, as if she was fixing what I said in her mind. Then she took the broom out of my hands and moved off with it slowly, a little way down the corridor.

‘No,’ she said, going on with her sweeping, and speaking to herself; ‘I know a better way of relieving my mind than that.’

‘What is it?’

‘Please to let me go on with my work.’

Penelope followed her, and offered to help her.

She answered, ‘No. I want to do my work. Thank you, Penelope.’ She looked round at me. ‘Thank you, Mr. Betteredge.’

There was no moving her; there was nothing more to be said. I signed to Penelope to come away with me. We left her, as we had found her, sweeping the corridor, like a woman in a dream.

‘This is a matter for the doctor to look into,’ I said. ‘It’s beyond me.’

My daughter reminded me of Mr. Candy’s illness, owing (as you may remember) to the chill he had caught on the night of the dinner-party. His assistant—a certain Mr. Ezra Jennings—was at our disposal, to be sure. But nobody knew much about him in our parts. He had been engaged by Mr. Candy under rather peculiar circumstances; and, right or wrong, we none of us liked him or trusted him. There were other doctors at

Frizinghall. But they were strangers to our house; and Penelope doubted, in Rosanna's present state, whether strangers might not do her more harm than good.

I thought of speaking to my lady. But, remembering the heavy weight of anxiety which she already had on her mind, I hesitated to add to all the other vexations this new trouble. Still, there was a necessity for doing something. The girl's state was, to my thinking, downright alarming and my mistress ought to be informed of it. Unwilling enough, I went to her sitting-room. No one was there. My lady was shut up with Miss Rachel. It was impossible for me to see her till she came out again.

I waited in vain till the clock on the front staircase struck the quarter to two. Five minutes afterwards, I heard my name called, from the drive outside the house. I knew the voice directly. Sergeant Cuff had returned from Frizinghall.

CHAPTER XVIII

Going down to the front door, I met the Sergeant on the steps.

It went against the grain with me, after what had passed between us, to show him that I felt any sort of interest in his proceedings. In spite of myself, however, I felt an interest that there was no resisting. My sense of dignity sank from under me, and out came the words: "What news from Frizinghall?"

"I have seen the Indians," answered Sergeant Cuff. "And I have found out what Rosanna bought privately in the town, on Thursday last. The Indians will be set free on Wednesday in next week. There isn't a doubt on my mind, and there isn't a doubt on Mr. Murthwaite's mind, that they came to this place to steal the Moonstone. Their calculations were all thrown out, of course, by what happened in the house on Wednesday night; and they have no more to do with the actual loss of the jewel than you have. But I can tell you one thing, Mr. Betteredge?if we don't find the Moonstone, they will. You have not heard the last of the three jugglers yet."

Mr. Franklin came back from his walk as the Sergeant said those startling words. Governing his curiosity better than I had governed mine, he passed us without a word, and went on into the house.

As for me, having already dropped my dignity, I determined to have the whole benefit of the sacrifice. "So much for the Indians," I said. "What about Rosanna next?"

Sergeant Cuff shook his head.

"The mystery in that quarter is thicker than ever," he said. "I have traced her to a shop at Frizinghall, kept by a linen draper named Maltby. She bought nothing whatever at any of the other drapers' shops, or at any milliners' or tailors' shops; and she bought nothing at

Maltby's but a piece of long cloth. She was very particular in choosing a certain quality. As to quantity, she bought enough to make a nightgown.

'Whose nightgown?' I asked.

'Her own, to be sure. Between twelve and three, on the Thursday morning, she must have slipped down to your young lady's room, to settle the hiding of the Moonstone while all the rest of you were in bed. In going back to her own room, her nightgown must have brushed the wet paint on the door. She couldn't wash out the stain; and she couldn't safely destroy the night-gown without first providing another like it, to make the inventory of her linen complete.'

'What proves that it was Rosanna's nightgown?' I objected.

'The material she bought for making the substitute dress,' answered the Sergeant. 'If it had been Miss Verinder's nightgown, she would have had to buy lace, and frilling, and Lord knows what besides; and she wouldn't have had time to make it in one night. Plain long cloth means a plain servant's nightgown. No, no, Mr. Betteredge—all that is clear enough. The pinch of the question is—why, after having provided the substitute dress, does she hide the smeared nightgown, instead of destroying it? If the girl won't speak out, there is only one way of settling the difficulty. The hiding-place at the Shivering Sand must be searched—and the true state of the case will be discovered there.'

'How are you to find the place?' I inquired.

'I am sorry to disappoint you,' said the Sergeant—but that's a secret which I mean to keep to myself.'

(Not to irritate your curiosity, as he irritated mine, I may here inform you that he had come back from Frizinghall provided with a search-warrant. His experience in such matters told him that Rosanna was in all probability carrying about her a memorandum of the hiding-place, to guide her, in case she returned to it, under changed circumstances and after a lapse of time. Possessed of this memorandum, the Sergeant would be furnished with all that he could desire.)

'Now, Mr. Betteredge,' he went on, 'suppose we drop speculation, and get to business. I told Joyce to have an eye on Rosanna. Where is Joyce?'

Joyce was the Frizinghall policeman, who had been left by Superintendent Seegrave at Sergeant Cuff's disposal. The clock struck two, as he put the question; and, punctual to the moment, the carriage came round to take Miss Rachel to her aunt's.

'One thing at a time,' said the Sergeant, stopping me as I was about to send in search of Joyce. 'I must attend to Miss Verinder first.'

As the rain was still threatening, it was the close carriage that had been appointed to take Miss Rachel to Frizinghall. Sergeant Cuff

beckoned Samuel to come down to him from the rumble behind.

‘You will see a friend of mine waiting among the trees, on this side of the lodge gate,’ he said. ‘My friend, without stopping the carriage, will get up into the rumble with you. You have nothing to do but to hold your tongue, and shut your eyes. Otherwise, you will get into trouble.’

With that advice, he sent the footman back to his place. What Samuel thought I don’t know. It was plain, to my mind, that Miss Rachel was to be privately kept in view from the time when she left our house?if she did leave it. A watch set on my young lady! A spy behind her in the rumble of her mother’s carriage! I could have cut my own tongue out for having forgotten myself so far as to speak to Sergeant Cuff.

The first person to come out of the house was my lady. She stood aside, on the top step, posting herself there to see what happened. Not a word did she say, either to the Sergeant or to me. With her lips closed, and her arms folded in the light garden cloak which she had wrapped round her on coming into the air, there she stood, as still as a statue, waiting for her daughter to appear.

In a minute more, Miss Rachel came downstairs?very nicely dressed in some soft yellow stuff, that set off her dark complexion, and clipped her tight (in the form of a jacket) round the waist. She had a smart little straw hat on her head, with a white veil twisted round it. She had primrose-coloured gloves that fitted her hands like a second skin. Her beautiful black hair looked as smooth as satin under her hat. Her little ears were like rosy shells?they had a pearl dangling from each of them. She came swiftly out to us, as straight as a lily on its stem, and as lithe and supple in every movement she made as a young cat. Nothing that I could discover was altered in her pretty face, but her eyes and her lips. Her eyes were brighter and fiercer than I liked to see; and her lips had so completely lost their colour and their smile that I hardly knew them again. She kissed her mother in a hasty and sudden manner on the cheek. She said, ‘Try to forgive me, mamma?’and then pulled down her veil over her face so vehemently that she tore it. In another moment she had run down the steps, and had rushed into the carriage as if it was a hiding-place.

Sergeant Cuff was just as quick on his side. He put Samuel back, and stood before Miss Rachel, with the open carriage-door in his hand, at the instant when she settled herself in her place.

‘What do you want?’ says Miss Rachel, from behind her veil.

‘I want to say one word to you, miss,’ answered the Sergeant, ‘before you go. I can’t presume to stop your paying a visit to your aunt. I can only venture to say that your leaving us, as things are now, puts an obstacle in the way of my recovering your Diamond. Please to understand that; and now decide for yourself whether you go or stay.’

Miss Rachel never even answered him. ‘Drive on, James!’ she called out to the coachman.

Without another word, the Sergeant shut the carriage-door. Just as he closed it, Mr. Franklin came running down the steps. "Good-bye, Rachel," he said, holding out his hand.

"Drive on!" cried Miss Rachel, louder than ever, and taking no more notice of Mr. Franklin than she had taken of Sergeant Cuff.

Mr. Franklin stepped back thunderstruck, as well he might be. The coachman, not knowing what to do, looked towards my lady, still standing immovable on the top step. My lady, with anger and sorrow and shame all struggling together in her face, made him a sign to start the horses, and then turned back hastily into the house. Mr. Franklin, recovering the use of his speech, called after her, as the carriage drove off, "Aunt! you were quite right. Accept my thanks for all your kindness?and let me go.?"

My lady turned as though to speak to him. Then, as if distrusting herself, waved her hand kindly. "Let me see you, before you leave us, Franklin," she said, in a broken voice?and went on to her own room.

"Do me a last favour, Betteredge," says Mr. Franklin, turning to me, with the tears in his eyes. "Get me away to the train as soon as you can!?"

He too went his way into the house. For the moment, Miss Rachel had completely unmanned him. Judge from that, how fond he must have been of her!

Sergeant Cuff and I were left face to face, at the bottom of the steps. The Sergeant stood with his face set towards a gap in the trees, commanding a view of one of the windings of the drive which led from the house. He had his hands in his pockets, and he was softly whistling "The Last Rose of Summer" to himself.

"There?s a time for everything,?" I said savagely enough. "This isn?t a time for whistling.?"

At that moment, the carriage appeared in the distance, through the gap, on its way to the lodge-gate. There was another man, besides Samuel, plainly visible in the rumble behind.

"All right!?" said the Sergeant to himself. He turned round to me. "It?s no time for whistling, Mr. Betteredge, as you say. It?s time to take this business in hand, now, without sparing anybody. We?ll begin with Rosanna Spearman. Where is Joyce??"

We both called for Joyce, and received no answer. I sent one of the stable-boys to look for him.

"You heard what I said to Miss Verinder??" remarked the Sergeant, while we were waiting. "And you saw how she received it? I tell her plainly that her leaving us will be an obstacle in the way of my recovering her Diamond?and she leaves, in the face of that statement! Your young lady

has got a travelling companion in her mother's carriage, Mr. Betteredge? and the name of it is, the Moonstone.?

I said nothing. I only held on like death to my belief in Miss Rachel.

The stable-boy came back, followed very unwillingly, as it appeared to me by Joyce.

Where is Rosanna Spearman? asked Sergeant Cuff.

I can't account for it, sir, Joyce began; and I am very sorry. But somehow or other???

Before I went to Frizinghall, said the Sergeant, cutting him short, I told you to keep your eyes on Rosanna Spearman, without allowing her to discover that she was being watched. Do you mean to tell me that you have let her give you the slip??

I am afraid, sir, says Joyce, beginning to tremble, that I was perhaps a little too careful not to let her discover me. There are such a many passages in the lower parts of this house???

How long is it since you missed her??

Nigh on an hour since, sir.?

You can go back to your regular business at Frizinghall, said the Sergeant, speaking just as composedly as ever, in his usual quiet and dreary way. I don't think your talents are at all in our line, Mr. Joyce. Your present form of employment is a trifle beyond you. Good morning.?

The man slunk off. I find it very difficult to describe how I was affected by the discovery that Rosanna Spearman was missing. I seemed to be in fifty different minds about it, all at the same time. In that state, I stood staring at Sergeant Cuff and my powers of language quite failed me.

No, Mr. Betteredge, said the Sergeant, as if he had discovered the uppermost thought in me, and was picking it out to be answered, before all the rest. Your young friend, Rosanna, won't slip through my fingers so easy as you think. As long as I know where Miss Verinder is, I have the means at my disposal of tracing Miss Verinder's accomplice. I prevented them from communicating last night. Very good. They will get together at Frizinghall, instead of getting together here. The present inquiry must be simply shifted (rather sooner than I had anticipated) from this house, to the house at which Miss Verinder is visiting. In the meantime, I'm afraid I must trouble you to call the servants together again.?

I went round with him to the servants' hall. It is very disgraceful, but it is not the less true, that I had another attack of the detective-fever, when he said those last words. I forgot that I hated Sergeant Cuff. I seized him confidentially by the arm. I said, For

goodness? sake, tell us what you are going to do with the servants now??

The great Cuff stood stock-still, and addressed himself in a kind of melancholy rapture to the empty air.

?If this man,? said the Sergeant (apparently meaning me), ?only understood the growing of roses he would be the most completely perfect character on the face of creation!? After that strong expression of feeling, he sighed, and put his arm through mine. ?This is how it stands,? he said, dropping down again to business. ?Rosanna has done one of two things. She has either gone direct to Frizinghall (before I can get there), or she has gone first to visit her hiding-place at the Shivering Sand. The first thing to find out is, which of the servants saw the last of her before she left the house.?

On instituting this inquiry, it turned out that the last person who had set eyes on Rosanna was Nancy, the kitchenmaid.

Nancy had seen her slip out with a letter in her hand, and stop the butcher?s man who had just been delivering some meat at the back door. Nancy had heard her ask the man to post the letter when he got back to Frizinghall. The man had looked at the address, and had said it was a roundabout way of delivering a letter directed to Cobb?s Hole, to post it at Frizinghall?and that, moreover, on a Saturday, which would prevent the letter from getting to its destination until Monday morning. Rosanna had answered that the delivery of the letter being delayed till Monday was of no importance. The only thing she wished to be sure of was that the man would do what she told him. The man had promised to do it, and had driven away. Nancy had been called back to her work in the kitchen. And no other person had seen anything afterwards of Rosanna Spearman.

?Well?? I asked, when we were alone again.

?Well,? says the Sergeant. ?I must go to Frizinghall.?

?About the letter, sir??

?Yes. The memorandum of the hiding-place is in that letter. I must see the address at the post-office. If it is the address I suspect, I shall pay our friend, Mrs. Yolland, another visit on Monday next.?

I went with the Sergeant to order the pony-chaise. In the stable-yard we got a new light thrown on the missing girl.

CHAPTER XIX

The news of Rosanna?s disappearance had, as it appeared, spread among the out-of-door servants. They too had made their inquiries; and they had just laid hands on a quick little imp, nicknamed ?Duffy??who was occasionally employed in weeding the garden, and who had seen Rosanna Spearman as lately as half-an-hour since. Duffy was certain that the

girl had passed him in the fir-plantation, not walking, but _running_, in the direction of the sea-shore.

?Does this boy know the coast hereabouts?? asked Sergeant Cuff.

?He has been born and bred on the coast,? I answered.

?Duffy!? says the Sergeant, ?do you want to earn a shilling? If you do, come along with me. Keep the pony-chaise ready, Mr. Betteredge, till I come back.?

He started for the Shivering Sand, at a rate that my legs (though well enough preserved for my time of life) had no hope of matching. Little Duffy, as the way is with the young savages in our parts when they are in high spirits, gave a howl, and trotted off at the Sergeant?s heels.

Here again, I find it impossible to give anything like a clear account of the state of my mind in the interval after Sergeant Cuff had left us. A curious and stupefying restlessness got possession of me. I did a dozen different needless things in and out of the house, not one of which I can now remember. I don?t even know how long it was after the Sergeant had gone to the sands, when Duffy came running back with a message for me. Sergeant Cuff had given the boy a leaf torn out of his pocket-book, on which was written in pencil, ?Send me one of Rosanna Spearman?s boots, and be quick about it.?

I despatched the first woman-servant I could find to Rosanna?s room; and I sent the boy back to say that I myself would follow him with the boot.

This, I am well aware, was not the quickest way to take of obeying the directions which I had received. But I was resolved to see for myself what new mystification was going on before I trusted Rosanna?s boot in the Sergeant?s hands. My old notion of screening the girl, if I could, seemed to have come back on me again, at the eleventh hour. This state of feeling (to say nothing of the detective-fever) hurried me off, as soon as I had got the boot, at the nearest approach to a run which a man turned seventy can reasonably hope to make.

As I got near the shore, the clouds gathered black, and the rain came down, drifting in great white sheets of water before the wind. I heard the thunder of the sea on the sand-bank at the mouth of the bay. A little further on, I passed the boy crouching for shelter under the lee of the sandhills. Then I saw the raging sea, and the rollers tumbling in on the sand-bank, and the driven rain sweeping over the waters like a flying garment, and the yellow wilderness of the beach with one solitary black figure standing on it?the figure of Sergeant Cuff.

He waved his hand towards the north, when he first saw me. ?Keep on that side!? he shouted. ?And come on down here to me!?

I went down to him, choking for breath, with my heart leaping as if it was like to leap out of me. I was past speaking. I had a hundred questions to put to him; and not one of them would pass my lips. His

face frightened me. I saw a look in his eyes which was a look of horror. He snatched the boot out of my hand, and set it in a footmark on the sand, bearing south from us as we stood, and pointing straight towards the rocky ledge called the South Spit. The mark was not yet blurred out by the rain?and the girl?s boot fitted it to a hair.

The Sergeant pointed to the boot in the footmark, without saying a word.

I caught at his arm, and tried to speak to him, and failed as I had failed when I tried before. He went on, following the footsteps down and down to where the rocks and the sand joined. The South Spit was just awash with the flowing tide; the waters heaved over the hidden face of the Shivering Sand. Now this way and now that, with an obstinate patience that was dreadful to see, Sergeant Cuff tried the boot in the footsteps, and always found it pointing the same way?straight _to_ the rocks. Hunt as he might, no sign could he find anywhere of the footsteps walking _from_ them.

He gave it up at last. Still keeping silence, he looked again at me; and then he looked out at the waters before us, heaving in deeper and deeper over the quicksand. I looked where he looked?and I saw his thought in his face. A dreadful dumb trembling crawled all over me on a sudden. I fell upon my knees on the beach.

?She has been back at the hiding-place,? I heard the Sergeant say to himself. ?Some fatal accident has happened to her on those rocks.?

The girl?s altered looks, and words, and actions?the numbed, deadened way in which she listened to me, and spoke to me?when I had found her sweeping the corridor but a few hours since, rose up in my mind, and warned me, even as the Sergeant spoke, that his guess was wide of the dreadful truth. I tried to tell him of the fear that had frozen me up. I tried to say, ?The death she has died, Sergeant, was a death of her own seeking.? No! the words wouldn?t come. The dumb trembling held me in its grip. I couldn?t feel the driving rain. I couldn?t see the rising tide. As in the vision of a dream, the poor lost creature came back before me. I saw her again as I had seen her in the past time?on the morning when I went to fetch her into the house. I heard her again, telling me that the Shivering Sand seemed to draw her to it against her will, and wondering whether her grave was waiting for her _there_. The horror of it struck at me, in some unfathomable way, through my own child. My girl was just her age. My girl, tried as Rosanna was tried, might have lived that miserable life, and died this dreadful death.

The Sergeant kindly lifted me up, and turned me away from the sight of the place where she had perished.

With that relief, I began to fetch my breath again, and to see things about me, as things really were. Looking towards the sandhills, I saw the men-servants from out-of-doors, and the fisherman, named Yolland, all running down to us together; and all, having taken the alarm, calling out to know if the girl had been found. In the fewest words, the Sergeant showed them the evidence of the footmarks, and told them

that a fatal accident must have happened to her. He then picked out the fisherman from the rest, and put a question to him, turning about again towards the sea: "Tell me," he said. "Could a boat have taken her off, in such weather as this, from those rocks where her footmarks stop?"

The fisherman pointed to the rollers tumbling in on the sand-bank, and to the great waves leaping up in clouds of foam against the headlands on either side of us.

"No boat that ever was built," he answered, "could have got to her through _that_."

Sergeant Cuff looked for the last time at the foot-marks on the sand, which the rain was now fast blurring out.

"There," he said, "is the evidence that she can't have left this place by land. And here," he went on, looking at the fisherman, "is the evidence that she can't have got away by sea." He stopped, and considered for a minute. "She was seen running towards this place, half an hour before I got here from the house," he said to Yolland. "Some time has passed since then. Call it, altogether, an hour ago. How high would the water be, at that time, on this side of the rocks?" He pointed to the south side; otherwise, the side which was not filled up by the quicksand.

"As the tide makes today," said the fisherman, "there wouldn't have been water enough to drown a kitten on that side of the Spit, an hour since."

Sergeant Cuff turned about northward, towards the quicksand.

"How much on this side?" he asked.

"Less still," answered Yolland. "The Shivering Sand would have been just awash, and no more."

The Sergeant turned to me, and said that the accident must have happened on the side of the quicksand. My tongue was loosened at that. "No accident!" I told him. "When she came to this place, she came weary of her life, to end it here."

He started back from me. "How do you know?" he asked. The rest of them crowded round. The Sergeant recovered himself instantly. He put them back from me; he said I was an old man; he said the discovery had shaken me; he said, "Let him alone a little." Then he turned to Yolland, and asked, "Is there any chance of finding her, when the tide ebbs again?" And Yolland answered, "None. What the Sand gets, the Sand keeps for ever." Having said that, the fisherman came a step nearer, and addressed himself to me.

"Mr. Betteredge," he said, "I have a word to say to you about the young woman's death. Four foot out, broadwise, along the side of the Spit, there's a shelf of rock, about half fathom down under the sand. My question is why didn't she strike that? If she slipped, by accident,

from off the Spit, she fell in where there's foothold at the bottom, at a depth that would barely cover her to the waist. She must have waded out, or jumped out, into the Deeps beyond?or she wouldn't be missing now. No accident, sir! The Deeps of the Quicksand have got her. And they have got her by her own act.?

After that testimony from a man whose knowledge was to be relied on, the Sergeant was silent. The rest of us, like him, held our peace. With one accord, we all turned back up the slope of the beach.

At the sandhillocks we were met by the under-groom, running to us from the house. The lad is a good lad, and has an honest respect for me. He handed me a little note, with a decent sorrow in his face. ?Penelope sent me with this, Mr. Betteredge,? he said. ?She found it in Rosanna's room.?

It was her last farewell word to the old man who had done his best?thank God, always done his best?to befriend her.

?You have often forgiven me, Mr. Betteredge, in past times. When you next see the Shivering Sand, try to forgive me once more. I have found my grave where my grave was waiting for me. I have lived, and died, sir, grateful for your kindness.?

There was no more than that. Little as it was, I hadn't manhood enough to hold up against it. Your tears come easy, when you're young, and beginning the world. Your tears come easy, when you're old, and leaving it. I burst out crying.

Sergeant Cuff took a step nearer to me?meaning kindly, I don't doubt. I shrank back from him. ?Don't touch me,? I said. ?It's the dread of you, that has driven her to it.?

?You are wrong, Mr. Betteredge,? he answered, quietly. ?But there will be time enough to speak of it when we are indoors again.?

I followed the rest of them, with the help of the groom's arm. Through the driving rain we went back?to meet the trouble and the terror that were waiting for us at the house.

CHAPTER XX

Those in front had spread the news before us. We found the servants in a state of panic. As we passed my lady's door, it was thrown open violently from the inner side. My mistress came out among us (with Mr. Franklin following, and trying vainly to compose her), quite beside herself with the horror of the thing.

?You are answerable for this!? she cried out, threatening the Sergeant wildly with her hand. ?Gabriel! give that wretch his money?and release me from the sight of him!?

The Sergeant was the only one among us who was fit to cope with

her?being the only one among us who was in possession of himself.

?I am no more answerable for this distressing calamity, my lady, than you are,? he said. ?If, in half an hour from this, you still insist on my leaving the house, I will accept your ladyship?s dismissal, but not your ladyship?s money.?

It was spoken very respectfully, but very firmly at the same time?and it had its effect on my mistress as well as on me. She suffered Mr. Franklin to lead her back into the room. As the door closed on the two, the Sergeant, looking about among the women-servants in his observant way, noticed that while all the rest were merely frightened, Penelope was in tears. ?When your father has changed his wet clothes,? he said to her, ?come and speak to us, in your father?s room.?

Before the half-hour was out, I had got my dry clothes on, and had lent Sergeant Cuff such change of dress as he required. Penelope came in to us to hear what the Sergeant wanted with her. I don?t think I ever felt what a good dutiful daughter I had, so strongly as I felt it at that moment. I took her and sat her on my knee and I prayed God bless her. She hid her head on my bosom, and put her arms round my neck?and we waited a little while in silence. The poor dead girl must have been at the bottom of it, I think, with my daughter and with me. The Sergeant went to the window, and stood there looking out. I thought it right to thank him for considering us both in this way?and I did.

People in high life have all the luxuries to themselves?among others, the luxury of indulging their feelings. People in low life have no such privilege. Necessity, which spares our betters, has no pity on us. We learn to put our feelings back into ourselves, and to jog on with our duties as patiently as may be. I don?t complain of this?I only notice it. Penelope and I were ready for the Sergeant, as soon as the Sergeant was ready on his side. Asked if she knew what had led her fellow-servant to destroy herself, my daughter answered (as you will foresee) that it was for love of Mr. Franklin Blake. Asked next, if she had mentioned this notion of hers to any other person, Penelope answered, ?I have not mentioned it, for Rosanna?s sake.? I felt it necessary to add a word to this. I said, ?And for Mr. Franklin?s sake, my dear, as well. If Rosanna has died for love of him, it is not with his knowledge or by his fault. Let him leave the house today, if he does leave it, without the useless pain of knowing the truth.? Sergeant Cuff said, ?Quite right,? and fell silent again; comparing Penelope?s notion (as it seemed to me) with some other notion of his own which he kept to himself.

At the end of the half-hour, my mistress?s bell rang.

On my way to answer it, I met Mr. Franklin coming out of his aunt?s sitting-room. He mentioned that her ladyship was ready to see Sergeant Cuff?in my presence as before?and he added that he himself wanted to say two words to the Sergeant first. On our way back to my room, he stopped, and looked at the railway time-table in the hall.

?Are you really going to leave us, sir?? I asked. ?Miss Rachel will

surely come right again, if you only give her time??

?She will come right again,? answered Mr. Franklin, ?when she hears that I have gone away, and that she will see me no more.?

I thought he spoke in resentment of my young lady?s treatment of him. But it was not so. My mistress had noticed, from the time when the police first came into the house, that the bare mention of him was enough to set Miss Rachel?s temper in a flame. He had been too fond of his cousin to like to confess this to himself, until the truth had been forced on him, when she drove off to her aunt?s. His eyes once opened in that cruel way which you know of, Mr. Franklin had taken his resolution?the one resolution which a man of any spirit could take?to leave the house.

What he had to say to the Sergeant was spoken in my presence. He described her ladyship as willing to acknowledge that she had spoken over-hastily. And he asked if Sergeant Cuff would consent?in that case?to accept his fee, and to leave the matter of the Diamond where the matter stood now. The Sergeant answered, ?No, sir. My fee is paid me for doing my duty. I decline to take it, until my duty is done.?

?I don?t understand you,? says Mr. Franklin.

?I?ll explain myself, sir,? says the Sergeant. ?When I came here, I undertook to throw the necessary light on the matter of the missing Diamond. I am now ready, and waiting to redeem my pledge. When I have stated the case to Lady Verinder as the case now stands, and when I have told her plainly what course of action to take for the recovery of the Moonstone, the responsibility will be off my shoulders. Let her ladyship decide, after that, whether she does, or does not, allow me to go on. I shall then have done what I undertook to do?and I?ll take my fee.?

In those words Sergeant Cuff reminded us that, even in the Detective Police, a man may have a reputation to lose.

The view he took was so plainly the right one, that there was no more to be said. As I rose to conduct him to my lady?s room, he asked if Mr. Franklin wished to be present. Mr. Franklin answered, ?Not unless Lady Verinder desires it.? He added, in a whisper to me, as I was following the Sergeant out, ?I know what that man is going to say about Rachel; and I am too fond of her to hear it, and keep my temper. Leave me by myself.?

I left him, miserable enough, leaning on the sill of my window, with his face hidden in his hands and Penelope peeping through the door, longing to comfort him. In Mr. Franklin?s place, I should have called her in. When you are ill-used by one woman, there is great comfort in telling it to another?because, nine times out of ten, the other always takes your side. Perhaps, when my back was turned, he did call her in? In that case it is only doing my daughter justice to declare that she would stick at nothing, in the way of comforting Mr. Franklin Blake.

In the meantime, Sergeant Cuff and I proceeded to my lady's room.

At the last conference we had held with her, we had found her not over willing to lift her eyes from the book which she had on the table. On this occasion there was a change for the better. She met the Sergeant's eye with an eye that was as steady as his own. The family spirit showed itself in every line of her face; and I knew that Sergeant Cuff would meet his match, when a woman like my mistress was strung up to hear the worst he could say to her.

CHAPTER XXI

The first words, when we had taken our seats, were spoken by my lady.

'Sergeant Cuff,' she said, 'there was perhaps some excuse for the inconsiderate manner in which I spoke to you half an hour since. I have no wish, however, to claim that excuse. I say, with perfect sincerity, that I regret it, if I wronged you.'

The grace of voice and manner with which she made him that atonement had its due effect on the Sergeant. He requested permission to justify himself—putting his justification as an act of respect to my mistress. It was impossible, he said, that he could be in any way responsible for the calamity, which had shocked us all, for this sufficient reason, that his success in bringing his inquiry to its proper end depended on his neither saying nor doing anything that could alarm Rosanna Spearman. He appealed to me to testify whether he had, or had not, carried that object out. I could, and did, bear witness that he had. And there, as I thought, the matter might have been judiciously left to come to an end.

Sergeant Cuff, however, took it a step further, evidently (as you shall now judge) with the purpose of forcing the most painful of all possible explanations to take place between her ladyship and himself.

'I have heard a motive assigned for the young woman's suicide,' said the Sergeant, 'which may possibly be the right one. It is a motive quite unconnected with the case which I am conducting here. I am bound to add, however, that my own opinion points the other way. Some unbearable anxiety in connexion with the missing Diamond, has, I believe, driven the poor creature to her own destruction. I don't pretend to know what that unbearable anxiety may have been. But I think (with your ladyship's permission) I can lay my hand on a person who is capable of deciding whether I am right or wrong.'

'Is the person now in the house?' my mistress asked, after waiting a little.

'The person has left the house, my lady.'

That answer pointed as straight to Miss Rachel as straight could be. A silence dropped on us which I thought would never come to an end. Lord! how the wind howled, and how the rain drove at the window, as I sat

there waiting for one or other of them to speak again!

‘Be so good as to express yourself plainly,’ said my lady. ‘Do you refer to my daughter?’

‘I do,’ said Sergeant Cuff, in so many words.

My mistress had her cheque-book on the table when we entered the room—no doubt to pay the Sergeant his fee. She now put it back in the drawer. It went to my heart to see how her poor hand trembled—the hand that had loaded her old servant with benefits; the hand that, I pray God, may take mine, when my time comes, and I leave my place for ever!

‘I had hoped,’ said my lady, very slowly and quietly, ‘to have recompensed your services, and to have parted with you without Miss Verinder’s name having been openly mentioned between us as it has been mentioned now. My nephew has probably said something of this, before you came into my room?’

‘Mr. Blake gave his message, my lady. And I gave Mr. Blake a reason?’

‘It is needless to tell me your reason. After what you have just said, you know as well as I do that you have gone too far to go back. I owe it to myself, and I owe it to my child, to insist on your remaining here, and to insist on your speaking out.’

The Sergeant looked at his watch.

‘If there had been time, my lady,’ he answered, ‘I should have preferred writing my report, instead of communicating it by word of mouth. But, if this inquiry is to go on, time is of too much importance to be wasted in writing. I am ready to go into the matter at once. It is a very painful matter for me to speak of, and for you to hear.’

There my mistress stopped him once more.

‘I may possibly make it less painful to you, and to my good servant and friend here,’ she said, ‘if I set the example of speaking boldly, on my side. You suspect Miss Verinder of deceiving us all, by secreting the Diamond for some purpose of her own? Is that true?’

‘Quite true, my lady.’

‘Very well. Now, before you begin, I have to tell you, as Miss Verinder’s mother, that she is absolutely incapable of doing what you suppose her to have done. Your knowledge of her character dates from a day or two since. My knowledge of her character dates from the beginning of her life. State your suspicion of her as strongly as you please—it is impossible that you can offend me by doing so. I am sure, beforehand, that (with all your experience) the circumstances have fatally misled you in this case. Mind! I am in possession of no private information. I am as absolutely shut out of my daughter’s confidence as you are. My one reason for speaking positively, is the reason you have heard already. I know my child.’

She turned to me, and gave me her hand. I kissed it in silence. "You may go on," she said, facing the Sergeant again as steadily as ever.

Sergeant Cuff bowed. My mistress had produced but one effect on him. His hatchet-face softened for a moment, as if he was sorry for her. As to shaking him in his own conviction, it was plain to see that she had not moved him by a single inch. He settled himself in his chair; and he began his vile attack on Miss Rachel's character in these words:

"I must ask your ladyship," he said, "to look this matter in the face, from my point of view as well as from yours. Will you please to suppose yourself coming down here, in my place, and with my experience? and will you allow me to mention very briefly what that experience has been?"

My mistress signed to him that she would do this. The Sergeant went on:

"For the last twenty years," he said, "I have been largely employed in cases of family scandal, acting in the capacity of confidential man. The one result of my domestic practice which has any bearing on the matter now in hand, is a result which I may state in two words. It is well within my experience, that young ladies of rank and position do occasionally have private debts which they dare not acknowledge to their nearest relatives and friends. Sometimes, the milliner and the jeweller are at the bottom of it. Sometimes, the money is wanted for purposes which I don't suspect in this case, and which I won't shock you by mentioning. Bear in mind what I have said, my lady?and now let us see how events in this house have forced me back on my own experience, whether I liked it or not!"

He considered with himself for a moment, and went on?with a horrid clearness that obliged you to understand him; with an abominable justice that favoured nobody.

"My first information relating to the loss of the Moonstone," said the Sergeant, "came to me from Superintendent Seegrave. He proved to my complete satisfaction that he was perfectly incapable of managing the case. The one thing he said which struck me as worth listening to, was this?that Miss Verinder had declined to be questioned by him, and had spoken to him with a perfectly incomprehensible rudeness and contempt. I thought this curious?but I attributed it mainly to some clumsiness on the Superintendent's part which might have offended the young lady. After that, I put it by in my mind, and applied myself, single-handed, to the case. It ended, as you are aware, in the discovery of the smear on the door, and in Mr. Franklin Blake's evidence satisfying me, that this same smear, and the loss of the Diamond, were pieces of the same puzzle. So far, if I suspected anything, I suspected that the Moonstone had been stolen, and that one of the servants might prove to be the thief. Very good. In this state of things, what happens? Miss Verinder suddenly comes out of her room, and speaks to me. I observe three suspicious appearances in that young lady. She is still violently agitated, though more than four-and-twenty hours have passed since the Diamond was lost. She treats me as she has already treated

Superintendent Seegrave. And she is mortally offended with Mr. Franklin Blake. Very good again. Here (I say to myself) is a young lady who has lost a valuable jewel? a young lady, also, as my own eyes and ears inform me, who is of an impetuous temperament. Under these circumstances, and with that character, what does she do? She betrays an incomprehensible resentment against Mr. Blake, Mr. Superintendent, and myself? otherwise, the very three people who have all, in their different ways, been trying to help her to recover her lost jewel. Having brought my inquiry to that point? _then_, my lady, and not till then, I begin to look back into my own mind for my own experience. My own experience explains Miss Verinder?s otherwise incomprehensible conduct. It associates her with those other young ladies that I know of. It tells me she has debts she dares?t acknowledge, that must be paid. And it sets me asking myself, whether the loss of the Diamond may not mean?that the Diamond must be secretly pledged to pay them. That is the conclusion which my experience draws from plain facts. What does your ladyship?s experience say against it??

?What I have said already,? answered my mistress. ?The circumstances have misled you.?

I said nothing on my side. _Robinson Crusoe_? God knows how? had got into my muddled old head. If Sergeant Cuff had found himself, at that moment, transported to a desert island, without a man Friday to keep him company, or a ship to take him off? he would have found himself exactly where I wished him to be! (_Nota bene:_ ?I am an average good Christian, when you don?t push my Christianity too far. And all the rest of you? which is a great comfort? are, in this respect, much the same as I am.)

Sergeant Cuff went on:

?Right or wrong, my lady,? he said, ?having drawn my conclusion, the next thing to do was to put it to the test. I suggested to your ladyship the examination of all the wardrobes in the house. It was a means of finding the article of dress which had, in all probability, made the smear; and it was a means of putting my conclusion to the test. How did it turn out? Your ladyship consented; Mr. Blake consented; Mr. Ablewhite consented. Miss Verinder alone stopped the whole proceeding by refusing point-blank. That result satisfied me that my view was the right one. If your ladyship and Mr. Betteredge persist in not agreeing with me, you must be blind to what happened before you this very day. In your hearing, I told the young lady that her leaving the house (as things were then) would put an obstacle in the way of my recovering her jewel. You saw yourselves that she drove off in the face of that statement. You saw yourself that, so far from forgiving Mr. Blake for having done more than all the rest of you to put the clue into my hands, she publicly insulted Mr. Blake, on the steps of her mother?s house. What do these things mean? If Miss Verinder is not privy to the suppression of the Diamond, what do these things mean??

This time he looked my way. It was downright frightful to hear him piling up proof after proof against Miss Rachel, and to know, while one was longing to defend her, that there was no disputing the truth of

what he said. I am (thank God!) constitutionally superior to reason. This enabled me to hold firm to my lady's view, which was my view also. This roused my spirit, and made me put a bold face on it before Sergeant Cuff. Profit, good friends, I beseech you, by my example. It will save you from many troubles of the vexing sort. Cultivate a superiority to reason, and see how you pare the claws of all the sensible people when they try to scratch you for your own good!

Finding that I made no remark, and that my mistress made no remark, Sergeant Cuff proceeded. Lord! how it did enrage me to notice that he was not in the least put out by our silence!

‘There is the case, my lady, as it stands against Miss Verinder alone,’ he said. ‘The next thing is to put the case as it stands against Miss Verinder and the deceased Rosanna Spearman taken together. We will go back for a moment, if you please, to your daughter's refusal to let her wardrobe be examined. My mind being made up, after that circumstance, I had two questions to consider next. First, as to the right method of conducting my inquiry. Second, as to whether Miss Verinder had an accomplice among the female servants in the house. After carefully thinking it over, I determined to conduct the inquiry in, what we should call at our office, a highly irregular manner. For this reason: I had a family scandal to deal with, which it was my business to keep within the family limits. The less noise made, and the fewer strangers employed to help me, the better. As to the usual course of taking people in custody on suspicion, going before the magistrate, and all the rest of it?nothing of the sort was to be thought of, when your ladyship's daughter was (as I believed) at the bottom of the whole business. In this case, I felt that a person of Mr. Betteredge's character and position in the house?knowing the servants as he did, and having the honour of the family at heart?would be safer to take as an assistant than any other person whom I could lay my hand on. I should have tried Mr. Blake as well?but for one obstacle in the way. ‘He’ saw the drift of my proceedings at a very early date; and, with his interest in Miss Verinder, any mutual understanding was impossible between him and me. I trouble your ladyship with these particulars to show you that I have kept the family secret within the family circle. I am the only outsider who knows it?and my professional existence depends on holding my tongue.’

Here I felt that ‘my’ professional existence depended on not holding ‘my’ tongue. To be held up before my mistress, in my old age, as a sort of deputy-policeman, was, once again, more than my Christianity was strong enough to bear.

‘I beg to inform your ladyship,’ I said, ‘that I never, to my knowledge, helped this abominable detective business, in any way, from first to last; and I summon Sergeant Cuff to contradict me, if he dares!’

Having given vent in those words, I felt greatly relieved. Her ladyship honoured me by a little friendly pat on the shoulder. I looked with righteous indignation at the Sergeant, to see what he thought of such a testimony as ‘that!’ The Sergeant looked back like a lamb, and seemed

to like me better than ever.

My lady informed him that he might continue his statement. ?I understand,? she said, ?that you have honestly done your best, in what you believe to be my interest. I am ready to hear what you have to say next.?

?What I have to say next,? answered Sergeant Cuff, ?relates to Rosanna Spearman. I recognised the young woman, as your ladyship may remember, when she brought the washing-book into this room. Up to that time I was inclined to doubt whether Miss Verinder had trusted her secret to anyone. When I saw Rosanna, I altered my mind. I suspected her at once of being privy to the suppression of the Diamond. The poor creature has met her death by a dreadful end, and I don?t want your ladyship to think, now she?s gone, that I was unduly hard on her. If this had been a common case of thieving, I should have given Rosanna the benefit of the doubt just as freely as I should have given it to any of the other servants in the house. Our experience of the Reformatory women is, that when tried in service?and when kindly and judiciously treated?they prove themselves in the majority of cases to be honestly penitent, and honestly worthy of the pains taken with them. But this was not a common case of thieving. It was a case?in my mind?of a deeply planned fraud, with the owner of the Diamond at the bottom of it. Holding this view, the first consideration which naturally presented itself to me, in connection with Rosanna, was this: Would Miss Verinder be satisfied (begging your ladyship?s pardon) with leading us all to think that the Moonstone was merely lost? Or would she go a step further, and delude us into believing that the Moonstone was stolen? In the latter event there was Rosanna Spearman?with the character of a thief?ready to her hand; the person of all others to lead your ladyship off, and to lead me off, on a false scent.?

Was it possible (I asked myself) that he could put his case against Miss Rachel and Rosanna in a more horrid point of view than this? It was possible, as you shall now see.

?I had another reason for suspecting the deceased woman,? he said, ?which appears to me to have been stronger still. Who would be the very person to help Miss Verinder in raising money privately on the Diamond? Rosanna Spearman. No young lady in Miss Verinder?s position could manage such a risky matter as that by herself. A go-between she must have, and who so fit, I ask again, as Rosanna Spearman? Your ladyship?s deceased housemaid was at the top of her profession when she was a thief. She had relations, to my certain knowledge, with one of the few men in London (in the money-lending line) who would advance a large sum on such a notable jewel as the Moonstone, without asking awkward questions, or insisting on awkward conditions. Bear this in mind, my lady; and now let me show you how my suspicions have been justified by Rosanna?s own acts, and by the plain inferences to be drawn from them.?

He thereupon passed the whole of Rosanna?s proceedings under review. You are already as well acquainted with those proceedings as I am; and you will understand how unanswerably this part of his report fixed the guilt of being concerned in the disappearance of the Moonstone on the

memory of the poor dead girl. Even my mistress was daunted by what he said now. She made him no answer when he had done. It didn't seem to matter to the Sergeant whether he was answered or not. On he went (devil take him!), just as steady as ever.

“Having stated the whole case as I understand it,” he said, “I have only to tell your ladyship, now, what I propose to do next. I see two ways of bringing this inquiry successfully to an end. One of those ways I look upon as a certainty. The other, I admit, is a bold experiment, and nothing more. Your ladyship shall decide. Shall we take the certainty first?”

My mistress made him a sign to take his own way, and choose for himself.

“Thank you,” said the Sergeant. “We'll begin with the certainty, as your ladyship is so good as to leave it to me. Whether Miss Verinder remains at Frizinghall, or whether she returns here, I propose, in either case, to keep a careful watch on all her proceedings—on the people she sees, on the rides and walks she may take, and on the letters she may write and receive.”

“What next?” asked my mistress.

“I shall next,” answered the Sergeant, “request your ladyship's leave to introduce into the house, as a servant in the place of Rosanna Spearman, a woman accustomed to private inquiries of this sort, for whose discretion I can answer.”

“What next?” repeated my mistress.

“Next,” proceeded the Sergeant, “and last, I propose to send one of my brother-officers to make an arrangement with that money-lender in London, whom I mentioned just now as formerly acquainted with Rosanna Spearman—and whose name and address, your ladyship may rely on it, have been communicated by Rosanna to Miss Verinder. I don't deny that the course of action I am now suggesting will cost money, and consume time. But the result is certain. We run a line round the Moonstone, and we draw that line closer and closer till we find it in Miss Verinder's possession, supposing she decides to keep it. If her debts press, and she decides on sending it away, then we have our man ready, and we meet the Moonstone on its arrival in London.”

To hear her own daughter made the subject of such a proposal as this, stung my mistress into speaking angrily for the first time.

“Consider your proposal declined, in every particular,” she said. “And go on to your other way of bringing the inquiry to an end.”

“My other way,” said the Sergeant, going on as easy as ever, “is to try that bold experiment to which I have alluded. I think I have formed a pretty correct estimate of Miss Verinder's temperament. She is quite capable (according to my belief) of committing a daring fraud. But she is too hot and impetuous in temper, and too little accustomed to deceit

as a habit, to act the hypocrite in small things, and to restrain herself under all provocations. Her feelings, in this case, have repeatedly got beyond her control, at the very time when it was plainly her interest to conceal them. It is on this peculiarity in her character that I now propose to act. I want to give her a great shock suddenly, under circumstances that will touch her to the quick. In plain English, I want to tell Miss Verinder, without a word of warning, of Rosanna's death?on the chance that her own better feelings will hurry her into making a clean breast of it. Does your ladyship accept _that_ alternative??

My mistress astonished me beyond all power of expression. She answered him on the instant:

?Yes; I do.?

?The pony-chaise is ready,? said the Sergeant. ?I wish your ladyship good morning.?

My lady held up her hand, and stopped him at the door.

?My daughter's better feelings shall be appealed to, as you propose,? she said. ?But I claim the right, as her mother, of putting her to the test myself. You will remain here, if you please; and I will go to Frizinghall.?

For once in his life, the great Cuff stood speechless with amazement, like an ordinary man.

My mistress rang the bell, and ordered her waterproof things. It was still pouring with rain; and the close carriage had gone, as you know, with Miss Rachel to Frizinghall. I tried to dissuade her ladyship from facing the severity of the weather. Quite useless! I asked leave to go with her, and hold the umbrella. She wouldn't hear of it. The pony-chaise came round, with the groom in charge. ?You may rely on two things,? she said to Sergeant Cuff, in the hall. ?I will try the experiment on Miss Verinder as boldly as you could try it yourself. And I will inform you of the result, either personally or by letter, before the last train leaves for London tonight.?

With that, she stepped into the chaise, and, taking the reins herself, drove off to Frizinghall.

CHAPTER XXII

My mistress having left us, I had leisure to think of Sergeant Cuff. I found him sitting in a snug corner of the hall, consulting his memorandum book, and curling up viciously at the corners of the lips.

?Making notes of the case?? I asked.

?No,? said the Sergeant. ?Looking to see what my next professional engagement is.?

‘Oh!’ I said. ‘You think it’s all over then, here?’

‘I think,’ answered Sergeant Cuff, ‘that Lady Verinder is one of the cleverest women in England. I also think a rose much better worth looking at than a diamond. Where is the gardener, Mr. Betteredge?’

There was no getting a word more out of him on the matter of the Moonstone. He had lost all interest in his own inquiry; and he would persist in looking for the gardener. An hour afterwards, I heard them at high words in the conservatory, with the dog-rose once more at the bottom of the dispute.

In the meantime, it was my business to find out whether Mr. Franklin persisted in his resolution to leave us by the afternoon train. After having been informed of the conference in my lady’s room, and of how it had ended, he immediately decided on waiting to hear the news from Frizinghall. This very natural alteration in his plans—which, with ordinary people, would have led to nothing in particular—proved, in Mr. Franklin’s case, to have one objectionable result. It left him unsettled, with a legacy of idle time on his hands, and, in so doing, it let out all the foreign sides of his character, one on the top of another, like rats out of a bag.

Now as an Italian-Englishman, now as a German-Englishman, and now as a French-Englishman, he drifted in and out of all the sitting-rooms in the house, with nothing to talk of but Miss Rachel’s treatment of him; and with nobody to address himself to but me. I found him (for example) in the library, sitting under the map of Modern Italy, and quite unaware of any other method of meeting his troubles, except the method of talking about them. ‘I have several worthy aspirations, Betteredge; but what am I to do with them now? I am full of dormant good qualities, if Rachel would only have helped me to bring them out!’ He was so eloquent in drawing the picture of his own neglected merits, and so pathetic in lamenting over it when it was done, that I felt quite at my wits’ end how to console him, when it suddenly occurred to me that here was a case for the wholesome application of a bit of ‘Robinson Crusoe’. I hobbled out to my own room, and hobbled back with that immortal book. Nobody in the library! The map of Modern Italy stared at ‘me’; and ‘I’ stared at the map of Modern Italy.

I tried the drawing-room. There was his handkerchief on the floor, to prove that he had drifted in. And there was the empty room to prove that he had drifted out again.

I tried the dining-room, and discovered Samuel with a biscuit and a glass of sherry, silently investigating the empty air. A minute since, Mr. Franklin had rung furiously for a little light refreshment. On its production, in a violent hurry, by Samuel, Mr. Franklin had vanished before the bell downstairs had quite done ringing with the pull he had given to it.

I tried the morning-room, and found him at last. There he was at the window, drawing hieroglyphics with his finger in the damp on the glass.

?Your sherry is waiting for you, sir,? I said to him. I might as well have addressed myself to one of the four walls of the room; he was down in the bottomless deep of his own meditations, past all pulling up. ?How do _you_ explain Rachel?s conduct, Betteredge?? was the only answer I received. Not being ready with the needful reply, I produced _Robinson Crusoe_, in which I am firmly persuaded some explanation might have been found, if we had only searched long enough for it. Mr. Franklin shut up _Robinson Crusoe_, and floundered into his German-English gibberish on the spot. ?Why not look into it?? he said, as if I had personally objected to looking into it. ?Why the devil lose your patience, Betteredge, when patience is all that?s wanted to arrive at the truth? Don?t interrupt me. Rachel?s conduct is perfectly intelligible, if you will only do her the common justice to take the Objective view first, and the Subjective view next, and the Objective-Subjective view to wind up with. What do we know? We know that the loss of the Moonstone, on Thursday morning last, threw her into a state of nervous excitement, from which she has not recovered yet. Do you mean to deny the Objective view, so far? Very well, then?don?t interrupt me. Now, being in a state of nervous excitement, how are we to expect that she should behave as she might otherwise have behaved to any of the people about her? Arguing in this way, from within-outwards, what do we reach? We reach the Subjective view. I defy you to controvert the Subjective view. Very well then?what follows? Good Heavens! the Objective-Subjective explanation follows, of course! Rachel, properly speaking, is _not_ Rachel, but Somebody Else. Do I mind being cruelly treated by Somebody Else? You are unreasonable enough, Betteredge; but you can hardly accuse me of that. Then how does it end? It ends, in spite of your confounded English narrowness and prejudice, in my being perfectly happy and comfortable. Where?s the sherry??

My head was by this time in such a condition, that I was not quite sure whether it was my own head, or Mr. Franklin?s. In this deplorable state, I contrived to do, what I take to have been, three Objective things. I got Mr. Franklin his sherry; I retired to my own room; and I solaced myself with the most composing pipe of tobacco I ever remember to have smoked in my life.

Don?t suppose, however, that I was quit of Mr. Franklin on such easy terms as these. Drifting again, out of the morning-room into the hall, he found his way to the offices next, smelt my pipe, and was instantly reminded that he had been simple enough to give up smoking for Miss Rachel?s sake. In the twinkling of an eye, he burst in on me with his cigar-case, and came out strong on the one everlasting subject, in his neat, witty, unbelieving, French way. ?Give me a light, Betteredge. Is it conceivable that a man can have smoked as long as I have without discovering that there is a complete system for the treatment of women at the bottom of his cigar-case? Follow me carefully, and I will prove it in two words. You choose a cigar, you try it, and it disappoints you. What do you do upon that? You throw it away and try another. Now observe the application! You choose a woman, you try her, and she breaks your heart. Fool! take a lesson from your cigar-case. Throw her away, and try another!?

I shook my head at that. Wonderfully clever, I dare say, but my own experience was dead against it. In the time of the late Mrs. Betteredge, I said, I felt pretty often inclined to try your philosophy, Mr. Franklin. But the law insists on your smoking your cigar, sir, when you have once chosen it. I pointed that observation with a wink. Mr. Franklin burst out laughing and we were as merry as crickets, until the next new side of his character turned up in due course. So things went on with my young master and me; and so (while the Sergeant and the gardener were wrangling over the roses) we two spent the interval before the news came back from Frizinghall.

The pony-chaise returned a good half hour before I had ventured to expect it. My lady had decided to remain for the present, at her sister's house. The groom brought two letters from his mistress; one addressed to Mr. Franklin, and the other to me.

Mr. Franklin's letter I sent to him in the library into which refuge his driftings had now taken him for the second time. My own letter, I read in my own room. A cheque, which dropped out when I opened it, informed me (before I had mastered the contents) that Sergeant Cuff's dismissal from the inquiry after the Moonstone was now a settled thing.

I sent to the conservatory to say that I wished to speak to the Sergeant directly. He appeared, with his mind full of the gardener and the dog-rose, declaring that the equal of Mr. Begbie for obstinacy never had existed yet, and never would exist again. I requested him to dismiss such wretched trifling as this from our conversation, and to give his best attention to a really serious matter. Upon that he exerted himself sufficiently to notice the letter in my hand. Ah! he said in a weary way, you have heard from her ladyship. Have I anything to do with it, Mr. Betteredge??

You shall judge for yourself, Sergeant. I thereupon read him the letter (with my best emphasis and discretion), in the following words:

MY GOOD GABRIEL, I request that you will inform Sergeant Cuff, that I have performed the promise I made to him; with this result, so far as Rosanna Spearman is concerned. Miss Verinder solemnly declares, that she has never spoken a word in private to Rosanna, since that unhappy woman first entered my house. They never met, even accidentally, on the night when the Diamond was lost; and no communication of any sort whatever took place between them, from the Thursday morning when the alarm was first raised in the house, to this present Saturday afternoon, when Miss Verinder left us. After telling my daughter suddenly, and in so many words, of Rosanna Spearman's suicide this is what has come of it.

Having reached that point, I looked up, and asked Sergeant Cuff what he thought of the letter, so far?

I should only offend you if I expressed _my_ opinion, answered the Sergeant. Go on, Mr. Betteredge, he said, with the most exasperating resignation, go on.?

When I remembered that this man had had the audacity to complain of our gardener's obstinacy, my tongue itched to 'go on' in other words than my mistress's. This time, however, my Christianity held firm. I proceeded steadily with her ladyship's letter:

'Having appealed to Miss Verinder in the manner which the officer thought most desirable, I spoke to her next in the manner which I myself thought most likely to impress her. On two different occasions, before my daughter left my roof, I privately warned her that she was exposing herself to suspicion of the most unendurable and most degrading kind. I have now told her, in the plainest terms, that my apprehensions have been realised.

'Her answer to this, on her own solemn affirmation, is as plain as words can be. In the first place, she owes no money privately to any living creature. In the second place, the Diamond is not now, and never has been, in her possession, since she put it into her cabinet on Wednesday night.

'The confidence which my daughter has placed in me goes no further than this. She maintains an obstinate silence, when I ask her if she can explain the disappearance of the Diamond. She refuses, with tears, when I appeal to her to speak out for my sake. 'The day will come when you will know why I am careless about being suspected, and why I am silent even to _you_. I have done much to make my mother pity me?nothing to make my mother blush for me.' Those are my daughter's own words.

'After what has passed between the officer and me, I think?stranger as he is?that he should be made acquainted with what Miss Verinder has said, as well as you. Read my letter to him, and then place in his hands the cheque which I enclose. In resigning all further claim on his services, I have only to say that I am convinced of his honesty and his intelligence; but I am more firmly persuaded than ever, that the circumstances, in this case, have fatally misled him.'

There the letter ended. Before presenting the cheque, I asked Sergeant Cuff if he had any remark to make.

'It's no part of my duty, Mr. Betteredge,' he answered, 'to make remarks on a case, when I have done with it.'

I tossed the cheque across the table to him. 'Do you believe in _that_ part of her ladyship's letter?' I said, indignantly.

The Sergeant looked at the cheque, and lifted up his dismal eyebrows in acknowledgment of her ladyship's liberality.

'This is such a generous estimate of the value of my time,' he said, 'that I feel bound to make some return for it. I'll bear in mind the amount in this cheque, Mr. Betteredge, when the occasion comes round for remembering it.'

'What do you mean?' I asked.

‘Her ladyship has smoothed matters over for the present very cleverly,’ said the Sergeant. ‘But this family scandal is of the sort that bursts up again when you least expect it. We shall have more detective-business on our hands, sir, before the Moonstone is many months older.’

If those words meant anything, and if the manner in which he spoke them meant anything, it came to this. My mistress’s letter had proved, to his mind, that Miss Rachel was hardened enough to resist the strongest appeal that could be addressed to her, and that she had deceived her own mother (good God, under what circumstances!) by a series of abominable lies. How other people, in my place, might have replied to the Sergeant, I don’t know. I answered what he said in these plain terms:

‘Sergeant Cuff, I consider your last observation as an insult to my lady and her daughter!’

‘Mr. Betteredge, consider it as a warning to yourself, and you will be nearer the mark.’

Hot and angry as I was, the infernal confidence with which he gave me that answer closed my lips.

I walked to the window to compose myself. The rain had given over; and, who should I see in the court-yard, but Mr. Begbie, the gardener, waiting outside to continue the dog-rose controversy with Sergeant Cuff.

‘My compliments to the Sairgent,’ said Mr. Begbie, the moment he set eyes on me. ‘If he’s minded to walk to the station, I’m agreeable to go with him.’

‘What!’ cries the Sergeant, behind me, ‘are you not convinced yet?’

‘The devil a bit I’m convinced!’ answered Mr. Begbie.

‘Then I’ll walk to the station!’ says the Sergeant.

‘Then I’ll meet you at the gate!’ says Mr. Begbie.

I was angry enough, as you know, but how was any man’s anger to hold out against such an interruption as this? Sergeant Cuff noticed the change in me, and encouraged it by a word in season. ‘Come! come!’ he said, ‘why not treat my view of the case as her ladyship treats it? Why not say, the circumstances have fatally misled me?’

To take anything as her ladyship took it was a privilege worth enjoying, even with the disadvantage of its having been offered to me by Sergeant Cuff. I cooled slowly down to my customary level. I regarded any other opinion of Miss Rachel, than my lady’s opinion or mine, with a lofty contempt. The only thing I could not do, was to keep off the subject of the Moonstone! My own good sense ought to have warned me, I

know, to let the matter rest?but, there! the virtues which distinguish the present generation were not invented in my time. Sergeant Cuff had hit me on the raw, and, though I did look down upon him with contempt, the tender place still tingled for all that. The end of it was that I perversely led him back to the subject of her ladyship's letter. 'I am quite satisfied myself,' I said. 'But never mind that! Go on, as if I was still open to conviction. You think Miss Rachel is not to be believed on her word; and you say we shall hear of the Moonstone again. Back your opinion, Sergeant,' I concluded, in an airy way. 'Back your opinion.'

Instead of taking offence, Sergeant Cuff seized my hand, and shook it till my fingers ached again.

'I declare to heaven,' says this strange officer solemnly, 'I would take to domestic service tomorrow, Mr. Betteredge, if I had a chance of being employed along with You! To say you are as transparent as a child, sir, is to pay the children a compliment which nine out of ten of them don't deserve. There! there! we won't begin to dispute again. You shall have it out of me on easier terms than that. I won't say a word more about her ladyship, or about Miss Verinder! I'll only turn prophet, for once in a way, and for your sake. I have warned you already that you haven't done with the Moonstone yet. Very well. Now I'll tell you, at parting, of three things which will happen in the future, and which, I believe, will force themselves on your attention, whether you like it or not.'

'Go on!' I said, quite unabashed, and just as airy as ever.

'First,' said the Sergeant, 'you will hear something from the Yollands when the postman delivers Rosanna's letter at Cobb's Hole, on Monday next.'

If he had thrown a bucket of cold water over me, I doubt if I could have felt it much more unpleasantly than I felt those words. Miss Rachel's assertion of her innocence had left Rosanna's conduct—the making the new nightgown, the hiding the smeared nightgown, and all the rest of it—entirely without explanation. And this had never occurred to me, till Sergeant Cuff forced it on my mind all in a moment!

'In the second place,' proceeded the Sergeant, 'you will hear of the three Indians again. You will hear of them in the neighbourhood, if Miss Rachel remains in the neighbourhood. You will hear of them in London, if Miss Rachel goes to London.'

Having lost all interest in the three jugglers, and having thoroughly convinced myself of my young lady's innocence, I took this second prophecy easily enough. 'So much for two of the three things that are going to happen,' I said. 'Now for the third!'

'Third, and last,' said Sergeant Cuff, 'you will, sooner or later, hear something of that money-lender in London, whom I have twice taken the liberty of mentioning already. Give me your pocket-book, and I'll make a note for you of his name and address so that there may be no mistake

about it if the thing really happens.?

He wrote accordingly on a blank leaf??Mr. Septimus Luker,
Middlesex-place, Lambeth, London.?

?There,? he said, pointing to the address, ?are the last words, on the subject of the Moonstone, which I shall trouble you with for the present. Time will show whether I am right or wrong. In the meanwhile, sir, I carry away with me a sincere personal liking for you, which I think does honour to both of us. If we don?t meet again before my professional retirement takes place, I hope you will come and see me in a little house near London, which I have got my eye on. There will be grass walks, Mr. Betteredge, I promise you, in _my_ garden. And as for the white moss rose???

?The de?il a bit ye?ll get the white moss rose to grow, unless you bud him on the dogue-rose first,? cried a voice at the window.

We both turned round. There was the everlasting Mr. Begbie, too eager for the controversy to wait any longer at the gate. The Sergeant wrung my hand, and darted out into the court-yard, hotter still on his side. ?Ask him about the moss rose, when he comes back, and see if I have left him a leg to stand on!? cried the great Cuff, hailing me through the window in his turn. ?Gentlemen, both!? I answered, moderating them again as I had moderated them once already. ?In the matter of the moss rose there is a great deal to be said on both sides!? I might as well (as the Irish say) have whistled jigs to a milestone. Away they went together, fighting the battle of the roses without asking or giving quarter on either side. The last I saw of them, Mr. Begbie was shaking his obstinate head, and Sergeant Cuff had got him by the arm like a prisoner in charge. Ah, well! well! I own I couldn?t help liking the Sergeant?though I hated him all the time.

Explain that state of mind, if you can. You will soon be rid, now, of me and my contradictions. When I have reported Mr. Franklin?s departure, the history of the Saturday?s events will be finished at last. And when I have next described certain strange things that happened in the course of the new week, I shall have done my part of the Story, and shall hand over the pen to the person who is appointed to follow my lead. If you are as tired of reading this narrative as I am of writing it?Lord, how we shall enjoy ourselves on both sides a few pages further on!

CHAPTER XXIII

I had kept the pony-chaise ready, in case Mr. Franklin persisted in leaving us by the train that night. The appearance of the luggage, followed downstairs by Mr. Franklin himself, informed me plainly enough that he had held firm to a resolution for once in his life.

?So you have really made up your mind, sir?? I said, as we met in the hall. ?Why not wait a day or two longer, and give Miss Rachel another chance??

The foreign varnish appeared to have all worn off Mr. Franklin, now that the time had come for saying good-bye. Instead of replying to me in words, he put the letter which her ladyship had addressed to him into my hand. The greater part of it said over again what had been said already in the other communication received by me. But there was a bit about Miss Rachel added at the end, which will account for the steadiness of Mr. Franklin's determination, if it accounts for nothing else.

"You will wonder, I dare say? (her ladyship wrote), "at my allowing my own daughter to keep me perfectly in the dark. A Diamond worth twenty thousand pounds has been lost?and I am left to infer that the mystery of its disappearance is no mystery to Rachel, and that some incomprehensible obligation of silence has been laid on her, by some person or persons utterly unknown to me, with some object in view at which I cannot even guess. Is it conceivable that I should allow myself to be trifled with in this way? It is quite conceivable, in Rachel's present state. She is in a condition of nervous agitation pitiable to see. I dare not approach the subject of the Moonstone again until time has done something to quiet her. To help this end, I have not hesitated to dismiss the police-officer. The mystery which baffles us, baffles him too. This is not a matter in which any stranger can help us. He adds to what I have to suffer; and he maddens Rachel if she only hears his name.

"My plans for the future are as well settled as they can be. My present idea is to take Rachel to London?partly to relieve her mind by a complete change, partly to try what may be done by consulting the best medical advice. Can I ask you to meet us in town? My dear Franklin, you, in your way, must imitate my patience, and wait, as I do, for a fitter time. The valuable assistance which you rendered to the inquiry after the lost jewel is still an unpardoned offence, in the present dreadful state of Rachel's mind. Moving blindfold in this matter, you have added to the burden of anxiety which she has had to bear, by innocently threatening her secret with discovery, through your exertions. It is impossible for me to excuse the perversity that holds you responsible for consequences which neither you nor I could imagine or foresee. She is not to be reasoned with?she can only be pitied. I am grieved to have to say it, but for the present, you and Rachel are better apart. The only advice I can offer you is, to give her time."

I handed the letter back, sincerely sorry for Mr. Franklin, for I knew how fond he was of my young lady; and I saw that her mother's account of her had cut him to the heart. "You know the proverb, sir," was all I said to him. "When things are at the worst, they're sure to mend. Things can't be much worse, Mr. Franklin, than they are now."

Mr. Franklin folded up his aunt's letter, without appearing to be much comforted by the remark which I had ventured on addressing to him.

"When I came here from London with that horrible Diamond," he said, "I don't believe there was a happier household in England than this. Look at the household now! Scattered, disunited?the very air of the place

poisoned with mystery and suspicion! Do you remember that morning at the Shivering Sand, when we talked about my uncle Herncastle, and his birthday gift? The Moonstone has served the Colonel's vengeance, Betteredge, by means which the Colonel himself never dreamt of!

With that he shook me by the hand, and went out to the pony-chaise.

I followed him down the steps. It was very miserable to see him leaving the old place, where he had spent the happiest years of his life, in this way. Penelope (sadly upset by all that had happened in the house) came round crying, to bid him good-bye. Mr. Franklin kissed her. I waved my hand as much as to say, 'You're heartily welcome, sir.' Some of the other female servants appeared, peeping after him round the corner. He was one of those men whom the women all like. At the last moment, I stopped the pony-chaise, and begged as a favour that he would let us hear from him by letter. He didn't seem to heed what I said—he was looking round from one thing to another, taking a sort of farewell of the old house and grounds. 'Tell us where you are going to, sir!' I said, holding on by the chaise, and trying to get at his future plans in that way. Mr. Franklin pulled his hat down suddenly over his eyes. 'Going?' says he, echoing the word after me. 'I am going to the devil!' The pony started at the word, as if he had felt a Christian horror of it. 'God bless you, sir, go where you may!' was all I had time to say, before he was out of sight and hearing. A sweet and pleasant gentleman! With all his faults and follies, a sweet and pleasant gentleman! He left a sad gap behind him, when he left my lady's house.

It was dull and dreary enough, when the long summer evening closed in, on that Saturday night.

I kept my spirits from sinking by sticking fast to my pipe and my Robinson Crusoe. The women (excepting Penelope) beguiled the time by talking of Rosanna's suicide. They were all obstinately of opinion that the poor girl had stolen the Moonstone, and that she had destroyed herself in terror of being found out. My daughter, of course, privately held fast to what she had said all along. Her notion of the motive which was really at the bottom of the suicide failed, oddly enough, just where my young lady's assertion of her innocence failed also. It left Rosanna's secret journey to Frizinghall, and Rosanna's proceedings in the matter of the nightgown entirely unaccounted for. There was no use in pointing this out to Penelope; the objection made about as much impression on her as a shower of rain on a waterproof coat. The truth is, my daughter inherits my superiority to reason—and, in respect to that accomplishment, has got a long way ahead of her own father.

On the next day (Sunday), the close carriage, which had been kept at Mr. Ablewhite's, came back to us empty. The coachman brought a message for me, and written instructions for my lady's own maid and for Penelope.

The message informed me that my mistress had determined to take Miss Rachel to her house in London, on the Monday. The written instructions informed the two maids of the clothing that was wanted, and directed them to meet their mistresses in town at a given hour. Most of the

other servants were to follow. My lady had found Miss Rachel so unwilling to return to the house, after what had happened in it, that she had decided on going to London direct from Frizinghall. I was to remain in the country, until further orders, to look after things indoors and out. The servants left with me were to be put on board wages.

Being reminded, by all this, of what Mr. Franklin had said about our being a scattered and disunited household, my mind was led naturally to Mr. Franklin himself. The more I thought of him, the more uneasy I felt about his future proceedings. It ended in my writing, by the Sunday's post, to his father's valet, Mr. Jeffco (whom I had known in former years) to beg he would let me know what Mr. Franklin had settled to do, on arriving in London.

The Sunday evening was, if possible, duller even than the Saturday evening. We ended the day of rest, as hundreds of thousands of people end it regularly, once a week, in these islands—that is to say, we all anticipated bedtime, and fell asleep in our chairs.

How the Monday affected the rest of the household I don't know. The Monday gave me a good shake up. The first of Sergeant Cuff's prophecies of what was to happen—namely, that I should hear from the Yollands—came true on that day.

I had seen Penelope and my lady's maid off in the railway with the luggage for London, and was pottering about the grounds, when I heard my name called. Turning round, I found myself face to face with the fisherman's daughter, Limping Lucy. Bating her lame foot and her leanness (this last a horrid draw-back to a woman, in my opinion), the girl had some pleasing qualities in the eye of a man. A dark, keen, clever face, and a nice clear voice, and a beautiful brown head of hair counted among her merits. A crutch appeared in the list of her misfortunes. And a temper reckoned high in the sum total of her defects.

“Well, my dear,” I said, “what do you want with me?”

“Where's the man you call Franklin Blake?” says the girl, fixing me with a fierce look, as she rested herself on her crutch.

“That's not a respectful way to speak of any gentleman,” I answered. “If you wish to inquire for my lady's nephew, you will please to mention him as Mr. Franklin Blake.”

She limped a step nearer to me, and looked as if she could have eaten me alive. “Mr. Franklin Blake?” she repeated after me. “Murderer Franklin Blake would be a fitter name for him.”

My practice with the late Mrs. Betteredge came in handy here. Whenever a woman tries to put you out of temper, turn the tables, and put her out of temper instead. They are generally prepared for every effort you can make in your own defence, but that. One word does it as well as a hundred; and one word did it with Limping Lucy. I looked her

pleasantly in the face; and I said??Pooh!?

The girl?s temper flamed out directly. She poised herself on her sound foot, and she took her crutch, and beat it furiously three times on the ground. ?He?s a murderer! he?s a murderer! he?s a murderer! He has been the death of Rosanna Spearman!? She screamed that answer out at the top of her voice. One or two of the people at work in the grounds near us looked up?saw it was Limping Lucy?knew what to expect from that quarter?and looked away again.

?He has been the death of Rosanna Spearman?? I repeated. ?What makes you say that, Lucy??

?What do you care? What does any man care? Oh! if she had only thought of the men as I think, she might have been living now!?

?She always thought kindly of _me_, poor soul,? I said; ?and, to the best of my ability, I always tried to act kindly by _her_.?

I spoke those words in as comforting a manner as I could. The truth is, I hadn?t the heart to irritate the girl by another of my smart replies. I had only noticed her temper at first. I noticed her wretchedness now?and wretchedness is not uncommonly insolent, you will find, in humble life. My answer melted Limping Lucy. She bent her head down, and laid it on the top of her crutch.

?I loved her,? the girl said softly. ?She had lived a miserable life, Mr. Betteredge?vile people had ill-treated her and led her wrong?and it hadn?t spoiled her sweet temper. She was an angel. She might have been happy with me. I had a plan for our going to London together like sisters, and living by our needles. That man came here, and spoilt it all. He bewitched her. Don?t tell me he didn?t mean it, and didn?t know it. He ought to have known it. He ought to have taken pity on her. ?I can?t live without him?and, oh, Lucy, he never even looks at me.? That?s what she said. Cruel, cruel, cruel. I said, ?No man is worth fretting for in that way.? And she said, ?There are men worth dying for, Lucy, and he is one of them.? I had saved up a little money. I had settled things with father and mother. I meant to take her away from the mortification she was suffering here. We should have had a little lodging in London, and lived together like sisters. She had a good education, sir, as you know, and she wrote a good hand. She was quick at her needle. I have a good education, and I write a good hand. I am not as quick at my needle as she was?but I could have done. We might have got our living nicely. And, oh! what happens this morning? what happens this morning? Her letter comes and tells me that she has done with the burden of her life. Her letter comes, and bids me good-bye for ever. Where is he?? cries the girl, lifting her head from the crutch, and flaming out again through her tears. ?Where?s this gentleman that I mustn?t speak of, except with respect? Ha, Mr. Betteredge, the day is not far off when the poor will rise against the rich. I pray Heaven they may begin with _him_. I pray Heaven they may begin with _him_.?

Here was another of your average good Christians, and here was the usual break-down, consequent on that same average Christianity being

pushed too far! The parson himself (though I own this is saying a great deal) could hardly have lectured the girl in the state she was in now. All I ventured to do was to keep her to the point?in the hope of something turning up which might be worth hearing.

?What do you want with Mr. Franklin Blake?? I asked.

?I want to see him.?

?For anything particular??

?I have got a letter to give him.?

?From Rosanna Spearman??

?Yes.?

?Sent to you in your own letter??

?Yes.?

Was the darkness going to lift? Were all the discoveries that I was dying to make, coming and offering themselves to me of their own accord? I was obliged to wait a moment. Sergeant Cuff had left his infection behind him. Certain signs and tokens, personal to myself, warned me that the detective-fever was beginning to set in again.

?You can?t see Mr. Franklin,? I said.

?I must, and will, see him.?

?He went to London last night.?

Limping Lucy looked me hard in the face, and saw that I was speaking the truth. Without a word more, she turned about again instantly towards Cobb?s Hole.

?Stop!? I said. ?I expect news of Mr. Franklin Blake tomorrow. Give me your letter, and I?ll send it on to him by the post.?

Limping Lucy steadied herself on her crutch and looked back at me over her shoulder.

?I am to give it from my hands into his hands,? she said. ?And I am to give it to him in no other way.?

?Shall I write, and tell him what you have said??

?Tell him I hate him. And you will tell him the truth.?

?Yes, yes. But about the letter?????

?If he wants the letter, he must come back here, and get it from Me.?

With those words she limped off on the way to Cobb's Hole. The detective-fever burnt up all my dignity on the spot. I followed her, and tried to make her talk. All in vain. It was my misfortune to be a man—and Limping Lucy enjoyed disappointing me. Later in the day, I tried my luck with her mother. Good Mrs. Yolland could only cry, and recommend a drop of comfort out of the Dutch bottle. I found the fisherman on the beach. He said it was 'a bad job,' and went on mending his net. Neither father nor mother knew more than I knew. The one way left to try was the chance, which might come with the morning, of writing to Mr. Franklin Blake.

I leave you to imagine how I watched for the postman on Tuesday morning. He brought me two letters. One, from Penelope (which I had hardly patience enough to read), announced that my lady and Miss Rachel were safely established in London. The other, from Mr. Jeffco, informed me that his master's son had left England already.

On reaching the metropolis, Mr. Franklin had, it appeared, gone straight to his father's residence. He arrived at an awkward time. Mr. Blake, the elder, was up to his eyes in the business of the House of Commons, and was amusing himself at home that night with the favourite parliamentary plaything which they call 'a private bill.' Mr. Jeffco himself showed Mr. Franklin into his father's study. 'My dear Franklin! why do you surprise me in this way? Anything wrong?' 'Yes; something wrong with Rachel; I am dreadfully distressed about it.' 'Grieved to hear it. But I can't listen to you now.' 'When _can_ you listen?' 'My dear boy! I won't deceive you. I can listen at the end of the session, not a moment before. Good-night.' 'Thank you, sir. Good-night.'

Such was the conversation, inside the study, as reported to me by Mr. Jeffco. The conversation outside the study, was shorter still. 'Jeffco, see what time the tidal train starts tomorrow morning.' 'At six-forty, Mr. Franklin.' 'Have me called at five.' 'Going abroad, sir?' 'Going, Jeffco, wherever the railway chooses to take me.' 'Shall I tell your father, sir?' 'Yes; tell him at the end of the session.'

The next morning Mr. Franklin had started for foreign parts. To what particular place he was bound, nobody (himself included) could presume to guess. We might hear of him next in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America. The chances were as equally divided as possible, in Mr. Jeffco's opinion, among the four quarters of the globe.

This news—by closing up all prospects of my bringing Limping Lucy and Mr. Franklin together—at once stopped any further progress of mine on the way to discovery. Penelope's belief that her fellow-servant had destroyed herself through unrequited love for Mr. Franklin Blake, was confirmed—and that was all. Whether the letter which Rosanna had left to be given to him after her death did, or did not, contain the confession which Mr. Franklin had suspected her of trying to make to him in her life-time, it was impossible to say. It might be only a farewell word, telling nothing but the secret of her unhappy fancy for a person beyond her reach. Or it might own the whole truth about the strange proceedings in which Sergeant Cuff had detected her, from the time when the Moonstone was lost, to the time when she rushed to her

own destruction at the Shivering Sand. A sealed letter it had been placed in Limping Lucy's hand, and a sealed letter it remained to me and to every one about the girl, her own parents included. We all suspected her of having been in the dead woman's confidence; we all tried to make her speak; we all failed. Now one, and now another, of the servants still holding to the belief that Rosanna had stolen the Diamond and had hidden it peered and poked about the rocks to which she had been traced, and peered and poked in vain. The tide ebbed, and the tide flowed; the summer went on, and the autumn came. And the Quicksand, which hid her body, hid her secret too.

The news of Mr. Franklin's departure from England on the Sunday morning, and the news of my lady's arrival in London with Miss Rachel on the Monday afternoon, had reached me, as you are aware, by the Tuesday's post. The Wednesday came, and brought nothing. The Thursday produced a second budget of news from Penelope.

My girl's letter informed me that some great London doctor had been consulted about her young lady, and had earned a guinea by remarking that she had better be amused. Flower-shows, operas, balls there was a whole round of gaieties in prospect; and Miss Rachel, to her mother's astonishment, eagerly took to it all. Mr. Godfrey had called; evidently as sweet as ever on his cousin, in spite of the reception he had met with, when he tried his luck on the occasion of the birthday. To Penelope's great regret, he had been most graciously received, and had added Miss Rachel's name to one of his Ladies' Charities on the spot. My mistress was reported to be out of spirits, and to have held two long interviews with her lawyer. Certain speculations followed, referring to a poor relation of the family one Miss Clack, whom I have mentioned in my account of the birthday dinner, as sitting next to Mr. Godfrey, and having a pretty taste in champagne. Penelope was astonished to find that Miss Clack had not called yet. She would surely not be long before she fastened herself on my lady as usual and so forth, and so forth, in the way women have of girding at each other, on and off paper. This would not have been worth mentioning, I admit, but for one reason. I hear you are likely to be turned over to Miss Clack, after parting with me. In that case, just do me the favour of not believing a word she says, if she speaks of your humble servant.

On Friday, nothing happened except that one of the dogs showed signs of a breaking out behind the ears. I gave him a dose of syrup of buckthorn, and put him on a diet of pot-liquor and vegetables till further orders. Excuse my mentioning this. It has slipped in somehow. Pass it over please. I am fast coming to the end of my offences against your cultivated modern taste. Besides, the dog was a good creature, and deserved a good physicking; he did indeed.

Saturday, the last day of the week, is also the last day in my narrative.

The morning's post brought me a surprise in the shape of a London newspaper. The handwriting on the direction puzzled me. I compared it with the money-lender's name and address as recorded in my pocket-book, and identified it at once as the writing of Sergeant Cuff.

Looking through the paper eagerly enough, after this discovery, I found an ink-mark drawn round one of the police reports. Here it is, at your service. Read it as I read it, and you will set the right value on the Sergeant's polite attention in sending me the news of the day:

LAMBETH—Shortly before the closing of the court, Mr. Septimus Luker, the well-known dealer in ancient gems, carvings, intagli, &c., &c., applied to the sitting magistrate for advice. The applicant stated that he had been annoyed, at intervals throughout the day, by the proceedings of some of those strolling Indians who infest the streets. The persons complained of were three in number. After having been sent away by the police, they had returned again and again, and had attempted to enter the house on pretence of asking for charity. Warned off in the front, they had been discovered again at the back of the premises. Besides the annoyance complained of, Mr. Luker expressed himself as being under some apprehension that robbery might be contemplated. His collection contained many unique gems, both classical and Oriental, of the highest value. He had only the day before been compelled to dismiss a skilled workman in ivory carving from his employment (a native of India, as we understood), on suspicion of attempted theft; and he felt by no means sure that this man and the street jugglers of whom he complained, might not be acting in concert. It might be their object to collect a crowd, and create a disturbance in the street, and, in the confusion thus caused, to obtain access to the house. In reply to the magistrate, Mr. Luker admitted that he had no evidence to produce of any attempt at robbery being in contemplation. He could speak positively to the annoyance and interruption caused by the Indians, but not to anything else. The magistrate remarked that, if the annoyance were repeated, the applicant could summon the Indians to that court, where they might easily be dealt with under the Act. As to the valuables in Mr. Luker's possession, Mr. Luker himself must take the best measures for their safe custody. He would do well perhaps to communicate with the police, and to adopt such additional precautions as their experience might suggest. The applicant thanked his worship, and withdrew.

One of the wise ancients is reported (I forget on what occasion) as having recommended his fellow-creatures to "look to the end." Looking to the end of these pages of mine, and wondering for some days past how I should manage to write it, I find my plain statement of facts coming to a conclusion, most appropriately, of its own self. We have gone on, in this matter of the Moonstone, from one marvel to another; and here we end with the greatest marvel of all—namely, the accomplishment of Sergeant Cuff's three predictions in less than a week from the time when he had made them.

After hearing from the Yollands on the Monday, I had now heard of the Indians, and heard of the money-lender, in the news from London—Miss Rachel herself remember, being also in London at the time. You see, I put things at their worst, even when they tell dead against my own view. If you desert me, and side with the Sergeant, on the evidence before you—if the only rational explanation you can see is, that Miss Rachel and Mr. Luker must have got together, and that the Moonstone

must be now in pledge in the money-lender's house? I own, I can't blame you for arriving at that conclusion. In the dark, I have brought you thus far. In the dark I am compelled to leave you, with my best respects.

Why compelled? it may be asked. Why not take the persons who have gone along with me, so far, up into those regions of superior enlightenment in which I sit myself?

In answer to this, I can only state that I am acting under orders, and that those orders have been given to me (as I understand) in the interests of truth. I am forbidden to tell more in this narrative than I knew myself at the time. Or, to put it plainer, I am to keep strictly within the limits of my own experience, and am not to inform you of what other persons told me—for the very sufficient reason that you are to have the information from those other persons themselves, at first hand. In this matter of the Moonstone the plan is, not to present reports, but to produce witnesses. I picture to myself a member of the family reading these pages fifty years hence. Lord! what a compliment he will feel it, to be asked to take nothing on hear-say, and to be treated in all respects like a Judge on the bench.

At this place, then, we part—for the present, at least—after long journeying together, with a companionable feeling, I hope, on both sides. The devil's dance of the Indian Diamond has threaded its way to London; and to London you must go after it, leaving me at the country house. Please to excuse the faults of this composition—my talking so much of myself, and being too familiar, I am afraid, with you. I mean no harm; and I drink most respectfully (having just done dinner) to your health and prosperity, in a tankard of her ladyship's ale. May you find in these leaves of my writing, what _Robinson Crusoe_ found in his experience on the desert island—namely, something to comfort yourselves from, and to set in the Description of Good and Evil, on the Credit Side of the Account.??Farewell.

THE END OF THE FIRST PERIOD.

SECOND PERIOD.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE TRUTH. (1848-1849.)

The Events related in several Narratives.

FIRST NARRATIVE.

Contributed by Miss Clack; niece of the late Sir John Verinder

CHAPTER I

I am indebted to my dear parents (both now in heaven) for having had habits of order and regularity instilled into me at a very early age.

In that happy bygone time, I was taught to keep my hair tidy at all

hours of the day and night, and to fold up every article of my clothing carefully, in the same order, on the same chair, in the same place at the foot of the bed, before retiring to rest. An entry of the day's events in my little diary invariably preceded the folding up. The Evening Hymn (repeated in bed) invariably followed the folding up. And the sweet sleep of childhood invariably followed the Evening Hymn.

In later life (alas!) the Hymn has been succeeded by sad and bitter meditations; and the sweet sleep has been but ill exchanged for the broken slumbers which haunt the uneasy pillow of care. On the other hand, I have continued to fold my clothes, and to keep my little diary. The former habit links me to my happy childhood—before papa was ruined. The latter habit—hitherto mainly useful in helping me to discipline the fallen nature which we all inherit from Adam—has unexpectedly proved important to my humble interests in quite another way. It has enabled poor Me to serve the caprice of a wealthy member of the family into which my late uncle married. I am fortunate enough to be useful to Mr. Franklin Blake.

I have been cut off from all news of my relatives by marriage for some time past. When we are isolated and poor, we are not infrequently forgotten. I am now living, for economy's sake, in a little town in Brittany, inhabited by a select circle of serious English friends, and possessed of the inestimable advantages of a Protestant clergyman and a cheap market.

In this retirement—a Patmos amid the howling ocean of popery that surrounds us—a letter from England has reached me at last. I find my insignificant existence suddenly remembered by Mr. Franklin Blake. My wealthy relative—would that I could add my spiritually-wealthy relative!—writes, without even an attempt at disguising that he wants something of me. The whim has seized him to stir up the deplorable scandal of the Moonstone: and I am to help him by writing the account of what I myself witnessed while visiting at Aunt Verinder's house in London. Pecuniary remuneration is offered to me—with the want of feeling peculiar to the rich. I am to re-open wounds that Time has barely closed; I am to recall the most intensely painful remembrances—and this done, I am to feel myself compensated by a new laceration, in the shape of Mr. Blake's cheque. My nature is weak. It cost me a hard struggle, before Christian humility conquered sinful pride, and self-denial accepted the cheque.

Without my diary, I doubt—pray let me express it in the grossest terms!—if I could have honestly earned my money. With my diary, the poor labourer (who forgives Mr. Blake for insulting her) is worthy of her hire. Nothing escaped me at the time I was visiting dear Aunt Verinder. Everything was entered (thanks to my early training) day by day as it happened; and everything, down to the smallest particular, shall be told here. My sacred regard for truth is (thank God) far above my respect for persons. It will be easy for Mr. Blake to suppress what may not prove to be sufficiently flattering in these pages to the person chiefly concerned in them. He has purchased my time, but not even his wealth can purchase my conscience too.*

[*Note. _Added by Franklin Blake._?Miss Clack may make her mind quite easy on this point. Nothing will be added, altered or removed, in her manuscript, or in any of the other manuscripts which pass through my hands. Whatever opinions any of the writers may express, whatever peculiarities of treatment may mark, and perhaps in a literary sense, disfigure the narratives which I am now collecting, not a line will be tampered with anywhere, from first to last. As genuine documents they are sent to me?and as genuine documents I shall preserve them, endorsed by the attestations of witnesses who can speak to the facts. It only remains to be added that ?the person chiefly concerned? in Miss Clack?s narrative, is happy enough at the present moment, not only to brave the smartest exercise of Miss Clack?s pen, but even to recognise its unquestionable value as an instrument for the exhibition of Miss Clack?s character.]

My diary informs me, that I was accidentally passing Aunt Verinder?s house in Montagu Square, on Monday, 3rd July, 1848.

Seeing the shutters opened, and the blinds drawn up, I felt that it would be an act of polite attention to knock, and make inquiries. The person who answered the door, informed me that my aunt and her daughter (I really cannot call her my cousin!) had arrived from the country a week since, and meditated making some stay in London. I sent up a message at once, declining to disturb them, and only begging to know whether I could be of any use.

The person who answered the door, took my message in insolent silence, and left me standing in the hall. She is the daughter of a heathen old man named Betteredge?long, too long, tolerated in my aunt?s family. I sat down in the hall to wait for my answer?and, having always a few tracts in my bag, I selected one which proved to be quite providentially applicable to the person who answered the door. The hall was dirty, and the chair was hard; but the blessed consciousness of returning good for evil raised me quite above any trifling considerations of that kind. The tract was one of a series addressed to young women on the sinfulness of dress. In style it was devoutly familiar. Its title was, ?A Word With You On Your Cap-Ribbons.?

?My lady is much obliged, and begs you will come and lunch tomorrow at two.?

I passed over the manner in which she gave her message, and the dreadful boldness of her look. I thanked this young castaway; and I said, in a tone of Christian interest, ?Will you favour me by accepting a tract??

She looked at the title. ?Is it written by a man or a woman, Miss? If it?s written by a woman, I had rather not read it on that account. If it?s written by a man, I beg to inform him that he knows nothing about it.? She handed me back the tract, and opened the door. We must sow the good seed somehow. I waited till the door was shut on me, and slipped the tract into the letter-box. When I had dropped another tract through

the area railings, I felt relieved, in some small degree, of a heavy responsibility towards others.

We had a meeting that evening of the Select Committee of the Mothers'-Small-Clothes-Conversion-Society. The object of this excellent Charity is—as all serious people know—to rescue unredeemed fathers' trousers from the pawnbroker, and to prevent their resumption, on the part of the irreclaimable parent, by abridging them immediately to suit the proportions of the innocent son. I was a member, at that time, of the select committee; and I mention the Society here, because my precious and admirable friend, Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite, was associated with our work of moral and material usefulness. I had expected to see him in the boardroom, on the Monday evening of which I am now writing, and had proposed to tell him, when we met, of dear Aunt Verinder's arrival in London. To my great disappointment he never appeared. On my expressing a feeling of surprise at his absence, my sisters of the Committee all looked up together from their trousers (we had a great pressure of business that night), and asked in amazement, if I had not heard the news. I acknowledged my ignorance, and was then told, for the first time, of an event which forms, so to speak, the starting-point of this narrative. On the previous Friday, two gentlemen—occupying widely-different positions in society—had been the victims of an outrage which had startled all London. One of the gentlemen was Mr. Septimus Luker, of Lambeth. The other was Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite.

Living in my present isolation, I have no means of introducing the newspaper-account of the outrage into my narrative. I was also deprived, at the time, of the inestimable advantage of hearing the events related by the fervid eloquence of Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite. All I can do is to state the facts as they were stated, on that Monday evening, to me; proceeding on the plan which I have been taught from infancy to adopt in folding up my clothes. Everything shall be put neatly, and everything shall be put in its place. These lines are written by a poor weak woman. From a poor weak woman who will be cruel enough to expect more?

The date—thanks to my dear parents, no dictionary that ever was written can be more particular than I am about dates—was Friday, June 30th, 1848.

Early on that memorable day, our gifted Mr. Godfrey happened to be cashing a cheque at a banking-house in Lombard Street. The name of the firm is accidentally blotted in my diary, and my sacred regard for truth forbids me to hazard a guess in a matter of this kind. Fortunately, the name of the firm doesn't matter. What does matter is a circumstance that occurred when Mr. Godfrey had transacted his business. On gaining the door, he encountered a gentleman—a perfect stranger to him—who was accidentally leaving the office exactly at the same time as himself. A momentary contest of politeness ensued between them as to who should be the first to pass through the door of the bank. The stranger insisted on making Mr. Godfrey precede him; Mr. Godfrey said a few civil words; they bowed, and parted in the street.

Thoughtless and superficial people may say, Here is surely a very

trumpety little incident related in an absurdly circumstantial manner. Oh, my young friends and fellow-sinners! beware of presuming to exercise your poor carnal reason. Oh, be morally tidy. Let your faith be as your stockings, and your stockings as your faith. Both ever spotless, and both ready to put on at a moment's notice!

I beg a thousand pardons. I have fallen insensibly into my Sunday-school style. Most inappropriate in such a record as this. Let me try to be worldly?let me say that trifles, in this case as in many others, led to terrible results. Merely premising that the polite stranger was Mr. Luker, of Lambeth, we will now follow Mr. Godfrey home to his residence at Kilburn.

He found waiting for him, in the hall, a poorly clad but delicate and interesting-looking little boy. The boy handed him a letter, merely mentioning that he had been entrusted with it by an old lady whom he did not know, and who had given him no instructions to wait for an answer. Such incidents as these were not uncommon in Mr. Godfrey's large experience as a promoter of public charities. He let the boy go, and opened the letter.

The handwriting was entirely unfamiliar to him. It requested his attendance, within an hour's time, at a house in Northumberland Street, Strand, which he had never had occasion to enter before. The object sought was to obtain from the worthy manager certain details on the subject of the Mothers'-Small-Clothes-Conversion-Society, and the information was wanted by an elderly lady who proposed adding largely to the resources of the charity, if her questions were met by satisfactory replies. She mentioned her name, and she added that the shortness of her stay in London prevented her from giving any longer notice to the eminent philanthropist whom she addressed.

Ordinary people might have hesitated before setting aside their own engagements to suit the convenience of a stranger. The Christian Hero never hesitates where good is to be done. Mr. Godfrey instantly turned back, and proceeded to the house in Northumberland Street. A most respectable though somewhat corpulent man answered the door, and, on hearing Mr. Godfrey's name, immediately conducted him into an empty apartment at the back, on the drawing-room floor. He noticed two unusual things on entering the room. One of them was a faint odour of musk and camphor. The other was an ancient Oriental manuscript, richly illuminated with Indian figures and devices, that lay open to inspection on a table.

He was looking at the book, the position of which caused him to stand with his back turned towards the closed folding doors communicating with the front room, when, without the slightest previous noise to warn him, he felt himself suddenly seized round the neck from behind. He had just time to notice that the arm round his neck was naked and of a tawny-brown colour, before his eyes were bandaged, his mouth was gagged, and he was thrown helpless on the floor by (as he judged) two men. A third rifled his pockets, and?if, as a lady, I may venture to use such an expression?searched him, without ceremony, through and through to his skin.

Here I should greatly enjoy saying a few cheering words on the devout confidence which could alone have sustained Mr. Godfrey in an emergency so terrible as this. Perhaps, however, the position and appearance of my admirable friend at the culminating period of the outrage (as above described) are hardly within the proper limits of female discussion. Let me pass over the next few moments, and return to Mr. Godfrey at the time when the odious search of his person had been completed. The outrage had been perpetrated throughout in dead silence. At the end of it some words were exchanged, among the invisible wretches, in a language which he did not understand, but in tones which were plainly expressive (to his cultivated ear) of disappointment and rage. He was suddenly lifted from the ground, placed in a chair, and bound there hand and foot. The next moment he felt the air flowing in from the open door, listened, and concluded that he was alone again in the room.

An interval elapsed, and he heard a sound below like the rustling sound of a woman's dress. It advanced up the stairs, and stopped. A female scream rent the atmosphere of guilt. A man's voice below exclaimed "Hullo!" A man's feet ascended the stairs. Mr. Godfrey felt Christian fingers unfastening his bandage, and extracting his gag. He looked in amazement at two respectable strangers, and faintly articulated, "What does it mean?" The two respectable strangers looked back, and said, "Exactly the question we were going to ask _you_."

The inevitable explanation followed. No! Let me be scrupulously particular. Sal volatile and water followed, to compose dear Mr. Godfrey's nerves. The explanation came next.

It appeared from the statement of the landlord and landlady of the house (persons of good repute in the neighbourhood), that their first and second floor apartments had been engaged, on the previous day, for a week certain, by a most respectable-looking gentleman—the same who has been already described as answering the door to Mr. Godfrey's knock. The gentleman had paid the week's rent and all the week's extras in advance, stating that the apartments were wanted for three Oriental noblemen, friends of his, who were visiting England for the first time. Early on the morning of the outrage, two of the Oriental strangers, accompanied by their respectable English friend, took possession of the apartments. The third was expected to join them shortly; and the luggage (reported as very bulky) was announced to follow when it had passed through the Custom-house, late in the afternoon. Not more than ten minutes previous to Mr. Godfrey's visit, the third foreigner had arrived. Nothing out of the common had happened, to the knowledge of the landlord and landlady downstairs, until within the last five minutes—when they had seen the three foreigners, accompanied by their respectable English friend, all leave the house together, walking quietly in the direction of the Strand. Remembering that a visitor had called, and not having seen the visitor also leave the house, the landlady had thought it rather strange that the gentleman should be left by himself upstairs. After a short discussion with her husband, she had considered it advisable to ascertain whether anything was wrong. The result had followed, as I have already attempted to describe it; and there the explanation of the landlord and the landlady came to

an end.

An investigation was next made in the room. Dear Mr. Godfrey's property was found scattered in all directions. When the articles were collected, however, nothing was missing; his watch, chain, purse, keys, pocket-handkerchief, note-book, and all his loose papers had been closely examined, and had then been left unharmed to be resumed by the owner. In the same way, not the smallest morsel of property belonging to the proprietors of the house had been abstracted. The Oriental noblemen had removed their own illuminated manuscript, and had removed nothing else.

What did it mean? Taking the worldly point of view, it appeared to mean that Mr. Godfrey had been the victim of some incomprehensible error, committed by certain unknown men. A dark conspiracy was on foot in the midst of us; and our beloved and innocent friend had been entangled in its meshes. When the Christian hero of a hundred charitable victories plunges into a pitfall that has been dug for him by mistake, oh, what a warning it is to the rest of us to be unceasingly on our guard! How soon may our own evil passions prove to be Oriental noblemen who pounce on us unawares!

I could write pages of affectionate warning on this one theme, but (alas!) I am not permitted to improve—I am condemned to narrate. My wealthy relative's cheque—henceforth, the incubus of my existence—warns me that I have not done with this record of violence yet. We must leave Mr. Godfrey to recover in Northumberland Street, and must follow the proceedings of Mr. Luker at a later period of the day.

After leaving the bank, Mr. Luker had visited various parts of London on business errands. Returning to his own residence, he found a letter waiting for him, which was described as having been left a short time previously by a boy. In this case, as in Mr. Godfrey's case, the handwriting was strange; but the name mentioned was the name of one of Mr. Luker's customers. His correspondent announced (writing in the third person—apparently by the hand of a deputy) that he had been unexpectedly summoned to London. He had just established himself in lodgings in Alfred Place, Tottenham Court Road; and he desired to see Mr. Luker immediately, on the subject of a purchase which he contemplated making. The gentleman was an enthusiastic collector of Oriental antiquities, and had been for many years a liberal patron of the establishment in Lambeth. Oh, when shall we wean ourselves from the worship of Mammon! Mr. Luker called a cab, and drove off instantly to his liberal patron.

Exactly what had happened to Mr. Godfrey in Northumberland Street now happened to Mr. Luker in Alfred Place. Once more the respectable man answered the door, and showed the visitor upstairs into the back drawing-room. There, again, lay the illuminated manuscript on a table. Mr. Luker's attention was absorbed, as Mr. Godfrey's attention had been absorbed, by this beautiful work of Indian art. He too was aroused from his studies by a tawny naked arm round his throat, by a bandage over his eyes, and by a gag in his mouth. He too was thrown prostrate and searched to the skin. A longer interval had then elapsed than had

passed in the experience of Mr. Godfrey; but it had ended as before, in the persons of the house suspecting something wrong, and going upstairs to see what had happened. Precisely the same explanation which the landlord in Northumberland Street had given to Mr. Godfrey, the landlord in Alfred Place now gave to Mr. Luker. Both had been imposed on in the same way by the plausible address and well-filled purse of the respectable stranger, who introduced himself as acting for his foreign friends. The one point of difference between the two cases occurred when the scattered contents of Mr. Luker's pockets were being collected from the floor. His watch and purse were safe, but (less fortunate than Mr. Godfrey) one of the loose papers that he carried about him had been taken away. The paper in question acknowledged the receipt of a valuable of great price which Mr. Luker had that day left in the care of his bankers. This document would be useless for purposes of fraud, inasmuch as it provided that the valuable should only be given up on the personal application of the owner. As soon as he recovered himself, Mr. Luker hurried to the bank, on the chance that the thieves who had robbed him might ignorantly present themselves with the receipt. Nothing had been seen of them when he arrived at the establishment, and nothing was seen of them afterwards. Their respectable English friend had (in the opinion of the bankers) looked the receipt over before they attempted to make use of it, and had given them the necessary warning in good time.

Information of both outrages was communicated to the police, and the needful investigations were pursued, I believe, with great energy. The authorities held that a robbery had been planned, on insufficient information received by the thieves. They had been plainly not sure whether Mr. Luker had, or had not, trusted the transmission of his precious gem to another person; and poor polite Mr. Godfrey had paid the penalty of having been seen accidentally speaking to him. Add to this, that Mr. Godfrey's absence from our Monday evening meeting had been occasioned by a consultation of the authorities, at which he was requested to assist?and all the explanations required being now given, I may proceed with the simpler story of my own little personal experiences in Montagu Square.

I was punctual to the luncheon hour on Tuesday. Reference to my diary shows this to have been a chequered day?much in it to be devoutly regretted, much in it to be devoutly thankful for.

Dear Aunt Verinder received me with her usual grace and kindness. But I noticed, after a little while, that something was wrong. Certain anxious looks escaped my aunt, all of which took the direction of her daughter. I never see Rachel myself without wondering how it can be that so insignificant-looking a person should be the child of such distinguished parents as Sir John and Lady Verinder. On this occasion, however, she not only disappointed?she really shocked me. There was an absence of all lady-like restraint in her language and manner most painful to see. She was possessed by some feverish excitement which made her distressingly loud when she laughed, and sinfully wasteful and capricious in what she ate and drank at lunch. I felt deeply for her poor mother, even before the true state of the case had been confidentially made known to me.

Luncheon over, my aunt said: "Remember what the doctor told you, Rachel, about quieting yourself with a book after taking your meals."

"I'll go into the library, mamma," she answered. "But if Godfrey calls, mind I am told of it. I am dying for more news of him, after his adventure in Northumberland Street." She kissed her mother on the forehead, and looked my way. "Good-bye, Clack," she said, carelessly. Her insolence roused no angry feeling in me; I only made a private memorandum to pray for her.

When we were left by ourselves, my aunt told me the whole horrible story of the Indian Diamond, which, I am happy to know, it is not necessary to repeat here. She did not conceal from me that she would have preferred keeping silence on the subject. But when her own servants all knew of the loss of the Moonstone, and when some of the circumstances had actually found their way into the newspapers—when strangers were speculating whether there was any connection between what had happened at Lady Verinder's country house, and what had happened in Northumberland Street and Alfred Place—concealment was not to be thought of; and perfect frankness became a necessity as well as a virtue.

Some persons, hearing what I now heard, would have been probably overwhelmed with astonishment. For my own part, knowing Rachel's spirit to have been essentially unregenerate from her childhood upwards, I was prepared for whatever my aunt could tell me on the subject of her daughter. It might have gone on from bad to worse till it ended in Murder; and I should still have said to myself, The natural result! oh, dear, dear, the natural result! The one thing that did shock me was the course my aunt had taken under the circumstances. Here surely was a case for a clergyman, if ever there was one yet! Lady Verinder had thought it a case for a physician. All my poor aunt's early life had been passed in her father's godless household. The natural result again! Oh, dear, dear, the natural result again!

"The doctors recommend plenty of exercise and amusement for Rachel, and strongly urge me to keep her mind as much as possible from dwelling on the past," said Lady Verinder.

"Oh, what heathen advice! I thought to myself. "In this Christian country, what heathen advice!"

My aunt went on, "I do my best to carry out my instructions. But this strange adventure of Godfrey's happens at a most unfortunate time. Rachel has been incessantly restless and excited since she first heard of it. She left me no peace till I had written and asked my nephew Ablewhite to come here. She even feels an interest in the other person who was roughly used—Mr. Luker, or some such name—though the man is, of course, a total stranger to her."

"Your knowledge of the world, dear aunt, is superior to mine," I suggested diffidently. "But there must be a reason surely for this extraordinary conduct on Rachel's part. She is keeping a sinful secret

from you and from everybody. May there not be something in these recent events which threatens her secret with discovery??

?Discovery?? repeated my aunt. ?What can you possibly mean? Discovery through Mr. Luker? Discovery through my nephew??

As the word passed her lips, a special providence occurred. The servant opened the door, and announced Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite.

CHAPTER II

Mr. Godfrey followed the announcement of his name?as Mr. Godfrey does everything else?exactly at the right time. He was not so close on the servant?s heels as to startle us. He was not so far behind as to cause us the double inconvenience of a pause and an open door. It is in the completeness of his daily life that the true Christian appears. This dear man was very complete.

?Go to Miss Verinder,? said my aunt, addressing the servant, ?and tell her Mr. Ablewhite is here.?

We both inquired after his health. We both asked him together whether he felt like himself again, after his terrible adventure of the past week. With perfect tact, he contrived to answer us at the same moment. Lady Verinder had his reply in words. I had his charming smile.

?What,? he cried, with infinite tenderness, ?have I done to deserve all this sympathy? My dear aunt! my dear Miss Clack! I have merely been mistaken for somebody else. I have only been blindfolded; I have only been strangled; I have only been thrown flat on my back, on a very thin carpet, covering a particularly hard floor. Just think how much worse it might have been! I might have been murdered; I might have been robbed. What have I lost? Nothing but Nervous Force?which the law doesn?t recognise as property; so that, strictly speaking, I have lost nothing at all. If I could have had my own way, I would have kept my adventure to myself?I shrink from all this fuss and publicity. But Mr. Luker made his injuries public, and my injuries, as the necessary consequence, have been proclaimed in their turn. I have become the property of the newspapers, until the gentle reader gets sick of the subject. I am very sick indeed of it myself. May the gentle reader soon be like me! And how is dear Rachel? Still enjoying the gaieties of London? So glad to hear it! Miss Clack, I need all your indulgence. I am sadly behind-hand with my Committee Work and my dear Ladies. But I really do hope to look in at the Mothers?-Small-Clothes next week. Did you make cheering progress at Monday?s Committee? Was the Board hopeful about future prospects? And are we nicely off for Trousers??

The heavenly gentleness of his smile made his apologies irresistible. The richness of his deep voice added its own indescribable charm to the interesting business question which he had just addressed to me. In truth, we were almost too nicely off for Trousers; we were quite overwhelmed by them. I was just about to say so, when the door opened again, and an element of worldly disturbance entered the room, in the

person of Miss Verinder.

She approached dear Mr. Godfrey at a most unladylike rate of speed, with her hair shockingly untidy, and her face, what _I_ should call, unbecomingly flushed.

'I am charmed to see you, Godfrey,' she said, addressing him, I grieve to add, in the off-hand manner of one young man talking to another. 'I wish you had brought Mr. Luker with you. You and he (as long as our present excitement lasts) are the two most interesting men in all London. It's morbid to say this; it's unhealthy; it's all that a well-regulated mind like Miss Clack's most instinctively shudders at. Never mind that. Tell me the whole of the Northumberland Street story directly. I know the newspapers have left some of it out.'

Even dear Mr. Godfrey partakes of the fallen nature which we all inherit from Adam—it is a very small share of our human legacy, but, alas! he has it. I confess it grieved me to see him take Rachel's hand in both of his own hands, and lay it softly on the left side of his waistcoat. It was a direct encouragement to her reckless way of talking, and her insolent reference to me.

'Dearest Rachel,' he said, in the same voice which had thrilled me when he spoke of our prospects and our trousers, 'the newspapers have told you everything—and they have told it much better than I can.'

'Godfrey thinks we all make too much of the matter,' my aunt remarked. 'He has just been saying that he doesn't care to speak of it.'

'Why?'

She put the question with a sudden flash in her eyes, and a sudden look up into Mr. Godfrey's face. On his side, he looked down at her with an indulgence so injudicious and so ill-deserved, that I really felt called on to interfere.

'Rachel, darling!' I remonstrated gently, 'true greatness and true courage are ever modest.'

'You are a very good fellow in your way, Godfrey,' she said—not taking the smallest notice, observe, of me, and still speaking to her cousin as if she was one young man addressing another. 'But I am quite sure you are not great; I don't believe you possess any extraordinary courage; and I am firmly persuaded—if you ever had any modesty—that your lady-worshippers relieved you of that virtue a good many years since. You have some private reason for not talking of your adventure in Northumberland Street; and I mean to know it.'

'My reason is the simplest imaginable, and the most easily acknowledged,' he answered, still bearing with her. 'I am tired of the subject.'

'You are tired of the subject? My dear Godfrey, I am going to make a remark.'

?What is it??

?You live a great deal too much in the society of women. And you have contracted two very bad habits in consequence. You have learnt to talk nonsense seriously, and you have got into a way of telling fibs for the pleasure of telling them. You can't go straight with your lady-worshippers. I mean to make you go straight with _me_. Come, and sit down. I am brimful of downright questions; and I expect you to be brimful of downright answers.?

She actually dragged him across the room to a chair by the window, where the light would fall on his face. I deeply feel being obliged to report such language, and to describe such conduct. But, hemmed in, as I am, between Mr. Franklin Blake's cheque on one side and my own sacred regard for truth on the other, what am I to do? I looked at my aunt. She sat unmoved; apparently in no way disposed to interfere. I had never noticed this kind of torpor in her before. It was, perhaps, the reaction after the trying time she had had in the country. Not a pleasant symptom to remark, be it what it might, at dear Lady Verinder's age, and with dear Lady Verinder's autumnal exuberance of figure.

In the meantime, Rachel had settled herself at the window with our amiable and forbearing?our too forbearing?Mr. Godfrey. She began the string of questions with which she had threatened him, taking no more notice of her mother, or of myself, than if we had not been in the room.

?Have the police done anything, Godfrey??

?Nothing whatever.?

?It is certain, I suppose, that the three men who laid the trap for you were the same three men who afterwards laid the trap for Mr. Luker??

?Humanly speaking, my dear Rachel, there can be no doubt of it.?

?And not a trace of them has been discovered??

?Not a trace.?

?It is thought?is it not??that these three men are the three Indians who came to our house in the country.?

?Some people think so.?

?Do you think so??

?My dear Rachel, they blindfolded me before I could see their faces. I know nothing whatever of the matter. How can I offer an opinion on it??

Even the angelic gentleness of Mr. Godfrey was, you see, beginning to give way at last under the persecution inflicted on him. Whether

unbridled curiosity, or ungovernable dread, dictated Miss Verinder's questions I do not presume to inquire. I only report that, on Mr. Godfrey's attempting to rise, after giving her the answer just described, she actually took him by the two shoulders, and pushed him back into his chair? Oh, don't say this was immodest! don't even hint that the recklessness of guilty terror could alone account for such conduct as I have described! We must not judge others. My Christian friends, indeed, indeed, indeed, we must not judge others!

She went on with her questions, unabashed. Earnest Biblical students will perhaps be reminded? as I was reminded? of the blinded children of the devil, who went on with their orgies, unabashed, in the time before the Flood.

?I want to know something about Mr. Luker, Godfrey.?

?I am again unfortunate, Rachel. No man knows less of Mr. Luker than I do.?

?You never saw him before you and he met accidentally at the bank??

?Never.?

?You have seen him since??

?Yes. We have been examined together, as well as separately, to assist the police.?

?Mr. Luker was robbed of a receipt which he had got from his banker's? was he not? What was the receipt for??

?For a valuable gem which he had placed in the safe keeping of the bank.?

?That's what the newspapers say. It may be enough for the general reader; but it is not enough for me. The banker's receipt must have mentioned what the gem was??

?The banker's receipt, Rachel? as I have heard it described? mentioned nothing of the kind. A valuable gem, belonging to Mr. Luker; deposited by Mr. Luker; sealed with Mr. Luker's seal; and only to be given up on Mr. Luker's personal application. That was the form, and that is all I know about it.?

She waited a moment, after he had said that. She looked at her mother, and sighed. She looked back again at Mr. Godfrey, and went on.

?Some of our private affairs, at home,? she said, ?seem to have got into the newspapers??

?I grieve to say, it is so.?

?And some idle people, perfect strangers to us, are trying to trace a connexion between what happened at our house in Yorkshire and what has

happened since, here in London??

?The public curiosity, in certain quarters, is, I fear, taking that turn.?

?The people who say that the three unknown men who ill-used you and Mr. Luker are the three Indians, also say that the valuable gem???

There she stopped. She had become gradually, within the last few moments, whiter and whiter in the face. The extraordinary blackness of her hair made this paleness, by contrast, so ghastly to look at, that we all thought she would faint, at the moment when she checked herself in the middle of her question. Dear Mr. Godfrey made a second attempt to leave his chair. My aunt entreated her to say no more. I followed my aunt with a modest medicinal peace-offering, in the shape of a bottle of salts. We none of us produced the slightest effect on her. ?Godfrey, stay where you are. Mamma, there is not the least reason to be alarmed about me. Clack, you're dying to hear the end of it?! won't faint, expressly to oblige _you_.?

Those were the exact words she used?taken down in my diary the moment I got home. But, oh, don't let us judge! My Christian friends, don't let us judge!

She turned once more to Mr. Godfrey. With an obstinacy dreadful to see, she went back again to the place where she had checked herself, and completed her question in these words:

?I spoke to you, a minute since, about what people were saying in certain quarters. Tell me plainly, Godfrey, do they any of them say that Mr. Luker's valuable gem is?the Moonstone??

As the name of the Indian Diamond passed her lips, I saw a change come over my admirable friend. His complexion deepened. He lost the genial suavity of manner which is one of his greatest charms. A noble indignation inspired his reply.

?They _do_ say it,? he answered. ?There are people who don't hesitate to accuse Mr. Luker of telling a falsehood to serve some private interests of his own. He has over and over again solemnly declared that, until this scandal assailed him, he had never even heard of the Moonstone. And these vile people reply, without a shadow of proof to justify them, He has his reasons for concealment; we decline to believe him on his oath. Shameful! shameful!?

Rachel looked at him very strangely?I can't well describe how?while he was speaking. When he had done, she said, ?Considering that Mr. Luker is only a chance acquaintance of yours, you take up his cause, Godfrey, rather warmly.?

My gifted friend made her one of the most truly evangelical answers I ever heard in my life.

?I hope, Rachel, I take up the cause of all oppressed people rather

warmly,? he said.

The tone in which those words were spoken might have melted a stone. But, oh dear, what is the hardness of stone? Nothing, compared to the hardness of the unregenerate human heart! She sneered. I blush to record it?she sneered at him to his face.

?Keep your noble sentiments for your Ladies? Committees, Godfrey. I am certain that the scandal which has assailed Mr. Luker, has not spared You.?

Even my aunt?s torpor was roused by those words.

?My dear Rachel,? she remonstrated, ?you have really no right to say that!?

?I mean no harm, mamma?I mean good. Have a moment?s patience with me, and you will see.?

She looked back at Mr. Godfrey, with what appeared to be a sudden pity for him. She went the length?the very unladylike length?of taking him by the hand.

?I am certain,? she said, ?that I have found out the true reason of your unwillingness to speak of this matter before my mother and before me. An unlucky accident has associated you in people?s minds with Mr. Luker. You have told me what scandal says of _him_. What does scandal say of _you?_?

Even at the eleventh hour, dear Mr. Godfrey?always ready to return good for evil?tried to spare her.

?Don?t ask me!? he said. ?It?s better forgotten, Rachel?it is, indeed.?

?I _will_ hear it!? she cried out, fiercely, at the top of her voice.

?Tell her, Godfrey!? entreated my aunt. ?Nothing can do her such harm as your silence is doing now!?

Mr. Godfrey?s fine eyes filled with tears. He cast one last appealing look at her?and then he spoke the fatal words:

?If you will have it, Rachel?scandal says that the Moonstone is in pledge to Mr. Luker, and that I am the man who has pawned it.?

She started to her feet with a scream. She looked backwards and forwards from Mr. Godfrey to my aunt, and from my aunt to Mr. Godfrey, in such a frantic manner that I really thought she had gone mad.

?Don?t speak to me! Don?t touch me!? she exclaimed, shrinking back from all of us (I declare like some hunted animal!) into a corner of the room. ?This is my fault! I must set it right. I have sacrificed myself?I had a right to do that, if I liked. But to let an innocent man be ruined; to keep a secret which destroys his character for life?Oh,

good God, it's too horrible! I can't bear it!?

My aunt half rose from her chair, then suddenly sat down again. She called to me faintly, and pointed to a little phial in her work-box.

'Quick!' she whispered. 'Six drops, in water. Don't let Rachel see.'

Under other circumstances, I should have thought this strange. There was no time now to think—there was only time to give the medicine. Dear Mr. Godfrey unconsciously assisted me in concealing what I was about from Rachel, by speaking composing words to her at the other end of the room.

'Indeed, indeed, you exaggerate,' I heard him say. 'My reputation stands too high to be destroyed by a miserable passing scandal like this. It will be all forgotten in another week. Let us never speak of it again.' She was perfectly inaccessible, even to such generosity as this. She went on from bad to worse.

'I must, and will, stop it,' she said. 'Mamma! hear what I say. Miss Clack! hear what I say. I know the hand that took the Moonstone. I know?' she laid a strong emphasis on the words; she stamped her foot in the rage that possessed her?—I know that Godfrey Ablewhite is innocent!— Take me to the magistrate, Godfrey! Take me to the magistrate, and I will swear it!'

My aunt caught me by the hand, and whispered, 'Stand between us for a minute or two. Don't let Rachel see me.' I noticed a bluish tinge in her face which alarmed me. She saw I was startled. 'The drops will put me right in a minute or two,' she said, and so closed her eyes, and waited a little.

While this was going on, I heard dear Mr. Godfrey still gently remonstrating.

'You must not appear publicly in such a thing as this,' he said. 'Your reputation, dearest Rachel, is something too pure and too sacred to be trifled with.'

'My reputation!' She burst out laughing. 'Why, I am accused, Godfrey, as well as you. The best detective officer in England declares that I have stolen my own Diamond. Ask him what he thinks—and he will tell you that I have pledged the Moonstone to pay my private debts!' She stopped, ran across the room—and fell on her knees at her mother's feet. 'Oh mamma! mamma! mamma! I must be mad—mustn't I?—not to own the truth now!' She was too vehement to notice her mother's condition—she was on her feet again, and back with Mr. Godfrey, in an instant. 'I won't let you! I won't let any innocent man be accused and disgraced through my fault. If you won't take me before the magistrate, draw out a declaration of your innocence on paper, and I will sign it. Do as I tell you, Godfrey, or I'll write it to the newspapers! I'll go out, and cry it in the streets!'

We will not say this was the language of remorse—we will say it was the

language of hysterics. Indulgent Mr. Godfrey pacified her by taking a sheet of paper, and drawing out the declaration. She signed it in a feverish hurry. "Show it everywhere? don't think of _me_," she said, as she gave it to him. "I am afraid, Godfrey, I have not done you justice, hitherto, in my thoughts. You are more unselfish? you are a better man than I believed you to be. Come here when you can, and I will try and repair the wrong I have done you."

She gave him her hand. Alas, for our fallen nature! Alas, for Mr. Godfrey! He not only forgot himself so far as to kiss her hand? he adopted a gentleness of tone in answering her which, in such a case, was little better than a compromise with sin. "I will come, dearest," he said, "on condition that we don't speak of this hateful subject again." Never had I seen and heard our Christian Hero to less advantage than on this occasion.

Before another word could be said by anybody, a thundering knock at the street door startled us all. I looked through the window, and saw the World, the Flesh, and the Devil waiting before the house? as typified in a carriage and horses, a powdered footman, and three of the most audaciously dressed women I ever beheld in my life.

Rachel started, and composed herself. She crossed the room to her mother.

"They have come to take me to the flower-show," she said. "One word, mamma, before I go. I have not distressed you, have I?"

(Is the bluntness of moral feeling which could ask such a question as that, after what had just happened, to be pitied or condemned? I like to lean towards mercy. Let us pity it.)

The drops had produced their effect. My poor aunt's complexion was like itself again. "No, no, my dear," she said. "Go with our friends, and enjoy yourself."

Her daughter stooped, and kissed her. I had left the window, and was near the door, when Rachel approached it to go out. Another change had come over her? she was in tears. I looked with interest at the momentary softening of that obdurate heart. I felt inclined to say a few earnest words. Alas! my well-meant sympathy only gave offence. "What do you mean by pitying me?" she asked in a bitter whisper, as she passed to the door. "Don't you see how happy I am? I'm going to the flower-show, Clack; and I've got the prettiest bonnet in London." She completed the hollow mockery of that address by blowing me a kiss? and so left the room.

I wish I could describe in words the compassion I felt for this miserable and misguided girl. But I am almost as poorly provided with words as with money. Permit me to say? my heart bled for her.

Returning to my aunt's chair, I observed dear Mr. Godfrey searching for something softly, here and there, in different parts of the room. Before I could offer to assist him he had found what he wanted. He came

back to my aunt and me, with his declaration of innocence in one hand, and with a box of matches in the other.

‘Dear aunt, a little conspiracy!’ he said. ‘Dear Miss Clack, a pious fraud which even your high moral rectitude will excuse! Will you leave Rachel to suppose that I accept the generous self-sacrifice which has signed this paper? And will you kindly bear witness that I destroy it in your presence, before I leave the house?’ He kindled a match, and, lighting the paper, laid it to burn in a plate on the table. ‘Any trifling inconvenience that I may suffer is as nothing,’ he remarked, ‘compared with the importance of preserving that pure name from the contaminating contact of the world. There! We have reduced it to a little harmless heap of ashes; and our dear impulsive Rachel will never know what we have done! How do you feel? My precious friends, how do you feel? For my poor part, I am as light-hearted as a boy!’

He beamed on us with his beautiful smile; he held out a hand to my aunt, and a hand to me. I was too deeply affected by his noble conduct to speak. I closed my eyes; I put his hand, in a kind of spiritual self-forgetfulness, to my lips. He murmured a soft remonstrance. Oh the ecstasy, the pure, unearthly ecstasy of that moment! I sat! I hardly know on what quite lost in my own exalted feelings. When I opened my eyes again, it was like descending from heaven to earth. There was nobody but my aunt in the room. He had gone.

I should like to stop here! I should like to close my narrative with the record of Mr. Godfrey’s noble conduct. Unhappily there is more, much more, which the unrelenting pecuniary pressure of Mr. Blake’s cheque obliges me to tell. The painful disclosures which were to reveal themselves in my presence, during that Tuesday’s visit to Montagu Square, were not at an end yet.

Finding myself alone with Lady Verinder, I turned naturally to the subject of her health; touching delicately on the strange anxiety which she had shown to conceal her indisposition, and the remedy applied to it, from the observation of her daughter.

My aunt’s reply greatly surprised me.

‘Drusilla,’ she said (if I have not already mentioned that my Christian name is Drusilla, permit me to mention it now), ‘you are touching quite innocently, I know, on a very distressing subject.’

I rose immediately. Delicacy left me but one alternative—the alternative, after first making my apologies, of taking my leave. Lady Verinder stopped me, and insisted on my sitting down again.

‘You have surprised a secret,’ she said, ‘which I had confided to my sister Mrs. Ablewhite, and to my lawyer Mr. Bruff, and to no one else. I can trust in their discretion; and I am sure, when I tell you the circumstances, I can trust in yours. Have you any pressing engagement, Drusilla? or is your time your own this afternoon?’

It is needless to say that my time was entirely at my aunt’s disposal.

"Keep me company then," she said, "for another hour. I have something to tell you which I believe you will be sorry to hear. And I shall have a service to ask of you afterwards, if you don't object to assist me."

It is again needless to say that, so far from objecting, I was all eagerness to assist her.

"You can wait here," she went on, "till Mr. Bruff comes at five. And you can be one of the witnesses, Drusilla, when I sign my Will."

Her Will! I thought of the drops which I had seen in her work-box. I thought of the bluish tinge which I had noticed in her complexion. A light which was not of this world—a light shining prophetically from an unmade grave—dawned on my mind. My aunt's secret was a secret no longer.

CHAPTER III

Consideration for poor Lady Verinder forbade me even to hint that I had guessed the melancholy truth, before she opened her lips. I waited her pleasure in silence; and, having privately arranged to say a few sustaining words at the first convenient opportunity, felt prepared for any duty that could claim me, no matter how painful it might be.

"I have been seriously ill, Drusilla, for some time past," my aunt began. "And, strange to say, without knowing it myself."

I thought of the thousands and thousands of perishing human creatures who were all at that moment spiritually ill, without knowing it themselves. And I greatly feared that my poor aunt might be one of the number. "Yes, dear," I said, sadly. "Yes?"

"I brought Rachel to London, as you know, for medical advice," she went on. "I thought it right to consult two doctors."

Two doctors! And, oh me (in Rachel's state), not one clergyman! "Yes, dear?" I said once more. "Yes?"

"One of the two medical men," proceeded my aunt, "was a stranger to me. The other had been an old friend of my husband's, and had always felt a sincere interest in me for my husband's sake. After prescribing for Rachel, he said he wished to speak to me privately in another room. I expected, of course, to receive some special directions for the management of my daughter's health. To my surprise, he took me gravely by the hand, and said, 'I have been looking at you, Lady Verinder, with a professional as well as a personal interest. You are, I am afraid, far more urgently in need of medical advice than your daughter.' He put some questions to me, which I was at first inclined to treat lightly enough, until I observed that my answers distressed him. It ended in his making an appointment to come and see me, accompanied by a medical friend, on the next day, at an hour when Rachel would not be at home. The result of that visit—most kindly and gently conveyed to

me?satisfied both the physicians that there had been precious time lost, which could never be regained, and that my case had now passed beyond the reach of their art. For more than two years I have been suffering under an insidious form of heart disease, which, without any symptoms to alarm me, has, by little and little, fatally broken me down. I may live for some months, or I may die before another day has passed over my head?the doctors cannot, and dare not, speak more positively than this. It would be vain to say, my dear, that I have not had some miserable moments since my real situation has been made known to me. But I am more resigned than I was, and I am doing my best to set my worldly affairs in order. My one great anxiety is that Rachel should be kept in ignorance of the truth. If she knew it, she would at once attribute my broken health to anxiety about the Diamond, and would reproach herself bitterly, poor child, for what is in no sense her fault. Both the doctors agree that the mischief began two, if not three years since. I am sure you will keep my secret, Drusilla?for I am sure I see sincere sorrow and sympathy for me in your face.?

Sorrow and sympathy! Oh, what Pagan emotions to expect from a Christian Englishwoman anchored firmly on her faith!

Little did my poor aunt imagine what a gush of devout thankfulness thrilled through me as she approached the close of her melancholy story. Here was a career of usefulness opened before me! Here was a beloved relative and perishing fellow-creature, on the eve of the great change, utterly unprepared; and led, providentially led, to reveal her situation to Me! How can I describe the joy with which I now remembered that the precious clerical friends on whom I could rely, were to be counted, not by ones or twos, but by tens and twenties. I took my aunt in my arms?my overflowing tenderness was not to be satisfied, _now_, with anything less than an embrace. ?Oh!? I said to her, fervently, ?the indescribable interest with which you inspire me! Oh! the good I mean to do you, dear, before we part!? After another word or two of earnest prefatory warning, I gave her her choice of three precious friends, all plying the work of mercy from morning to night in her own neighbourhood; all equally inexhaustible in exhortation; all affectionately ready to exercise their gifts at a word from _me_. Alas! the result was far from encouraging. Poor Lady Verinder looked puzzled and frightened, and met everything I could say to her with the purely worldly objection that she was not strong enough to face strangers. I yielded?for the moment only, of course. My large experience (as Reader and Visitor, under not less, first and last, than fourteen beloved clerical friends) informed me that this was another case for preparation by books. I possessed a little library of works, all suitable to the present emergency, all calculated to arouse, convince, prepare, enlighten, and fortify my aunt. ?You will read, dear, won?t you?? I said, in my most winning way. ?You will read, if I bring you my own precious books? Turned down at all the right places, aunt. And marked in pencil where you are to stop and ask yourself, ?Does this apply to me?? Even that simple appeal?so absolutely heathenising is the influence of the world?appeared to startle my aunt. She said, ?I will do what I can, Drusilla, to please you,? with a look of surprise, which was at once instructive and terrible to see. Not a moment was to be lost. The clock on the mantelpiece informed me that I had just time

to hurry home; to provide myself with a first series of selected readings (say a dozen only); and to return in time to meet the lawyer, and witness Lady Verinder's Will. Promising faithfully to be back by five o'clock, I left the house on my errand of mercy.

When no interests but my own are involved, I am humbly content to get from place to place by the omnibus. Permit me to give an idea of my devotion to my aunt's interests by recording that, on this occasion, I committed the prodigality of taking a cab.

I drove home, selected and marked my first series of readings, and drove back to Montagu Square, with a dozen works in a carpet-bag, the like of which, I firmly believe, are not to be found in the literature of any other country in Europe. I paid the cabman exactly his fare. He received it with an oath; upon which I instantly gave him a tract. If I had presented a pistol at his head, this abandoned wretch could hardly have exhibited greater consternation. He jumped up on his box, and, with profane exclamations of dismay, drove off furiously. Quite useless, I am happy to say! I sowed the good seed, in spite of him, by throwing a second tract in at the window of the cab.

The servant who answered the door—not the person with the cap-ribbons, to my great relief, but the footman—informed me that the doctor had called, and was still shut up with Lady Verinder. Mr. Bruff, the lawyer, had arrived a minute since and was waiting in the library. I was shown into the library to wait too.

Mr. Bruff looked surprised to see me. He is the family solicitor, and we had met more than once, on previous occasions, under Lady Verinder's roof. A man, I grieve to say, grown old and grizzled in the service of the world. A man who, in his hours of business, was the chosen prophet of Law and Mammon; and who, in his hours of leisure, was equally capable of reading a novel and of tearing up a tract.

"Have you come to stay here, Miss Clack?" he asked, with a look at my carpet-bag.

To reveal the contents of my precious bag to such a person as this would have been simply to invite an outburst of profanity. I lowered myself to his own level, and mentioned my business in the house.

"My aunt has informed me that she is about to sign her Will," I answered. "She has been so good as to ask me to be one of the witnesses."

"Aye? aye? Well, Miss Clack, you will do. You are over twenty-one, and you have not the slightest pecuniary interest in Lady Verinder's Will."

Not the slightest pecuniary interest in Lady Verinder's Will. Oh, how thankful I felt when I heard that! If my aunt, possessed of thousands, had remembered poor Me, to whom five pounds is an object—if my name had appeared in the Will, with a little comforting legacy attached to it—my enemies might have doubted the motive which had loaded me with the choicest treasures of my library, and had drawn upon my failing

resources for the prodigal expenses of a cab. Not the cruellest scoffer of them all could doubt now. Much better as it was! Oh, surely, surely, much better as it was!

I was aroused from these consoling reflections by the voice of Mr. Bruff. My meditative silence appeared to weigh upon the spirits of this worldling, and to force him, as it were, into talking to me against his own will.

‘Well, Miss Clack, what’s the last news in the charitable circles? How is your friend Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite, after the mauling he got from the rogues in Northumberland Street? Egad! they’re telling a pretty story about that charitable gentleman at my club!’

I had passed over the manner in which this person had remarked that I was more than twenty-one, and that I had no pecuniary interest in my aunt’s Will. But the tone in which he alluded to dear Mr. Godfrey was too much for my forbearance. Feeling bound, after what had passed in my presence that afternoon, to assert the innocence of my admirable friend, whenever I found it called in question? I own to having also felt bound to include in the accomplishment of this righteous purpose, a stinging castigation in the case of Mr. Bruff.

‘I live very much out of the world,’ I said; ‘and I don’t possess the advantage, sir, of belonging to a club. But I happen to know the story to which you allude; and I also know that a viler falsehood than that story never was told.’

‘Yes, yes, Miss Clack? you believe in your friend. Natural enough. Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite won’t find the world in general quite so easy to convince as a committee of charitable ladies. Appearances are dead against him. He was in the house when the Diamond was lost. And he was the first person in the house to go to London afterwards. Those are ugly circumstances, ma’am, viewed by the light of later events.’

I ought, I know, to have set him right before he went any farther. I ought to have told him that he was speaking in ignorance of a testimony to Mr. Godfrey’s innocence, offered by the only person who was undeniably competent to speak from a positive knowledge of the subject. Alas! the temptation to lead the lawyer artfully on to his own discomfiture was too much for me. I asked what he meant by ‘later events?’ with an appearance of the utmost innocence.

‘By later events, Miss Clack, I mean events in which the Indians are concerned,’ proceeded Mr. Bruff, getting more and more superior to poor Me, the longer he went on. ‘What do the Indians do, the moment they are let out of the prison at Frizinghall? They go straight to London, and fix on Mr. Luker. What follows? Mr. Luker feels alarmed for the safety of ‘a valuable of great price,’ which he has got in the house. He lodges it privately (under a general description) in his bankers’ strongroom. Wonderfully clever of him: but the Indians are just as clever on their side. They have their suspicions that the ‘valuable of great price’ is being shifted from one place to another; and they hit on a singularly bold and complete way of clearing those suspicions up.

Whom do they seize and search? Not Mr. Luker only?which would be intelligible enough?but Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite as well. Why? Mr. Ablewhite?s explanation is, that they acted on blind suspicion, after seeing him accidentally speaking to Mr. Luker. Absurd! Half-a-dozen other people spoke to Mr. Luker that morning. Why were they not followed home too, and decoyed into the trap? No! no! The plain inference is, that Mr. Ablewhite had his private interest in the ?valuable? as well as Mr. Luker, and that the Indians were so uncertain as to which of the two had the disposal of it, that there was no alternative but to search them both. Public opinion says that, Miss Clack. And public opinion, on this occasion, is not easily refuted.?

He said those last words, looking so wonderfully wise in his own worldly conceit, that I really (to my shame be it spoken) could not resist leading him a little farther still, before I overwhelmed him with the truth.

?I don?t presume to argue with a clever lawyer like you,? I said. ?But is it quite fair, sir, to Mr. Ablewhite to pass over the opinion of the famous London police officer who investigated this case? Not the shadow of a suspicion rested upon anybody but Miss Verinder, in the mind of Sergeant Cuff.?

?Do you mean to tell me, Miss Clack, that you agree with the Sergeant??

?I judge nobody, sir, and I offer no opinion.?

?And I commit both those enormities, ma?am. I judge the Sergeant to have been utterly wrong; and I offer the opinion that, if he had known Rachel?s character as I know it, he would have suspected everybody in the house but _her_. I admit that she has her faults?she is secret, and self-willed; odd and wild, and unlike other girls of her age. But true as steel, and high-minded and generous to a fault. If the plainest evidence in the world pointed one way, and if nothing but Rachel?s word of honour pointed the other, I would take her word before the evidence, lawyer as I am! Strong language, Miss Clack; but I mean it.?

?Would you object to illustrate your meaning, Mr. Bruff, so that I may be sure I understand it? Suppose you found Miss Verinder quite unaccountably interested in what has happened to Mr. Ablewhite and Mr. Luker? Suppose she asked the strangest questions about this dreadful scandal, and displayed the most ungovernable agitation when she found out the turn it was taking??

?Suppose anything you please, Miss Clack, it wouldn?t shake my belief in Rachel Verinder by a hair?s-breadth.?

?She is so absolutely to be relied on as that??

?So absolutely to be relied on as that.?

?Then permit me to inform you, Mr. Bruff, that Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite was in this house not two hours since, and that his entire innocence of all concern in the disappearance of the Moonstone was proclaimed by

Miss Verinder herself, in the strongest language I ever heard used by a young lady in my life.?

I enjoyed the triumph?the unholy triumph, I fear I must admit?of seeing Mr. Bruff utterly confounded and overthrown by a few plain words from Me. He started to his feet, and stared at me in silence. I kept my seat, undisturbed, and related the whole scene as it had occurred. ?And what do you say about Mr. Ablewhite _now?_? I asked, with the utmost possible gentleness, as soon as I had done.

?If Rachel has testified to his innocence, Miss Clack, I don?t scruple to say that I believe in his innocence as firmly as you do. I have been misled by appearances, like the rest of the world; and I will make the best atonement I can, by publicly contradicting the scandal which has assailed your friend wherever I meet with it. In the meantime, allow me to congratulate you on the masterly manner in which you have opened the full fire of your batteries on me at the moment when I least expected it. You would have done great things in my profession, ma?am, if you had happened to be a man.?

With those words he turned away from me, and began walking irritably up and down the room.

I could see plainly that the new light I had thrown on the subject had greatly surprised and disturbed him. Certain expressions dropped from his lips, as he became more and more absorbed in his own thoughts, which suggested to my mind the abominable view that he had hitherto taken of the mystery of the lost Moonstone. He had not scrupled to suspect dear Mr. Godfrey of the infamy of stealing the Diamond, and to attribute Rachel?s conduct to a generous resolution to conceal the crime. On Miss Verinder?s own authority?a perfectly unassailable authority, as you are aware, in the estimation of Mr. Bruff?that explanation of the circumstances was now shown to be utterly wrong. The perplexity into which I had plunged this high legal authority was so overwhelming that he was quite unable to conceal it from notice. ?What a case!? I heard him say to himself, stopping at the window in his walk, and drumming on the glass with his fingers. ?It not only defies explanation, it?s even beyond conjecture.?

There was nothing in these words which made any reply at all needful, on my part?and yet, I answered them! It seems hardly credible that I should not have been able to let Mr. Bruff alone, even now. It seems almost beyond mere mortal perversity that I should have discovered, in what he had just said, a new opportunity of making myself personally disagreeable to him. But?ah, my friends! nothing is beyond mortal perversity; and anything is credible when our fallen natures get the better of us!

?Pardon me for intruding on your reflections,? I said to the unsuspecting Mr. Bruff. ?But surely there is a conjecture to make which has not occurred to us yet.?

?Maybe, Miss Clack. I own I don?t know what it is.?

‘Before I was so fortunate, sir, as to convince you of Mr. Ablewhite’s innocence, you mentioned it as one of the reasons for suspecting him, that he was in the house at the time when the Diamond was lost. Permit me to remind you that Mr. Franklin Blake was also in the house at the time when the Diamond was lost.’

The old worldling left the window, took a chair exactly opposite to mine, and looked at me steadily, with a hard and vicious smile.

‘You are not so good a lawyer, Miss Clack,’ he remarked in a meditative manner, ‘as I supposed. You don’t know how to let well alone.’

‘I am afraid I fail to follow you, Mr. Bruff,’ I said, modestly.

‘It won’t do, Miss Clack—it really won’t do a second time. Franklin Blake is a prime favourite of mine, as you are well aware. But that doesn’t matter. I’ll adopt your view, on this occasion, before you have time to turn round on me. You’re quite right, ma’am. I have suspected Mr. Ablewhite, on grounds which abstractedly justify suspecting Mr. Blake too. Very good—let’s suspect them together. It’s quite in his character, we will say, to be capable of stealing the Moonstone. The only question is, whether it was his interest to do so.’

‘Mr. Franklin Blake’s debts,’ I remarked, ‘are matters of family notoriety.’

‘And Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite’s debts have not arrived at that stage of development yet. Quite true. But there happen to be two difficulties in the way of your theory, Miss Clack. I manage Franklin Blake’s affairs, and I beg to inform you that the vast majority of his creditors (knowing his father to be a rich man) are quite content to charge interest on their debts, and to wait for their money. There is the first difficulty—which is tough enough. You will find the second tougher still. I have it on the authority of Lady Verinder herself, that her daughter was ready to marry Franklin Blake, before that infernal Indian Diamond disappeared from the house. She had drawn him on and put him off again, with the coquetry of a young girl. But she had confessed to her mother that she loved cousin Franklin, and her mother had trusted cousin Franklin with the secret. So there he was, Miss Clack, with his creditors content to wait, and with the certain prospect before him of marrying an heiress. By all means consider him a scoundrel; but tell me, if you please, why he should steal the Moonstone?’

‘The human heart is unsearchable,’ I said gently. ‘Who is to fathom it?’

‘In other words, ma’am—though he hadn’t the shadow of a reason for taking the Diamond—he might have taken it, nevertheless, through natural depravity. Very well. Say he did. Why the devil?’

‘I beg your pardon, Mr. Bruff. If I hear the devil referred to in that manner, I must leave the room.’

?I beg _your_ pardon, Miss Clack?!?I'll be more careful in my choice of language for the future. All I meant to ask was this. Why?even supposing he did take the Diamond?should Franklin Blake make himself the most prominent person in the house in trying to recover it? You may tell me he cunningly did that to divert suspicion from himself. I answer that he had no need to divert suspicion?because nobody suspected him. He first steals the Moonstone (without the slightest reason) through natural depravity; and he then acts a part, in relation to the loss of the jewel, which there is not the slightest necessity to act, and which leads to his mortally offending the young lady who would otherwise have married him. That is the monstrous proposition which you are driven to assert, if you attempt to associate the disappearance of the Moonstone with Franklin Blake. No, no, Miss Clack! After what has passed here today, between us two, the dead-lock, in this case, is complete. Rachel?s own innocence is (as her mother knows, and as I know) beyond a doubt. Mr. Ablewhite?s innocence is equally certain?or Rachel would never have testified to it. And Franklin Blake?s innocence, as you have just seen, unanswerably asserts itself. On the one hand, we are morally certain of all these things. And, on the other hand, we are equally sure that somebody has brought the Moonstone to London, and that Mr. Luker, or his banker, is in private possession of it at this moment. What is the use of my experience, what is the use of any person?s experience, in such a case as that? It baffles me; it baffles you, it baffles everybody.?

No?not everybody. It had not baffled Sergeant Cuff. I was about to mention this, with all possible mildness, and with every necessary protest against being supposed to cast a slur upon Rachel?when the servant came in to say that the doctor had gone, and that my aunt was waiting to receive us.

This stopped the discussion. Mr. Bruff collected his papers, looking a little exhausted by the demands which our conversation had made on him. I took up my bag-full of precious publications, feeling as if I could have gone on talking for hours. We proceeded in silence to Lady Verinder?s room.

Permit me to add here, before my narrative advances to other events, that I have not described what passed between the lawyer and me, without having a definite object in view. I am ordered to include in my contribution to the shocking story of the Moonstone a plain disclosure, not only of the turn which suspicion took, but even of the names of the persons on whom suspicion rested, at the time when the Indian Diamond was believed to be in London. A report of my conversation in the library with Mr. Bruff appeared to me to be exactly what was wanted to answer this purpose?while, at the same time, it possessed the great moral advantage of rendering a sacrifice of sinful self-esteem essentially necessary on my part. I have been obliged to acknowledge that my fallen nature got the better of me. In making that humiliating confession, _I_ get the better of my fallen nature. The moral balance is restored; the spiritual atmosphere feels clear once more. Dear friends, we may go on again.

CHAPTER IV

The signing of the Will was a much shorter matter than I had anticipated. It was hurried over, to my thinking, in indecent haste. Samuel, the footman, was sent for to act as second witness?and the pen was put at once into my aunt?s hand. I felt strongly urged to say a few appropriate words on this solemn occasion. But Mr. Bruff?s manner convinced me that it was wisest to check the impulse while he was in the room. In less than two minutes it was all over?and Samuel (unbenefited by what I might have said) had gone downstairs again.

Mr. Bruff folded up the Will, and then looked my way; apparently wondering whether I did or did not mean to leave him alone with my aunt. I had my mission of mercy to fulfil, and my bag of precious publications ready on my lap. He might as well have expected to move St. Paul?s Cathedral by looking at it, as to move Me. There was one merit about him (due no doubt to his worldly training) which I have no wish to deny. He was quick at seeing things. I appeared to produce almost the same impression on him which I had produced on the cabman. _He_ too uttered a profane expression, and withdrew in a violent hurry, and left me mistress of the field.

As soon as we were alone, my aunt reclined on the sofa, and then alluded, with some appearance of confusion, to the subject of her Will.

?I hope you won?t think yourself neglected, Drusilla,? she said. ?I mean to _give_ you your little legacy, my dear, with my own hand.?

Here was a golden opportunity! I seized it on the spot. In other words, I instantly opened my bag, and took out the top publication. It proved to be an early edition?only the twenty-fifth?of the famous anonymous work (believed to be by precious Miss Bellows), entitled _The Serpent at Home_. The design of the book?with which the worldly reader may not be acquainted?is to show how the Evil One lies in wait for us in all the most apparently innocent actions of our daily lives. The chapters best adapted to female perusal are ?Satan in the Hair Brush;? ?Satan behind the Looking Glass;? ?Satan under the Tea Table;? ?Satan out of the Window??and many others.

?Give your attention, dear aunt, to this precious book?and you will give me all I ask.? With those words, I handed it to her open, at a marked passage?one continuous burst of burning eloquence! Subject: Satan among the Sofa Cushions.

Poor Lady Verinder (reclining thoughtlessly on her own sofa cushions) glanced at the book, and handed it back to me looking more confused than ever.

?I?m afraid, Drusilla,? she said, ?I must wait till I am a little better, before I can read that. The doctor???

The moment she mentioned the doctor?s name, I knew what was coming. Over and over again in my past experience among my perishing fellow-creatures, the members of the notoriously infidel profession of

Medicine had stepped between me and my mission of mercy?on the miserable pretence that the patient wanted quiet, and that the disturbing influence of all others which they most dreaded, was the influence of Miss Clack and her Books. Precisely the same blinded materialism (working treacherously behind my back) now sought to rob me of the only right of property that my poverty could claim?my right of spiritual property in my perishing aunt.

?The doctor tells me,? my poor misguided relative went on, ?that I am not so well today. He forbids me to see any strangers; and he orders me, if I read at all, only to read the lightest and the most amusing books. ?Do nothing, Lady Verinder, to weary your head, or to quicken your pulse??those were his last words, Drusilla, when he left me today.?

There was no help for it but to yield again?for the moment only, as before. Any open assertion of the infinitely superior importance of such a ministry as mine, compared with the ministry of the medical man, would only have provoked the doctor to practise on the human weakness of his patient, and to threaten to throw up the case. Happily, there are more ways than one of sowing the good seed, and few persons are better versed in those ways than myself.

?You might feel stronger, dear, in an hour or two,? I said. ?Or you might wake, tomorrow morning, with a sense of something wanting, and even this unpretending volume might be able to supply it. You will let me leave the book, aunt? The doctor can hardly object to that!?

I slipped it under the sofa cushions, half in, and half out, close by her handkerchief, and her smelling-bottle. Every time her hand searched for either of these, it would touch the book; and, sooner or later (who knows?) the book might touch _her_. After making this arrangement, I thought it wise to withdraw. ?Let me leave you to repose, dear aunt; I will call again tomorrow.? I looked accidentally towards the window as I said that. It was full of flowers, in boxes and pots. Lady Verinder was extravagantly fond of these perishable treasures, and had a habit of rising every now and then, and going to look at them and smell them. A new idea flashed across my mind. ?Oh! may I take a flower?? I said?and got to the window unsuspected, in that way. Instead of taking away a flower, I added one, in the shape of another book from my bag, which I left, to surprise my aunt, among the geraniums and roses. The happy thought followed, ?Why not do the same for her, poor dear, in every other room that she enters?? I immediately said good-bye; and, crossing the hall, slipped into the library. Samuel, coming up to let me out, and supposing I had gone, went downstairs again. On the library table I noticed two of the ?amusing books? which the infidel doctor had recommended. I instantly covered them from sight with two of my own precious publications. In the breakfast-room I found my aunt?s favourite canary singing in his cage. She was always in the habit of feeding the bird herself. Some groundsel was strewed on a table which stood immediately under the cage. I put a book among the groundsel. In the drawing-room I found more cheering opportunities of emptying my bag. My aunt?s favourite musical pieces were on the piano. I slipped in two more books among the music. I disposed of another in the back

drawing-room, under some unfinished embroidery, which I knew to be of Lady Verinder's working. A third little room opened out of the back drawing-room, from which it was shut off by curtains instead of a door. My aunt's plain old-fashioned fan was on the chimney-piece. I opened my ninth book at a very special passage, and put the fan in as a marker, to keep the place. The question then came, whether I should go higher still, and try the bedroom floor?at the risk, undoubtedly, of being insulted, if the person with the cap-ribbons happened to be in the upper regions of the house, and to find me out. But oh, what of that? It is a poor Christian that is afraid of being insulted. I went upstairs, prepared to bear anything. All was silent and solitary?it was the servants' tea-time, I suppose. My aunt's room was in front. The miniature of my late dear uncle, Sir John, hung on the wall opposite the bed. It seemed to smile at me; it seemed to say, "Drusilla! deposit a book." There were tables on either side of my aunt's bed. She was a bad sleeper, and wanted, or thought she wanted, many things at night. I put a book near the matches on one side, and a book under the box of chocolate drops on the other. Whether she wanted a light, or whether she wanted a drop, there was a precious publication to meet her eye, or to meet her hand, and to say with silent eloquence, in either case, "Come, try me! try me!" But one book was now left at the bottom of my bag, and but one apartment was still unexplored?the bath-room, which opened out of the bedroom. I peeped in; and the holy inner voice that never deceives, whispered to me, "You have met her, Drusilla, everywhere else; meet her at the bath, and the work is done." I observed a dressing-gown thrown across a chair. It had a pocket in it, and in that pocket I put my last book. Can words express my exquisite sense of duty done, when I had slipped out of the house, unsuspected by any of them, and when I found myself in the street with my empty bag under my arm? Oh, my worldly friends, pursuing the phantom, Pleasure, through the guilty mazes of Dissipation, how easy it is to be happy, if you will only be good!

When I folded up my things that night?when I reflected on the true riches which I had scattered with such a lavish hand, from top to bottom of the house of my wealthy aunt?I declare I felt as free from all anxiety as if I had been a child again. I was so light-hearted that I sang a verse of the Evening Hymn. I was so light-hearted that I fell asleep before I could sing another. Quite like a child again! quite like a child again!

So I passed that blissful night. On rising the next morning, how young I felt! I might add, how young I looked, if I were capable of dwelling on the concerns of my own perishable body. But I am not capable?and I add nothing.

Towards luncheon time?not for the sake of the creature-comforts, but for the certainty of finding dear aunt?I put on my bonnet to go to Montagu Square. Just as I was ready, the maid at the lodgings in which I then lived looked in at the door, and said, "Lady Verinder's servant, to see Miss Clack."

I occupied the parlour-floor, at that period of my residence in London. The front parlour was my sitting-room. Very small, very low in the

ceiling, very poorly furnished?but, oh, so neat! I looked into the passage to see which of Lady Verinder?s servants had asked for me. It was the young footman, Samuel?a civil fresh-coloured person, with a teachable look and a very obliging manner. I had always felt a spiritual interest in Samuel, and a wish to try him with a few serious words. On this occasion, I invited him into my sitting-room.

He came in, with a large parcel under his arm. When he put the parcel down, it appeared to frighten him. ?My lady?s love, Miss; and I was to say that you would find a letter inside.? Having given that message, the fresh-coloured young footman surprised me by looking as if he would have liked to run away.

I detained him to make a few kind inquiries. Could I see my aunt, if I called in Montagu Square? No; she had gone out for a drive. Miss Rachel had gone with her, and Mr. Ablewhite had taken a seat in the carriage, too. Knowing how sadly dear Mr. Godfrey?s charitable work was in arrear, I thought it odd that he should be going out driving, like an idle man. I stopped Samuel at the door, and made a few more kind inquiries. Miss Rachel was going to a ball that night, and Mr. Ablewhite had arranged to come to coffee, and go with her. There was a morning concert advertised for tomorrow, and Samuel was ordered to take places for a large party, including a place for Mr. Ablewhite. ?All the tickets may be gone, Miss,? said this innocent youth, ?if I don?t run and get them at once!? He ran as he said the words?and I found myself alone again, with some anxious thoughts to occupy me.

We had a special meeting of the Mothers?-Small-Clothes-Conversion Society that night, summoned expressly with a view to obtaining Mr. Godfrey?s advice and assistance. Instead of sustaining our sisterhood, under an overwhelming flow of Trousers which quite prostrated our little community, he had arranged to take coffee in Montagu Square, and to go to a ball afterwards! The afternoon of the next day had been selected for the Festival of the British-Ladies?-Servants?-Sunday-Sweetheart-Supervision Society. Instead of being present, the life and soul of that struggling Institution, he had engaged to make one of a party of worldlings at a morning concert! I asked myself what did it mean? Alas! it meant that our Christian Hero was to reveal himself to me in a new character, and to become associated in my mind with one of the most awful backslidings of modern times.

To return, however, to the history of the passing day. On finding myself alone in my room, I naturally turned my attention to the parcel which appeared to have so strangely intimidated the fresh-coloured young footman. Had my aunt sent me my promised legacy? and had it taken the form of cast-off clothes, or worn-out silver spoons, or unfashionable jewellery, or anything of that sort? Prepared to accept all, and to resent nothing, I opened the parcel?and what met my view? The twelve precious publications which I had scattered through the house, on the previous day; all returned to me by the doctor?s orders! Well might the youthful Samuel shrink when he brought his parcel into my room! Well might he run when he had performed his miserable errand! As to my aunt?s letter, it simply amounted, poor soul, to this?that she

dare not disobey her medical man.

What was to be done now? With my training and my principles, I never had a moment's doubt.

Once self-supported by conscience, once embarked on a career of manifest usefulness, the true Christian never yields. Neither public nor private influences produce the slightest effect on us, when we have once got our mission. Taxation may be the consequence of a mission; riots may be the consequence of a mission; wars may be the consequence of a mission: we go on with our work, irrespective of every human consideration which moves the world outside us. We are above reason; we are beyond ridicule; we see with nobody's eyes, we hear with nobody's ears, we feel with nobody's hearts, but our own. Glorious, glorious privilege! And how is it earned? Ah, my friends, you may spare yourselves the useless inquiry! We are the only people who can earn it—for we are the only people who are always right.

In the case of my misguided aunt, the form which pious perseverance was next to take revealed itself to me plainly enough.

Preparation by clerical friends had failed, owing to Lady Verinder's own reluctance. Preparation by books had failed, owing to the doctor's infidel obstinacy. So be it! What was the next thing to try? The next thing to try was? Preparation by Little Notes. In other words, the books themselves having been sent back, select extracts from the books, copied by different hands, and all addressed as letters to my aunt, were, some to be sent by post, and some to be distributed about the house on the plan I had adopted on the previous day. As letters they would excite no suspicion; as letters they would be opened—and, once opened, might be read. Some of them I wrote myself. "Dear aunt, may I ask your attention to a few lines?" &c. "Dear aunt, I was reading last night, and I chanced on the following passage," &c. Other letters were written for me by my valued fellow-workers, the sisterhood at the Mothers'-Small-Clothes. "Dear madam, pardon the interest taken in you by a true, though humble, friend." "Dear madam, may a serious person surprise you by saying a few cheering words?" Using these and other similar forms of courteous appeal, we reintroduced all my precious passages under a form which not even the doctor's watchful materialism could suspect. Before the shades of evening had closed around us, I had a dozen awakening letters for my aunt, instead of a dozen awakening books. Six I made immediate arrangements for sending through the post, and six I kept in my pocket for personal distribution in the house the next day.

Soon after two o'clock I was again on the field of pious conflict, addressing more kind inquiries to Samuel at Lady Verinder's door.

My aunt had had a bad night. She was again in the room in which I had witnessed her Will, resting on the sofa, and trying to get a little sleep.

I said I would wait in the library, on the chance of seeing her. In the fervour of my zeal to distribute the letters, it never occurred to me

to inquire about Rachel. The house was quiet, and it was past the hour at which the musical performance began. I took it for granted that she and her party of pleasure-seekers (Mr. Godfrey, alas! included) were all at the concert, and eagerly devoted myself to my good work, while time and opportunity were still at my own disposal.

My aunt's correspondence of the morning—including the six awakening letters which I had posted overnight—was lying unopened on the library table. She had evidently not felt herself equal to dealing with a large mass of letters—and she might be daunted by the number of them, if she entered the library later in the day. I put one of my second set of six letters on the chimney-piece by itself; leaving it to attract her curiosity, by means of its solitary position, apart from the rest. A second letter I put purposely on the floor in the breakfast-room. The first servant who went in after me would conclude that my aunt had dropped it, and would be specially careful to restore it to her. The field thus sown on the basement story, I ran lightly upstairs to scatter my mercies next over the drawing-room floor.

Just as I entered the front room, I heard a double knock at the street-door—a soft, fluttering, considerate little knock. Before I could think of slipping back to the library (in which I was supposed to be waiting), the active young footman was in the hall, answering the door. It mattered little, as I thought. In my aunt's state of health, visitors in general were not admitted. To my horror and amazement, the performer of the soft little knock proved to be an exception to general rules. Samuel's voice below me (after apparently answering some questions which I did not hear) said, unmistakably, "Upstairs, if you please, sir." The next moment I heard footsteps—a man's footsteps—approaching the drawing-room floor. Who could this favoured male visitor possibly be? Almost as soon as I asked myself the question, the answer occurred to me. Who could it be but the doctor?

In the case of any other visitor, I should have allowed myself to be discovered in the drawing-room. There would have been nothing out of the common in my having got tired of the library, and having gone upstairs for a change. But my own self-respect stood in the way of my meeting the person who had insulted me by sending me back my books. I slipped into the little third room, which I have mentioned as communicating with the back drawing-room, and dropped the curtains which closed the open doorway. If I only waited there for a minute or two, the usual result in such cases would take place. That is to say, the doctor would be conducted to his patient's room.

I waited a minute or two, and more than a minute or two. I heard the visitor walking restlessly backwards and forwards. I also heard him talking to himself. I even thought I recognised the voice. Had I made a mistake? Was it not the doctor, but somebody else? Mr. Bruff, for instance? No! an unerring instinct told me it was not Mr. Bruff. Whoever he was, he was still talking to himself. I parted the heavy curtains the least little morsel in the world, and listened.

The words I heard were, "I'll do it today!" And the voice that spoke them was Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite's.

CHAPTER V

My hand dropped from the curtain. But don't suppose?oh, don't suppose?that the dreadful embarrassment of my situation was the uppermost idea in my mind! So fervent still was the sisterly interest I felt in Mr. Godfrey, that I never stopped to ask myself why he was not at the concert. No! I thought only of the words?the startling words?which had just fallen from his lips. He would do it today. He had said, in a tone of terrible resolution, he would do it today. What, oh what, would he do? Something even more deplorably unworthy of him than what he had done already? Would he apostatise from the faith? Would he abandon us at the Mothers?-Small-Clothes? Had we seen the last of his angelic smile in the committee-room? Had we heard the last of his unrivalled eloquence at Exeter Hall? I was so wrought up by the bare idea of such awful eventualities as these in connection with such a man, that I believe I should have rushed from my place of concealment, and implored him in the name of all the Ladies? Committees in London to explain himself?when I suddenly heard another voice in the room. It penetrated through the curtains; it was loud, it was bold, it was wanting in every female charm. The voice of Rachel Verinder.

?Why have you come up here, Godfrey?? she asked. ?Why didn't you go into the library??

He laughed softly, and answered, ?Miss Clack is in the library.?

?Clack in the library!? She instantly seated herself on the ottoman in the back drawing-room. ?You are quite right, Godfrey. We had much better stop here.?

I had been in a burning fever, a moment since, and in some doubt what to do next. I became extremely cold now, and felt no doubt whatever. To show myself, after what I had heard, was impossible. To retreat?except into the fireplace?was equally out of the question. A martyrdom was before me. In justice to myself, I noiselessly arranged the curtains so that I could both see and hear. And then I met my martyrdom, with the spirit of a primitive Christian.

?Don't sit on the ottoman,? the young lady proceeded. ?Bring a chair, Godfrey. I like people to be opposite to me when I talk to them.?

He took the nearest seat. It was a low chair. He was very tall, and many sizes too large for it. I never saw his legs to such disadvantage before.

?Well?? she went on. ?What did you say to them??

?Just what you said, dear Rachel, to me.?

?That mamma was not at all well today? And that I didn't quite like leaving her to go to the concert??

?Those were the words. They were grieved to lose you at the concert, but they quite understood. All sent their love; and all expressed a cheering belief that Lady Verinder?s indisposition would soon pass away.?

?_You_ don?t think it?s serious, do you, Godfrey??

?Far from it! In a few days, I feel quite sure, all will be well again.?

?I think so, too. I was a little frightened at first, but I think so too. It was very kind to go and make my excuses for me to people who are almost strangers to you. But why not have gone with them to the concert? It seems very hard that you should miss the music too.?

?Don?t say that, Rachel! If you only knew how much happier I am?here, with you!?

He clasped his hands, and looked at her. In the position which he occupied, when he did that, he turned my way. Can words describe how I sickened when I noticed exactly the same pathetic expression on his face, which had charmed me when he was pleading for destitute millions of his fellow-creatures on the platform at Exeter Hall!

?It?s hard to get over one?s bad habits, Godfrey. But do try to get over the habit of paying compliments?do, to please me.?

?I never paid _you_ a compliment, Rachel, in my life. Successful love may sometimes use the language of flattery, I admit. But hopeless love, dearest, always speaks the truth.?

He drew his chair close, and took her hand, when he said ?hopeless love.? There was a momentary silence. He, who thrilled everybody, had doubtless thrilled _her_. I thought I now understood the words which had dropped from him when he was alone in the drawing-room, ?I?ll do it today.? Alas! the most rigid propriety could hardly have failed to discover that he was doing it now.

?Have you forgotten what we agreed on, Godfrey, when you spoke to me in the country? We agreed that we were to be cousins, and nothing more.?

?I break the agreement, Rachel, every time I see you.?

?Then don?t see me.?

?Quite useless! I break the agreement every time I think of you. Oh, Rachel! how kindly you told me, only the other day, that my place in your estimation was a higher place than it had ever been yet! Am I mad to build the hopes I do on those dear words? Am I mad to dream of some future day when your heart may soften to me? Don?t tell me so, if I am! Leave me my delusion, dearest! I must have _that_ to cherish, and to comfort me, if I have nothing else!?

His voice trembled, and he put his white handkerchief to his eyes.

Exeter Hall again! Nothing wanting to complete the parallel but the audience, the cheers, and the glass of water.

Even her obdurate nature was touched. I saw her lean a little nearer to him. I heard a new tone of interest in her next words.

?Are you really sure, Godfrey, that you are so fond of me as that??

?Sure! You know what I was, Rachel. Let me tell you what I am. I have lost every interest in life, but my interest in you. A transformation has come over me which I can't account for, myself. Would you believe it? My charitable business is an unendurable nuisance to me; and when I see a Ladies' Committee now, I wish myself at the uttermost ends of the earth!?

If the annals of apostasy offer anything comparable to such a declaration as that, I can only say that the case in point is not producible from the stores of my reading. I thought of the Mothers'-Small-Clothes. I thought of the Sunday-Sweetheart-Supervision. I thought of the other Societies, too numerous to mention, all built up on this man as on a tower of strength. I thought of the struggling Female Boards, who, so to speak, drew the breath of their business-life through the nostrils of Mr. Godfrey?of that same Mr. Godfrey who had just reviled our good work as a ?nuisance??and just declared that he wished he was at the uttermost ends of the earth when he found himself in our company! My young female friends will feel encouraged to persevere, when I mention that it tried even my discipline before I could devour my own righteous indignation in silence. At the same time, it is only justice to myself to add, that I didn't lose a syllable of the conversation. Rachel was the next to speak.

?You have made your confession,? she said. ?I wonder whether it would cure you of your unhappy attachment to me, if I made mine??

He started. I confess I started too. He thought, and I thought, that she was about to divulge the mystery of the Moonstone.

?Would you think, to look at me,? she went on, ?that I am the wretchedest girl living? It's true, Godfrey. What greater wretchedness can there be than to live degraded in your own estimation? That is my life now.?

?My dear Rachel! it's impossible you can have any reason to speak of yourself in that way!?

?How do you know I have no reason??

?Can you ask me the question! I know it, because I know you. Your silence, dearest, has never lowered you in the estimation of your true friends. The disappearance of your precious birthday gift may seem strange; your unexplained connection with that event may seem stranger still???

?Are you speaking of the Moonstone, Godfrey??

?I certainly thought that you referred???

?I referred to nothing of the sort. I can hear of the loss of the Moonstone, let who will speak of it, without feeling degraded in my own estimation. If the story of the Diamond ever comes to light, it will be known that I accepted a dreadful responsibility; it will be known that I involved myself in the keeping of a miserable secret?but it will be as clear as the sun at noon-day that I did nothing mean! You have misunderstood me, Godfrey. It?s my fault for not speaking more plainly. Cost me what it may, I will be plainer now. Suppose you were not in love with me? Suppose you were in love with some other woman??

?Yes??

?Suppose you discovered that woman to be utterly unworthy of you? Suppose you were quite convinced that it was a disgrace to you to waste another thought on her? Suppose the bare idea of ever marrying such a person made your face burn, only with thinking of it??

?Yes??

?And, suppose, in spite of all that?you couldn?t tear her from your heart? Suppose the feeling she had roused in you (in the time when you believed in her) was not a feeling to be hidden? Suppose the love this wretch had inspired in you??? Oh, how can I find words to say it in! How can I make a _man_ understand that a feeling which horrifies me at myself, can be a feeling that fascinates me at the same time? It?s the breath of my life, Godfrey, and it?s the poison that kills me?both in one! Go away! I must be out of my mind to talk as I am talking now. No! you mustn?t leave me?you mustn?t carry away a wrong impression. I must say what is to be said in my own defence. Mind this! _He_ doesn?t know?he never will know, what I have told _you_. I will never see him?I don?t care what happens?I will never, never, never see him again! Don?t ask me his name! Don?t ask me any more! Let?s change the subject. Are you doctor enough, Godfrey, to tell me why I feel as if I was stifling for want of breath? Is there a form of hysterics that bursts into words instead of tears? I dare say! What does it matter? You will get over any trouble I have caused you, easily enough now. I have dropped to my right place in your estimation, haven?t I? Don?t notice me! Don?t pity me! For God?s sake, go away!?

She turned round on a sudden, and beat her hands wildly on the back of the ottoman. Her head dropped on the cushions; and she burst out crying. Before I had time to feel shocked at this, I was horror-struck by an entirely unexpected proceeding on the part of Mr. Godfrey. Will it be credited that he fell on his knees at her feet??on _both_ knees, I solemnly declare! May modesty mention that he put his arms round her next? And may reluctant admiration acknowledge that he electrified her with two words?

?Noble creature!?

No more than that! But he did it with one of the bursts which have made

his fame as a public speaker. She sat, either quite thunderstruck, or quite fascinated?I don't know which?without even making an effort to put his arms back where his arms ought to have been. As for me, my sense of propriety was completely bewildered. I was so painfully uncertain whether it was my first duty to close my eyes, or to stop my ears, that I did neither. I attribute my being still able to hold the curtain in the right position for looking and listening, entirely to suppressed hysterics. In suppressed hysterics, it is admitted, even by the doctors, that one must hold something.

?Yes,? he said, with all the fascination of his evangelical voice and manner, ?you are a noble creature! A woman who can speak the truth, for the truth's own sake?a woman who will sacrifice her pride, rather than sacrifice an honest man who loves her?is the most priceless of all treasures. When such a woman marries, if her husband only wins her esteem and regard, he wins enough to ennoble his whole life. You have spoken, dearest, of your place in my estimation. Judge what that place is?when I implore you on my knees, to let the cure of your poor wounded heart be my care. Rachel! will you honour me, will you bless me, by being my wife??

By this time I should certainly have decided on stopping my ears, if Rachel had not encouraged me to keep them open, by answering him in the first sensible words I had ever heard fall from her lips.

?Godfrey!? she said, ?you must be mad!?

?I never spoke more reasonably, dearest?in your interests, as well as in mine. Look for a moment to the future. Is your happiness to be sacrificed to a man who has never known how you feel towards him, and whom you are resolved never to see again? Is it not your duty to yourself to forget this ill-fated attachment? and is forgetfulness to be found in the life you are leading now? You have tried that life, and you are wearying of it already. Surround yourself with nobler interests than the wretched interests of the world. A heart that loves and honours you; a home whose peaceful claims and happy duties win gently on you day by day?try the consolation, Rachel, which is to be found _there!_ I don't ask for your love?I will be content with your affection and regard. Let the rest be left, confidently left, to your husband's devotion, and to Time that heals even wounds as deep as yours.?

She began to yield already. Oh, what a bringing-up she must have had! Oh, how differently I should have acted in her place!

?Don't tempt me, Godfrey,? she said; ?I am wretched enough and reckless enough as it is. Don't tempt me to be more wretched and more wreckless still!?

?One question, Rachel. Have you any personal objection to me??

?! I always liked you. After what you have just said to me, I should be insensible indeed if I didn't respect and admire you as well.?

?Do you know many wives, my dear Rachel, who respect and admire their husbands? And yet they and their husbands get on very well. How many brides go to the altar with hearts that would bear inspection by the men who take them there? And yet it doesn't end unhappily?somehow or other the nuptial establishment jogs on. The truth is, that women try marriage as a Refuge, far more numerously than they are willing to admit; and, what is more, they find that marriage has justified their confidence in it. Look at your own case once again. At your age, and with your attractions, is it possible for you to sentence yourself to a single life? Trust my knowledge of the world?nothing is less possible. It is merely a question of time. You may marry some other man, some years hence. Or you may marry the man, dearest, who is now at your feet, and who prizes your respect and admiration above the love of any other woman on the face of the earth.?

?Gently, Godfrey! you are putting something into my head which I never thought of before. You are tempting me with a new prospect, when all my other prospects are closed before me. I tell you again, I am miserable enough and desperate enough, if you say another word, to marry you on your own terms. Take the warning, and go!?

?I won't even rise from my knees, till you have said yes!?

?If I say yes you will repent, and I shall repent, when it is too late!?

?We shall both bless the day, darling, when I pressed, and when you yielded.?

?Do you feel as confidently as you speak??

?You shall judge for yourself. I speak from what I have seen in my own family. Tell me what you think of our household at Frizinghall. Do my father and mother live unhappily together??

?Far from it?so far as I can see.?

?When my mother was a girl, Rachel (it is no secret in the family), she had loved as you love?she had given her heart to a man who was unworthy of her. She married my father, respecting him, admiring him, but nothing more. Your own eyes have seen the result. Is there no encouragement in it for you and for me??*

* See Betteredge's Narrative, chapter viii.

?You won't hurry me, Godfrey??

?My time shall be yours.?

?You won't ask me for more than I can give??

?My angel! I only ask you to give me yourself.?

?Take me!?

In those two words, she accepted him!

He had another burst—a burst of unholy rapture this time. He drew her nearer and nearer to him till her face touched his; and then?No! I really cannot prevail upon myself to carry this shocking disclosure any farther. Let me only say, that I tried to close my eyes before it happened, and that I was just one moment too late. I had calculated, you see, on her resisting. She submitted. To every right-feeling person of my own sex, volumes could say no more.

Even my innocence in such matters began to see its way to the end of the interview now. They understood each other so thoroughly by this time, that I fully expected to see them walk off together, arm in arm, to be married. There appeared, however, judging by Mr. Godfrey?s next words, to be one more trifling formality which it was necessary to observe. He seated himself?unforbidden this time?on the ottoman by her side. ?Shall I speak to your dear mother?? he asked. ?Or will you??

She declined both alternatives.

?Let my mother hear nothing from either of us, until she is better. I wish it to be kept a secret for the present, Godfrey. Go now, and come back this evening. We have been here alone together quite long enough.?

She rose, and, in rising, looked for the first time towards the little room in which my martyrdom was going on.

?Who has drawn those curtains?? she exclaimed. ?The room is close enough, as it is, without keeping the air out of it in that way.?

She advanced to the curtains. At the moment when she laid her hand on them—at the moment when the discovery of me appeared to be quite inevitable—the voice of the fresh-coloured young footman, on the stairs, suddenly suspended any further proceedings on her side or on mine. It was unmistakably the voice of a man in great alarm.

?Miss Rachel!? he called out, ?where are you, Miss Rachel??

She sprang back from the curtains, and ran to the door.

The footman came just inside the room. His ruddy colour was all gone. He said, ?Please to come downstairs, Miss! My lady has fainted, and we can?t bring her to again.?

In a moment more I was alone, and free to go downstairs in my turn, quite unobserved.

Mr. Godfrey passed me in the hall, hurrying out, to fetch the doctor. ?Go in, and help them!? he said, pointing to the room. I found Rachel on her knees by the sofa, with her mother?s head on her bosom. One look at my aunt?s face (knowing what I knew) was enough to warn me of the dreadful truth. I kept my thoughts to myself till the doctor came in.

It was not long before he arrived. He began by sending Rachel out of the room?and then he told the rest of us that Lady Verinder was no more. Serious persons, in search of proofs of hardened scepticism, may be interested in hearing that he showed no signs of remorse when he looked at Me.

At a later hour I peeped into the breakfast-room, and the library. My aunt had died without opening one of the letters which I had addressed to her. I was so shocked at this, that it never occurred to me, until some days afterwards, that she had also died without giving me my little legacy.

CHAPTER VI

(1.) ?Miss Clack presents her compliments to Mr. Franklin Blake; and, in sending him the fifth chapter of her humble narrative, begs to say that she feels quite unequal to enlarge as she could wish on an event so awful, under the circumstances, as Lady Verinder?s death. She has, therefore, attached to her own manuscripts, copious Extracts from precious publications in her possession, all bearing on this terrible subject. And may those Extracts (Miss Clack fervently hopes) sound as the blast of a trumpet in the ears of her respected kinsman, Mr. Franklin Blake.?

(2.) ?Mr. Franklin Blake presents his compliments to Miss Clack, and begs to thank her for the fifth chapter of her narrative. In returning the extracts sent with it, he will refrain from mentioning any personal objection which he may entertain to this species of literature, and will merely say that the proposed additions to the manuscript are not necessary to the fulfilment of the purpose that he has in view.?

(3.) ?Miss Clack begs to acknowledge the return of her Extracts. She affectionately reminds Mr. Franklin Blake that she is a Christian, and that it is, therefore, quite impossible for him to offend her. Miss C. persists in feeling the deepest interest in Mr. Blake, and pledges herself, on the first occasion when sickness may lay him low, to offer him the use of her Extracts for the second time. In the meanwhile she would be glad to know, before beginning the final chapters of her narrative, whether she may be permitted to make her humble contribution complete, by availing herself of the light which later discoveries have thrown on the mystery of the Moonstone.?

(4.) ?Mr. Franklin Blake is sorry to disappoint Miss Clack. He can only repeat the instructions which he had the honour of giving her when she began her narrative. She is requested to limit herself to her own individual experience of persons and events, as recorded in her diary. Later discoveries she will be good enough to leave to the pens of those persons who can write in the capacity of actual witnesses.?

(5.) ?Miss Clack is extremely sorry to trouble Mr. Franklin Blake with another letter. Her Extracts have been returned, and the expression of her matured views on the subject of the Moonstone has been forbidden. Miss Clack is painfully conscious that she ought (in the worldly

phrase) to feel herself put down. But, no?Miss C. has learnt Perseverance in the School of Adversity. Her object in writing is to know whether Mr. Blake (who prohibits everything else) prohibits the appearance of the present correspondence in Miss Clack?s narrative? Some explanation of the position in which Mr. Blake?s interference has placed her as an authoress, seems due on the ground of common justice. And Miss Clack, on her side, is most anxious that her letters should be produced to speak for themselves.?

(6.) ?Mr. Franklin Blake agrees to Miss Clack?s proposal, on the understanding that she will kindly consider this intimation of his consent as closing the correspondence between them.?

(7.) ?Miss Clack feels it an act of Christian duty (before the correspondence closes) to inform Mr. Franklin Blake that his last letter?evidently intended to offend her?has not succeeded in accomplishing the object of the writer. She affectionately requests Mr. Blake to retire to the privacy of his own room, and to consider with himself whether the training which can thus elevate a poor weak woman above the reach of insult, be not worthy of greater admiration than he is now disposed to feel for it. On being favoured with an intimation to that effect, Miss C. solemnly pledges herself to send back the complete series of her Extracts to Mr. Franklin Blake.?

[To this letter no answer was received. Comment is needless.

(Signed) DRUSILLA CLACK.]

CHAPTER VII

The foregoing correspondence will sufficiently explain why no choice is left to me but to pass over Lady Verinder?s death with the simple announcement of the fact which ends my fifth chapter.

Keeping myself for the future strictly within the limits of my own personal experience, I have next to relate that a month elapsed from the time of my aunt?s decease before Rachel Verinder and I met again. That meeting was the occasion of my spending a few days under the same roof with her. In the course of my visit, something happened, relative to her marriage-engagement with Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite, which is important enough to require special notice in these pages. When this last of many painful family circumstances has been disclosed, my task will be completed; for I shall then have told all that I know, as an actual (and most unwilling) witness of events.

My aunt?s remains were removed from London, and were buried in the little cemetery attached to the church in her own park. I was invited to the funeral with the rest of the family. But it was impossible (with my religious views) to rouse myself in a few days only from the shock which this death had caused me. I was informed, moreover, that the rector of Frizinghall was to read the service. Having myself in past times seen this clerical castaway making one of the players at Lady Verinder?s whist-table, I doubt, even if I had been fit to travel, whether I should have felt justified in attending the ceremony.

Lady Verinder's death left her daughter under the care of her brother-in-law, Mr. Ablewhite the elder. He was appointed guardian by the will, until his niece married, or came of age. Under these circumstances, Mr. Godfrey informed his father, I suppose, of the new relation in which he stood towards Rachel. At any rate, in ten days from my aunt's death, the secret of the marriage-engagement was no secret at all within the circle of the family, and the grand question for Mr. Ablewhite senior—another confirmed castaway!—was how to make himself and his authority most agreeable to the wealthy young lady who was going to marry his son.

Rachel gave him some trouble at the outset, about the choice of a place in which she could be prevailed upon to reside. The house in Montagu Square was associated with the calamity of her mother's death. The house in Yorkshire was associated with the scandalous affair of the lost Moonstone. Her guardian's own residence at Frizinghall was open to neither of these objections. But Rachel's presence in it, after her recent bereavement, operated as a check on the gaieties of her cousins, the Miss Ablewhites—and she herself requested that her visit might be deferred to a more favourable opportunity. It ended in a proposal, emanating from old Mr. Ablewhite, to try a furnished house at Brighton. His wife, an invalid daughter, and Rachel were to inhabit it together, and were to expect him to join them later in the season. They would see no society but a few old friends, and they would have his son Godfrey, travelling backwards and forwards by the London train, always at their disposal.

I describe this aimless flitting about from one place of residence to another—this insatiate restlessness of body and appalling stagnation of soul—merely with the view to arriving at results. The event which (under Providence) proved to be the means of bringing Rachel Verinder and myself together again, was no other than the hiring of the house at Brighton.

My Aunt Ablewhite is a large, silent, fair-complexioned woman, with one noteworthy point in her character. From the hour of her birth she has never been known to do anything for herself. She has gone through life, accepting everybody's help, and adopting everybody's opinions. A more hopeless person, in a spiritual point of view, I have never met with—there is absolutely, in this perplexing case, no obstructive material to work upon. Aunt Ablewhite would listen to the Grand Lama of Thibet exactly as she listens to Me, and would reflect his views quite as readily as she reflects mine. She found the furnished house at Brighton by stopping at an hotel in London, composing herself on a sofa, and sending for her son. She discovered the necessary servants by breakfasting in bed one morning (still at the hotel), and giving her maid a holiday on condition that the girl would begin enjoying herself by fetching Miss Clack. I found her placidly fanning herself in her dressing-gown at eleven o'clock. "Drusilla, dear, I want some servants. You are so clever—please get them for me." I looked round the untidy room. The church-bells were going for a week-day service; they suggested a word of affectionate remonstrance on my part. "Oh, aunt! I said sadly. "Is _this_ worthy of a Christian Englishwoman? Is the

passage from time to eternity to be made in _this_ manner?? My aunt answered, ?I'll put on my gown, Drusilla, if you will be kind enough to help me.? What was to be said after that? I have done wonders with murderesses?I have never advanced an inch with Aunt Ablewhite. ?Where is the list,? I asked, ?of the servants whom you require?? My aunt shook her head; she hadn't even energy enough to keep the list. ?Rachel has got it, dear,? she said, ?in the next room.? I went into the next room, and so saw Rachel again for the first time since we had parted in Montagu Square.

She looked pitifully small and thin in her deep mourning. If I attached any serious importance to such a perishable trifle as personal appearance, I might be inclined to add that hers was one of those unfortunate complexions which always suffer when not relieved by a border of white next the skin. But what are our complexions and our looks? Hindrances and pitfalls, dear girls, which beset us on our way to higher things! Greatly to my surprise, Rachel rose when I entered the room, and came forward to meet me with outstretched hand.

?I am glad to see you,? she said. ?Drusilla, I have been in the habit of speaking very foolishly and very rudely to you, on former occasions. I beg your pardon. I hope you will forgive me.?

My face, I suppose, betrayed the astonishment I felt at this. She coloured up for a moment, and then proceeded to explain herself.

?In my poor mother's lifetime,? she went on, ?her friends were not always my friends, too. Now I have lost her, my heart turns for comfort to the people she liked. She liked you. Try to be friends with me, Drusilla, if you can.?

To any rightly-constituted mind, the motive thus acknowledged was simply shocking. Here in Christian England was a young woman in a state of bereavement, with so little idea of where to look for true comfort, that she actually expected to find it among her mother's friends! Here was a relative of mine, awakened to a sense of her shortcomings towards others, under the influence, not of conviction and duty, but of sentiment and impulse! Most deplorable to think of?but, still, suggestive of something hopeful, to a person of my experience in plying the good work. There could be no harm, I thought, in ascertaining the extent of the change which the loss of her mother had wrought in Rachel's character. I decided, as a useful test, to probe her on the subject of her marriage-engagement to Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite.

Having first met her advances with all possible cordiality, I sat by her on the sofa, at her own request. We discussed family affairs and future plans?always excepting that one future plan which was to end in her marriage. Try as I might to turn the conversation that way, she resolutely declined to take the hint. Any open reference to the question, on my part, would have been premature at this early stage of our reconciliation. Besides, I had discovered all I wanted to know. She was no longer the reckless, defiant creature whom I had heard and seen, on the occasion of my martyrdom in Montagu Square. This was, of itself, enough to encourage me to take her future conversion in hand?beginning

with a few words of earnest warning directed against the hasty formation of the marriage tie, and so getting on to higher things. Looking at her, now, with this new interest?and calling to mind the headlong suddenness with which she had met Mr. Godfrey?s matrimonial views?I felt the solemn duty of interfering with a fervour which assured me that I should achieve no common results. Rapidity of proceeding was, as I believed, of importance in this case. I went back at once to the question of the servants wanted for the furnished house.

?Where is the list, dear??

Rachel produced it.

?Cook, kitchen-maid, housemaid, and footman,? I read. ?My dear Rachel, these servants are only wanted for a term?the term during which your guardian has taken the house. We shall have great difficulty in finding persons of character and capacity to accept a temporary engagement of that sort, if we try in London. Has the house in Brighton been found yet??

?Yes. Godfrey has taken it; and persons in the house wanted him to hire them as servants. He thought they would hardly do for us, and came back having settled nothing.?

?And you have no experience yourself in these matters, Rachel??

?None whatever.?

?And Aunt Ablewhite won?t exert herself??

?No, poor dear. Don?t blame her, Drusilla. I think she is the only really happy woman I have ever met with.?

?There are degrees in happiness, darling. We must have a little talk, some day, on that subject. In the meantime I will undertake to meet the difficulty about the servants. Your aunt will write a letter to the people of the house???

?She will sign a letter, if I write it for her, which comes to the same thing.?

?Quite the same thing. I shall get the letter, and I will go to Brighton tomorrow.?

?How extremely kind of you! We will join you as soon as you are ready for us. And you will stay, I hope, as _my_ guest. Brighton is so lively; you are sure to enjoy it.?

In those words the invitation was given, and the glorious prospect of interference was opened before me.

It was then the middle of the week. By Saturday afternoon the house was ready for them. In that short interval I had sifted, not the characters only, but the religious views as well, of all the disengaged servants

who applied to me, and had succeeded in making a selection which my conscience approved. I also discovered, and called on two serious friends of mine, residents in the town, to whom I knew I could confide the pious object which had brought me to Brighton. One of them? a clerical friend? kindly helped me to take sittings for our little party in the church in which he himself ministered. The other? a single lady, like myself? placed the resources of her library (composed throughout of precious publications) entirely at my disposal. I borrowed half-a-dozen works, all carefully chosen with a view to Rachel. When these had been judiciously distributed in the various rooms she would be likely to occupy, I considered that my preparations were complete. Sound doctrine in the servants who waited on her; sound doctrine in the minister who preached to her; sound doctrine in the books that lay on her table? such was the treble welcome which my zeal had prepared for the motherless girl! A heavenly composure filled my mind, on that Saturday afternoon, as I sat at the window waiting the arrival of my relatives. The giddy throng passed and repassed before my eyes. Alas! how many of them felt my exquisite sense of duty done? An awful question. Let us not pursue it.

Between six and seven the travellers arrived. To my indescribable surprise, they were escorted, not by Mr. Godfrey (as I had anticipated), but by the lawyer, Mr. Bruff.

?How do you do, Miss Clack?? he said. ?I mean to stay this time.?

That reference to the occasion on which I had obliged him to postpone his business to mine, when we were both visiting in Montagu Square, satisfied me that the old worldling had come to Brighton with some object of his own in view. I had prepared quite a little Paradise for my beloved Rachel? and here was the Serpent already!

?Godfrey was very much vexed, Drusilla, not to be able to come with us,? said my Aunt Ablewhite. ?There was something in the way which kept him in town. Mr. Bruff volunteered to take his place, and make a holiday of it till Monday morning. By-the-bye, Mr. Bruff, I?m ordered to take exercise, and I don?t like it. That,? added Aunt Ablewhite, pointing out of window to an invalid going by in a chair on wheels, drawn by a man, ?is my idea of exercise. If it?s air you want, you get it in your chair. And if it?s fatigue you want, I am sure it?s fatigue enough to look at the man.?

Rachel stood silent, at a window by herself, with her eyes fixed on the sea.

?Tired, love?? I inquired.

?No. Only a little out of spirits,? she answered. ?I have often seen the sea, on our Yorkshire coast, with that light on it. And I was thinking, Drusilla, of the days that can never come again.?

Mr. Bruff remained to dinner, and stayed through the evening. The more I saw of him, the more certain I felt that he had some private end to serve in coming to Brighton. I watched him carefully. He maintained the

same appearance of ease, and talked the same godless gossip, hour after hour, until it was time to take leave. As he shook hands with Rachel, I caught his hard and cunning eyes resting on her for a moment with a peculiar interest and attention. She was plainly concerned in the object that he had in view. He said nothing out of the common to her or to anyone on leaving. He invited himself to luncheon the next day, and then he went away to his hotel.

It was impossible the next morning to get my Aunt Ablewhite out of her dressing-gown in time for church. Her invalid daughter (suffering from nothing, in my opinion, but incurable laziness, inherited from her mother) announced that she meant to remain in bed for the day. Rachel and I went alone together to church. A magnificent sermon was preached by my gifted friend on the heathen indifference of the world to the sinfulness of little sins. For more than an hour his eloquence (assisted by his glorious voice) thundered through the sacred edifice. I said to Rachel, when we came out, "Has it found its way to your heart, dear?" And she answered, "No; it has only made my head ache." This might have been discouraging to some people; but, once embarked on a career of manifest usefulness, nothing discourages Me.

We found Aunt Ablewhite and Mr. Bruff at luncheon. When Rachel declined eating anything, and gave as a reason for it that she was suffering from a headache, the lawyer's cunning instantly saw, and seized, the chance that she had given him.

"There is only one remedy for a headache," said this horrible old man. "A walk, Miss Rachel, is the thing to cure you. I am entirely at your service, if you will honour me by accepting my arm."

"With the greatest pleasure. A walk is the very thing I was longing for."

"It's past two," I gently suggested. "And the afternoon service, Rachel, begins at three."

"How can you expect me to go to church again," she asked, petulantly, "with such a headache as mine?"

Mr. Bruff officiously opened the door for her. In another minute more they were both out of the house. I don't know when I have felt the solemn duty of interfering so strongly as I felt it at that moment. But what was to be done? Nothing was to be done but to interfere at the first opportunity, later in the day.

On my return from the afternoon service I found that they had just got back. One look at them told me that the lawyer had said what he wanted to say. I had never before seen Rachel so silent and so thoughtful. I had never before seen Mr. Bruff pay her such devoted attention, and look at her with such marked respect. He had (or pretended that he had) an engagement to dinner that day?and he took an early leave of us all; intending to go back to London by the first train the next morning.

"Are you sure of your own resolution?" he said to Rachel at the door.

?Quite sure,? she answered?and so they parted.

The moment his back was turned, Rachel withdrew to her own room. She never appeared at dinner. Her maid (the person with the cap-ribbons) was sent downstairs to announce that her headache had returned. I ran up to her and made all sorts of sisterly offers through the door. It was locked, and she kept it locked. Plenty of obstructive material to work on here! I felt greatly cheered and stimulated by her locking the door.

When her cup of tea went up to her the next morning, I followed it in. I sat by her bedside and said a few earnest words. She listened with languid civility. I noticed my serious friend?s precious publications huddled together on a table in a corner. Had she chanced to look into them??I asked. Yes?and they had not interested her. Would she allow me to read a few passages of the deepest interest, which had probably escaped her eye? No, not now?she had other things to think of. She gave these answers, with her attention apparently absorbed in folding and refolding the frilling on her nightgown. It was plainly necessary to rouse her by some reference to those worldly interests which she still had at heart.

?Do you know, love,? I said, ?I had an odd fancy, yesterday, about Mr. Bruff? I thought, when I saw you after your walk with him, that he had been telling you some bad news.?

Her fingers dropped from the frilling of her nightgown, and her fierce black eyes flashed at me.

?Quite the contrary!? she said. ?It was news I was interested in hearing?and I am deeply indebted to Mr. Bruff for telling me of it.?

?Yes?? I said, in a tone of gentle interest.

Her fingers went back to the frilling, and she turned her head sullenly away from me. I had been met in this manner, in the course of plying the good work, hundreds of times. She merely stimulated me to try again. In my dauntless zeal for her welfare, I ran the great risk, and openly alluded to her marriage engagement.

?News you were interested in hearing?? I repeated. ?I suppose, my dear Rachel, that must be news of Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite??

She started up in the bed, and turned deadly pale. It was evidently on the tip of her tongue to retort on me with the unbridled insolence of former times. She checked herself?laid her head back on the pillow?considered a minute?and then answered in these remarkable words:

?_I shall never marry Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite._?

It was my turn to start at that.

?What can you possibly mean?? I exclaimed. ?The marriage is considered

by the whole family as a settled thing!?

?Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite is expected here today,? she said doggedly.

?Wait till he comes?and you will see.?

?But my dear Rachel???

She rang the bell at the head of her bed. The person with the cap-ribbons appeared.

?Penelope! my bath.?

Let me give her her due. In the state of my feelings at that moment, I do sincerely believe that she had hit on the only possible way of forcing me to leave the room.

By the mere worldly mind my position towards Rachel might have been viewed as presenting difficulties of no ordinary kind. I had reckoned on leading her to higher things by means of a little earnest exhortation on the subject of her marriage. And now, if she was to be believed, no such event as her marriage was to take place at all. But ah, my friends! a working Christian of my experience (with an evangelising prospect before her) takes broader views than these. Supposing Rachel really broke off the marriage, on which the Ablewhites, father and son, counted as a settled thing, what would be the result? It could only end, if she held firm, in an exchanging of hard words and bitter accusations on both sides. And what would be the effect on Rachel when the stormy interview was over? A salutary moral depression would be the effect. Her pride would be exhausted, her stubbornness would be exhausted, by the resolute resistance which it was in her character to make under the circumstances. She would turn for sympathy to the nearest person who had sympathy to offer. And I was that nearest person?brimful of comfort, charged to overflowing with seasonable and reviving words. Never had the evangelising prospect looked brighter, to _my_ eyes, than it looked now.

She came down to breakfast, but she ate nothing, and hardly uttered a word.

After breakfast she wandered listlessly from room to room?then suddenly roused herself, and opened the piano. The music she selected to play was of the most scandalously profane sort, associated with performances on the stage which it curdles one?s blood to think of. It would have been premature to interfere with her at such a time as this. I privately ascertained the hour at which Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite was expected, and then I escaped the music by leaving the house.

Being out alone, I took the opportunity of calling upon my two resident friends. It was an indescribable luxury to find myself indulging in earnest conversation with serious persons. Infinitely encouraged and refreshed, I turned my steps back again to the house, in excellent time to await the arrival of our expected visitor. I entered the dining-room, always empty at that hour of the day, and found myself face to face with Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite!

He made no attempt to fly the place. Quite the contrary. He advanced to meet me with the utmost eagerness.

“Dear Miss Clack, I have been only waiting to see _you!_ Chance set me free of my London engagements today sooner than I had expected, and I have got here, in consequence, earlier than my appointed time.”

Not the slightest embarrassment encumbered his explanation, though this was his first meeting with me after the scene in Montagu Square. He was not aware, it is true, of my having been a witness of that scene. But he knew, on the other hand, that my attendances at the Mothers’ Small-Clothes, and my relations with friends attached to other charities, must have informed me of his shameless neglect of his Ladies and of his Poor. And yet there he was before me, in full possession of his charming voice and his irresistible smile!

“Have you seen Rachel yet?” I asked.

He sighed gently, and took me by the hand. I should certainly have snatched my hand away, if the manner in which he gave his answer had not paralysed me with astonishment.

“I have seen Rachel,” he said with perfect tranquillity. “You are aware, dear friend, that she was engaged to me? Well, she has taken a sudden resolution to break the engagement. Reflection has convinced her that she will best consult her welfare and mine by retracting a rash promise, and leaving me free to make some happier choice elsewhere. That is the only reason she will give, and the only answer she will make to every question that I can ask of her.”

“What have you done on your side?” I inquired. “Have you submitted?”

“Yes,” he said with the most unruffled composure, “I have submitted.”

His conduct, under the circumstances, was so utterly inconceivable, that I stood bewildered with my hand in his. It is a piece of rudeness to stare at anybody, and it is an act of indelicacy to stare at a gentleman. I committed both those improprieties. And I said, as if in a dream, “What does it mean?”

“Permit me to tell you,” he replied. “And suppose we sit down?”

He led me to a chair. I have an indistinct remembrance that he was very affectionate. I don’t think he put his arm round my waist to support me—but I am not sure. I was quite helpless, and his ways with ladies were very endearing. At any rate, we sat down. I can answer for that, if I can answer for nothing more.

CHAPTER VIII

“I have lost a beautiful girl, an excellent social position, and a handsome income,” Mr. Godfrey began; “and I have submitted to it

without a struggle. What can be the motive for such extraordinary conduct as that? My precious friend, there is no motive.?

?No motive?? I repeated.

?Let me appeal, my dear Miss Clack, to your experience of children,? he went on. ?A child pursues a certain course of conduct. You are greatly struck by it, and you attempt to get at the motive. The dear little thing is incapable of telling you its motive. You might as well ask the grass why it grows, or the birds why they sing. Well! in this matter, I am like the dear little thing?like the grass?like the birds. I don?t know why I made a proposal of marriage to Miss Verinder. I don?t know why I have shamefully neglected my dear Ladies. I don?t know why I have apostatised from the Mothers? Small-Clothes. You say to the child, Why have you been naughty? And the little angel puts its finger into its mouth, and doesn?t know. My case exactly, Miss Clack! I couldn?t confess it to anybody else. I feel impelled to confess it to _you!_?

I began to recover myself. A mental problem was involved here. I am deeply interested in mental problems?and I am not, it is thought, without some skill in solving them.

?Best of friends, exert your intellect, and help me,? he proceeded. ?Tell me?why does a time come when these matrimonial proceedings of mine begin to look like something done in a dream? Why does it suddenly occur to me that my true happiness is in helping my dear Ladies, in going my modest round of useful work, in saying my few earnest words when called on by my Chairman? What do I want with a position? I have got a position! What do I want with an income? I can pay for my bread and cheese, and my nice little lodging, and my two coats a year. What do I want with Miss Verinder? She has told me with her own lips (this, dear lady, is between ourselves) that she loves another man, and that her only idea in marrying me is to try and put that other man out of her head. What a horrid union is this! Oh, dear me, what a horrid union is this! Such are my reflections, Miss Clack, on my way to Brighton. I approach Rachel with the feeling of a criminal who is going to receive his sentence. When I find that she has changed her mind too?when I hear her propose to break the engagement?I experience (there is no sort of doubt about it) a most overpowering sense of relief. A month ago I was pressing her rapturously to my bosom. An hour ago, the happiness of knowing that I shall never press her again, intoxicates me like strong liquor. The thing seems impossible?the thing can?t be. And yet there are the facts, as I had the honour of stating them when we first sat down together in these two chairs. I have lost a beautiful girl, an excellent social position, and a handsome income; and I have submitted to it without a struggle. Can _you_ account for it, dear friend? It?s quite beyond _me_.?

His magnificent head sank on his breast, and he gave up his own mental problem in despair.

I was deeply touched. The case (if I may speak as a spiritual physician) was now quite plain to me. It is no uncommon event, in the experience of us all, to see the possessors of exalted ability

occasionally humbled to the level of the most poorly-gifted people about them. The object, no doubt, in the wise economy of Providence, is to remind greatness that it is mortal and that the power which has conferred it can also take it away. It was now to my mind easy to discern one of these salutary humiliations in the deplorable proceedings on dear Mr. Godfrey's part, of which I had been the unseen witness. And it was equally easy to recognise the welcome reappearance of his own finer nature in the horror with which he recoiled from the idea of a marriage with Rachel, and in the charming eagerness which he showed to return to his Ladies and his Poor.

I put this view before him in a few simple and sisterly words. His joy was beautiful to see. He compared himself, as I went on, to a lost man emerging from the darkness into the light. When I answered for a loving reception of him at the Mothers' Small-Clothes, the grateful heart of our Christian Hero overflowed. He pressed my hands alternately to his lips. Overwhelmed by the exquisite triumph of having got him back among us, I let him do what he liked with my hands. I closed my eyes. I felt my head, in an ecstasy of spiritual self-forgetfulness, sinking on his shoulder. In a moment more I should certainly have swooned away in his arms, but for an interruption from the outer world, which brought me to myself again. A horrid rattling of knives and forks sounded outside the door, and the footman came in to lay the table for luncheon.

Mr. Godfrey started up, and looked at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"How time flies with _you!_" he exclaimed. "I shall barely catch the train."

I ventured on asking why he was in such a hurry to get back to town. His answer reminded me of family difficulties that were still to be reconciled, and of family disagreements that were yet to come.

"I have heard from my father," he said. "Business obliges him to leave Frizinghall for London today, and he proposes coming on here, either this evening or tomorrow. I must tell him what has happened between Rachel and me. His heart is set on our marriage; there will be great difficulty, I fear, in reconciling him to the breaking-off of the engagement. I must stop him, for all our sakes, from coming here till he _is_ reconciled. Best and dearest of friends, we shall meet again!"

With those words he hurried out. In equal haste on my side, I ran upstairs to compose myself in my own room before meeting Aunt Ablewhite and Rachel at the luncheon-table.

I am well aware to dwell for a moment yet on the subject of Mr. Godfrey; that the all-profaning opinion of the world has charged him with having his own private reasons for releasing Rachel from her engagement, at the first opportunity she gave him. It has also reached my ears, that his anxiety to recover his place in my estimation has been attributed in certain quarters, to a mercenary eagerness to make his peace (through me) with a venerable committee-woman at the Mothers' Small-Clothes, abundantly blessed with the goods of this world, and a beloved and intimate friend of my own. I only notice these odious

slanders for the sake of declaring that they never had a moment's influence on my mind. In obedience to my instructions, I have exhibited the fluctuations in my opinion of our Christian Hero, exactly as I find them recorded in my diary. In justice to myself, let me here add that, once reinstated in his place in my estimation, my gifted friend never lost that place again. I write with the tears in my eyes, burning to say more. But no? I am cruelly limited to my actual experience of persons and things. In less than a month from the time of which I am now writing, events in the money-market (which diminished even _my_ miserable little income) forced me into foreign exile, and left me with nothing but a loving remembrance of Mr. Godfrey which the slander of the world has assailed, and assailed in vain.

Let me dry my eyes, and return to my narrative.

I went downstairs to luncheon, naturally anxious to see how Rachel was affected by her release from her marriage engagement.

It appeared to me?but I own I am a poor authority in such matters?that the recovery of her freedom had set her thinking again of that other man whom she loved, and that she was furious with herself for not being able to control a revulsion of feeling of which she was secretly ashamed. Who was the man? I had my suspicions?but it was needless to waste time in idle speculation. When I had converted her, she would, as a matter of course, have no concealments from Me. I should hear all about the man; I should hear all about the Moonstone. If I had had no higher object in stirring her up to a sense of spiritual things, the motive of relieving her mind of its guilty secrets would have been enough of itself to encourage me to go on.

Aunt Ablewhite took her exercise in the afternoon in an invalid chair. Rachel accompanied her. ?I wish I could drag the chair,? she broke out, recklessly. ?I wish I could fatigue myself till I was ready to drop.?

She was in the same humour in the evening. I discovered in one of my friend's precious publications?the _Life, Letters, and Labours of Miss Jane Ann Stamper_, forty-fourth edition?passages which bore with a marvellous appropriateness on Rachel's present position. Upon my proposing to read them, she went to the piano. Conceive how little she must have known of serious people, if she supposed that my patience was to be exhausted in that way! I kept Miss Jane Ann Stamper by me, and waited for events with the most unfaltering trust in the future.

Old Mr. Ablewhite never made his appearance that night. But I knew the importance which his worldly greed attached to his son's marriage with Miss Verinder?and I felt a positive conviction (do what Mr. Godfrey might to prevent it) that we should see him the next day. With his interference in the matter, the storm on which I had counted would certainly come, and the salutary exhaustion of Rachel's resisting powers would as certainly follow. I am not ignorant that old Mr. Ablewhite has the reputation generally (especially among his inferiors) of being a remarkably good-natured man. According to my observation of him, he deserves his reputation as long as he has his own way, and not a moment longer.

The next day, exactly as I had foreseen, Aunt Ablewhite was as near to being astonished as her nature would permit, by the sudden appearance of her husband. He had barely been a minute in the house, before he was followed, to _my_ astonishment this time, by an unexpected complication in the shape of Mr. Bruff.

I never remember feeling the presence of the lawyer to be more unwelcome than I felt it at that moment. He looked ready for anything in the way of an obstructive proceeding?capable even of keeping the peace with Rachel for one of the combatants!

?This is a pleasant surprise, sir,? said Mr. Ablewhite, addressing himself with his deceptive cordiality to Mr. Bruff. ?When I left your office yesterday, I didn?t expect to have the honour of seeing you at Brighton today.?

?I turned over our conversation in my mind, after you had gone,? replied Mr. Bruff. ?And it occurred to me that I might perhaps be of some use on this occasion. I was just in time to catch the train, and I had no opportunity of discovering the carriage in which you were travelling.?

Having given that explanation, he seated himself by Rachel. I retired modestly to a corner?with Miss Jane Ann Stamper on my lap, in case of emergency. My aunt sat at the window; placidly fanning herself as usual. Mr. Ablewhite stood up in the middle of the room, with his bald head much pinker than I had ever seen it yet, and addressed himself in the most affectionate manner to his niece.

?Rachel, my dear,? he said, ?I have heard some very extraordinary news from Godfrey. And I am here to inquire about it. You have a sitting-room of your own in this house. Will you honour me by showing me the way to it??

Rachel never moved. Whether she was determined to bring matters to a crisis, or whether she was prompted by some private sign from Mr. Bruff, is more than I can tell. She declined doing old Mr. Ablewhite the honour of conducting him into her sitting-room.

?Whatever you wish to say to me,? she answered, ?can be said here?in the presence of my relatives, and in the presence? (she looked at Mr. Bruff) ?of my mother?s trusted old friend.?

?Just as you please, my dear,? said the amiable Mr. Ablewhite. He took a chair. The rest of them looked at his face?as if they expected it, after seventy years of worldly training, to speak the truth. I looked at the top of his bald head; having noticed on other occasions that the temper which was really in him had a habit of registering itself _there_.

?Some weeks ago,? pursued the old gentleman, ?my son informed me that Miss Verinder had done him the honour to engage herself to marry him. Is it possible, Rachel, that he can have misinterpreted?or presumed

upon?what you really said to him??

?Certainly not,? she replied. ?I did engage myself to marry him.?

?Very frankly answered!? said Mr. Ablewhite. ?And most satisfactory, my dear, so far. In respect to what happened some weeks since, Godfrey has made no mistake. The error is evidently in what he told me yesterday. I begin to see it now. You and he have had a lovers? quarrel?and my foolish son has interpreted it seriously. Ah! I should have known better than that at his age.?

The fallen nature in Rachel?the mother Eve, so to speak?began to chafe at this.

?Pray let us understand each other, Mr. Ablewhite,? she said. ?Nothing in the least like a quarrel took place yesterday between your son and me. If he told you that I proposed breaking off our marriage engagement, and that he agreed on his side?he told you the truth.?

The self-registering thermometer at the top of Mr. Ablewhite?s bald head began to indicate a rise of temper. His face was more amiable than ever?but _there_ was the pink at the top of his face, a shade deeper already!

?Come, come, my dear!? he said, in his most soothing manner, ?now don?t be angry, and don?t be hard on poor Godfrey! He has evidently said some unfortunate thing. He was always clumsy from a child?but he means well, Rachel, he means well!?

?Mr. Ablewhite, I have either expressed myself very badly, or you are purposely mistaking me. Once for all, it is a settled thing between your son and myself that we remain, for the rest of our lives, cousins and nothing more. Is that plain enough??

The tone in which she said those words made it impossible, even for old Mr. Ablewhite, to mistake her any longer. His thermometer went up another degree, and his voice when he next spoke, ceased to be the voice which is appropriate to a notoriously good-natured man.

?I am to understand, then,? he said, ?that your marriage engagement is broken off??

?You are to understand that, Mr. Ablewhite, if you please.?

?I am also to take it as a matter of fact that the proposal to withdraw from the engagement came, in the first instance, from _you?_?

?It came, in the first instance, from me. And it met, as I have told you, with your son?s consent and approval.?

The thermometer went up to the top of the register. I mean, the pink changed suddenly to scarlet.

?My son is a mean-spirited hound!? cried this furious old worldling.

?In justice to myself as his father?not in justice to _him_?I beg to ask you, Miss Verinder, what complaint you have to make of Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite??

Here Mr. Bruff interfered for the first time.

?You are not bound to answer that question,? he said to Rachel.

Old Mr. Ablewhite fastened on him instantly.

?Don?t forget, sir,? he said, ?that you are a self-invited guest here. Your interference would have come with a better grace if you had waited until it was asked for.?

Mr. Bruff took no notice. The smooth varnish on _his_ wicked old face never cracked. Rachel thanked him for the advice he had given to her, and then turned to old Mr. Ablewhite?preserving her composure in a manner which (having regard to her age and her sex) was simply awful to see.

?Your son put the same question to me which you have just asked,? she said. ?I had only one answer for him, and I have only one answer for you. I proposed that we should release each other, because reflection had convinced me that I should best consult his welfare and mine by retracting a rash promise, and leaving him free to make his choice elsewhere.?

?What has my son done?? persisted Mr. Ablewhite. ?I have a right to know that. What has my son done??

She persisted just as obstinately on her side.

?You have had the only explanation which I think it necessary to give to you, or to him,? she answered.

?In plain English, it?s your sovereign will and pleasure, Miss Verinder, to jilt my son??

Rachel was silent for a moment. Sitting close behind her, I heard her sigh. Mr. Bruff took her hand, and gave it a little squeeze. She recovered herself, and answered Mr. Ablewhite as boldly as ever.

?I have exposed myself to worse misconstruction than that,? she said. ?And I have borne it patiently. The time has gone by, when you could mortify me by calling me a jilt.?

She spoke with a bitterness of tone which satisfied me that the scandal of the Moonstone had been in some way recalled to her mind. ?I have no more to say,? she added, wearily, not addressing the words to anyone in particular, and looking away from us all, out of the window that was nearest to her.

Mr. Ablewhite got upon his feet, and pushed away his chair so violently that it toppled over and fell on the floor.

‘I have something more to say on my side,’ he announced, bringing down the flat of his hand on the table with a bang. ‘I have to say that if my son doesn’t feel this insult, I do!’

Rachel started, and looked at him in sudden surprise.

‘Insult?’ she repeated. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Insult!’ reiterated Mr. Ablewhite. ‘I know your motive, Miss Verinder, for breaking your promise to my son! I know it as certainly as if you had confessed it in so many words. Your cursed family pride is insulting Godfrey, as it insulted me when I married your aunt. Her family—her beggarly family—turned their backs on her for marrying an honest man, who had made his own place and won his own fortune. I had no ancestors. I wasn’t descended from a set of cut-throat scoundrels who lived by robbery and murder. I couldn’t point to the time when the Ablewhites hadn’t a shirt to their backs, and couldn’t sign their own names. Ha! ha! I wasn’t good enough for the Herncastles, when I married. And now it comes to the pinch, my son isn’t good enough for you. I suspected it, all along. You have got the Herncastle blood in you, my young lady! I suspected it all along.’

‘A very unworthy suspicion,’ remarked Mr. Bruff. ‘I am astonished that you have the courage to acknowledge it.’

Before Mr. Ablewhite could find words to answer in, Rachel spoke in a tone of the most exasperating contempt.

‘Surely,’ she said to the lawyer, ‘this is beneath notice. If he can think in that way, let us leave him to think as he pleases.’

From scarlet, Mr. Ablewhite was now becoming purple. He gasped for breath; he looked backwards and forwards from Rachel to Mr. Bruff in such a frenzy of rage with both of them that he didn’t know which to attack first. His wife, who had sat impenetrably fanning herself up to this time, began to be alarmed, and attempted, quite uselessly, to quiet him. I had, throughout this distressing interview, felt more than one inward call to interfere with a few earnest words, and had controlled myself under a dread of the possible results, very unworthy of a Christian Englishwoman who looks, not to what is meanly prudent, but to what is morally right. At the point at which matters had now arrived, I rose superior to all considerations of mere expediency. If I had contemplated interposing any remonstrance of my own humble devising, I might possibly have still hesitated. But the distressing domestic emergency which now confronted me, was most marvellously and beautifully provided for in the Correspondence of Miss Jane Ann Stamper—Letter one thousand and one, on ‘Peace in Families.’ I rose in my modest corner, and I opened my precious book.

‘Dear Mr. Ablewhite,’ I said, ‘one word!’

When I first attracted the attention of the company by rising, I could see that he was on the point of saying something rude to me. My

sisterly form of address checked him. He stared at me in heathen astonishment.

‘As an affectionate well-wisher and friend,’ I proceeded, ‘and as one long accustomed to arouse, convince, prepare, enlighten, and fortify others, permit me to take the most pardonable of all liberties—the liberty of composing your mind.’

He began to recover himself; he was on the point of breaking out—he would have broken out, with anybody else. But my voice (habitually gentle) possesses a high note or so, in emergencies. In this emergency, I felt imperatively called upon to have the highest voice of the two.

I held up my precious book before him; I rapped the open page impressively with my forefinger. ‘Not my words!’ I exclaimed, in a burst of fervent interruption. ‘Oh, don’t suppose that I claim attention for My humble words! Manna in the wilderness, Mr. Ablewhite! Dew on the parched earth! Words of comfort, words of wisdom, words of love—the blessed, blessed, blessed words of Miss Jane Ann Stamper!’

I was stopped there by a momentary impediment of the breath. Before I could recover myself, this monster in human form shouted out furiously,

‘Miss Jane Ann Stamper be ???’

It is impossible for me to write the awful word, which is here represented by a blank. I shrieked as it passed his lips; I flew to my little bag on the side table; I shook out all my tracts; I seized the one particular tract on profane swearing, entitled, ‘Hush, for Heaven’s Sake!’; I handed it to him with an expression of agonised entreaty. He tore it in two, and threw it back at me across the table. The rest of them rose in alarm, not knowing what might happen next. I instantly sat down again in my corner. There had once been an occasion, under somewhat similar circumstances, when Miss Jane Ann Stamper had been taken by the two shoulders and turned out of a room. I waited, inspired by her spirit, for a repetition of her martyrdom.

But no—it was not to be. His wife was the next person whom he addressed. ‘Who?who?who,’ he said, stammering with rage, ‘who asked this impudent fanatic into the house? Did you?’

Before Aunt Ablewhite could say a word, Rachel answered for her.

‘Miss Clack is here,’ she said, ‘as my guest.’

Those words had a singular effect on Mr. Ablewhite. They suddenly changed him from a man in a state of red-hot anger to a man in a state of icy-cold contempt. It was plain to everybody that Rachel had said something—short and plain as her answer had been—which gave him the upper hand of her at last.

‘Oh?’ he said. ‘Miss Clack is here as your guest?in my house?’

It was Rachel’s turn to lose her temper at that. Her colour rose, and

her eyes brightened fiercely. She turned to the lawyer, and, pointing to Mr. Ablewhite, asked haughtily, "What does he mean?"

Mr. Bruff interfered for the third time.

"You appear to forget," he said, addressing Mr. Ablewhite, "that you took this house as Miss Verinder's guardian, for Miss Verinder's use."

"Not quite so fast," interposed Mr. Ablewhite. "I have a last word to say, which I should have said some time since, if this?" He looked my way, pondering what abominable name he should call me?" "if this Rampant Spinster had not interrupted us. I beg to inform you, sir, that, if my son is not good enough to be Miss Verinder's husband, I cannot presume to consider his father good enough to be Miss Verinder's guardian. Understand, if you please, that I refuse to accept the position which is offered to me by Lady Verinder's will. In your legal phrase, I decline to act. This house has necessarily been hired in my name. I take the entire responsibility of it on my shoulders. It is my house. I can keep it, or let it, just as I please. I have no wish to hurry Miss Verinder. On the contrary, I beg her to remove her guest and her luggage, at her own entire convenience." He made a low bow, and walked out of the room.

That was Mr. Ablewhite's revenge on Rachel, for refusing to marry his son!

The instant the door closed, Aunt Ablewhite exhibited a phenomenon which silenced us all. She became endowed with energy enough to cross the room!

"My dear," she said, taking Rachel by the hand, "I should be ashamed of my husband, if I didn't know that it is his temper which has spoken to you, and not himself. You," continued Aunt Ablewhite, turning on me in my corner with another endowment of energy, in her looks this time instead of her limbs?" "you are the mischievous person who irritated him. I hope I shall never see you or your tracts again." She went back to Rachel and kissed her. "I beg your pardon, my dear," she said, "in my husband's name. What can I do for you?"

Consistently perverse in everything?capricious and unreasonable in all the actions of her life?Rachel melted into tears at those commonplace words, and returned her aunt's kiss in silence.

"If I may be permitted to answer for Miss Verinder," said Mr. Bruff, "might I ask you, Mrs. Ablewhite, to send Penelope down with her mistress's bonnet and shawl. Leave us ten minutes together," he added, in a lower tone, "and you may rely on my settling matters right, to your satisfaction as well as to Rachel's."

The trust of the family in this man was something wonderful to see. Without a word more, on her side, Aunt Ablewhite left the room.

"Ah!" said Mr. Bruff, looking after her. "The Herncastle blood has its drawbacks, I admit. But there is something in good breeding after

all!?

Having made that purely worldly remark, he looked hard at my corner, as if he expected me to go. My interest in Rachel—an infinitely higher interest than his—riveted me to my chair.

Mr. Bruff gave it up, exactly as he had given it up at Aunt Verinder's, in Montagu Square. He led Rachel to a chair by the window, and spoke to her there.

“My dear young lady,” he said, “Mr. Ablewhite's conduct has naturally shocked you, and taken you by surprise. If it was worth while to contest the question with such a man, we might soon show him that he is not to have things all his own way. But it isn't worth while. You were quite right in what you said just now; he is beneath our notice.”

He stopped, and looked round at my corner. I sat there quite immovable, with my tracts at my elbow and with Miss Jane Ann Stamper on my lap.

“You know,” he resumed, turning back again to Rachel, “that it was part of your poor mother's fine nature always to see the best of the people about her, and never the worst. She named her brother-in-law your guardian because she believed in him, and because she thought it would please her sister. I had never liked Mr. Ablewhite myself, and I induced your mother to let me insert a clause in the will, empowering her executors, in certain events, to consult with me about the appointment of a new guardian. One of those events has happened today; and I find myself in a position to end all these dry business details, I hope agreeably, with a message from my wife. Will you honour Mrs. Bruff by becoming her guest? And will you remain under my roof, and be one of my family, until we wise people have laid our heads together, and have settled what is to be done next?”

At those words, I rose to interfere. Mr. Bruff had done exactly what I had dreaded he would do, when he asked Mrs. Ablewhite for Rachel's bonnet and shawl.

Before I could interpose a word, Rachel had accepted his invitation in the warmest terms. If I suffered the arrangement thus made between them to be carried out—if she once passed the threshold of Mr. Bruff's door—farewell to the fondest hope of my life, the hope of bringing my lost sheep back to the fold! The bare idea of such a calamity as this quite overwhelmed me. I cast the miserable trammels of worldly discretion to the winds, and spoke with the fervour that filled me, in the words that came first.

“Stop!?” I said—“stop! I must be heard. Mr. Bruff! you are not related to her, and I am. I invite her—I summon the executors to appoint me guardian. Rachel, dearest Rachel, I offer you my modest home; come to London by the next train, love, and share it with me!”

Mr. Bruff said nothing. Rachel looked at me with a cruel astonishment which she made no effort to conceal.

"You are very kind, Drusilla," she said. "I shall hope to visit you whenever I happen to be in London. But I have accepted Mr. Bruff's invitation, and I think it will be best, for the present, if I remain under Mr. Bruff's care."

"Oh, don't say so!" I pleaded. "I can't part with you, Rachel! I can't part with you!"

I tried to fold her in my arms. But she drew back. My fervour did not communicate itself; it only alarmed her.

"Surely," she said, "this is a very unnecessary display of agitation? I don't understand it."

"No more do I," said Mr. Bruff.

Their hardness—their hideous, worldly hardness—revolted me.

"Oh, Rachel! Rachel!" I burst out. "Haven't you seen _yet_, that my heart yearns to make a Christian of you? Has no inner voice told you that I am trying to do for _you_, what I was trying to do for your dear mother when death snatched her out of my hands?"

Rachel advanced a step nearer, and looked at me very strangely.

"I don't understand your reference to my mother," she said. "Miss Clack, will you have the goodness to explain yourself?"

Before I could answer, Mr. Bruff came forward, and offering his arm to Rachel, tried to lead her out of the room.

"You had better not pursue the subject, my dear," he said. "And Miss Clack had better not explain herself."

If I had been a stock or a stone, such an interference as this must have roused me into testifying to the truth. I put Mr. Bruff aside indignantly with my own hand, and, in solemn and suitable language, I stated the view with which sound doctrine does not scruple to regard the awful calamity of dying unprepared.

Rachel started back from me—I blush to write—with a scream of horror.

"Come away!" she said to Mr. Bruff. "Come away, for God's sake, before that woman can say any more! Oh, think of my poor mother's harmless, useful, beautiful life! You were at the funeral, Mr. Bruff; you saw how everybody loved her; you saw the poor helpless people crying at her grave over the loss of their best friend. And that wretch stands there, and tries to make me doubt that my mother, who was an angel on earth, is an angel in heaven now! Don't stop to talk about it! Come away! It stifles me to breathe the same air with her! It frightens me to feel that we are in the same room together!"

Deaf to all remonstrance, she ran to the door.

At the same moment, her maid entered with her bonnet and shawl. She huddled them on anyhow. "Pack my things," she said, "and bring them to Mr. Bruff's." I attempted to approach her?I was shocked and grieved, but, it is needless to say, not offended. I only wished to say to her, "May your hard heart be softened! I freely forgive you!" She pulled down her veil, and tore her shawl away from my hand, and, hurrying out, shut the door in my face. I bore the insult with my customary fortitude. I remember it now with my customary superiority to all feeling of offence.

Mr. Bruff had his parting word of mockery for me, before he too hurried out, in his turn.

"You had better not have explained yourself, Miss Clack," he said, and bowed, and left the room.

The person with the cap-ribbons followed.

"It's easy to see who has set them all by the ears together," she said. "I'm only a poor servant?but I declare I'm ashamed of you!" She too went out, and banged the door after her.

I was left alone in the room. Reviled by them all, deserted by them all, I was left alone in the room.

Is there more to be added to this plain statement of facts?to this touching picture of a Christian persecuted by the world? No! my diary reminds me that one more of the many chequered chapters in my life ends here. From that day forth, I never saw Rachel Verinder again. She had my forgiveness at the time when she insulted me. She has had my prayerful good wishes ever since. And when I die?to complete the return on my part of good for evil?she will have the Life, Letters, and Labours of Miss Jane Ann Stamper left her as a legacy by my will.

SECOND NARRATIVE.

Contributed by Mathew Bruff, Solicitor, of Gray's Inn Square.

CHAPTER I

My fair friend, Miss Clack, having laid down the pen, there are two reasons for my taking it up next, in my turn.

In the first place, I am in a position to throw the necessary light on certain points of interest which have thus far been left in the dark. Miss Verinder had her own private reason for breaking her marriage engagement?and I was at the bottom of it. Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite had his own private reason for withdrawing all claim to the hand of his charming cousin?and I discovered what it was.

In the second place, it was my good or ill fortune, I hardly know which, to find myself personally involved?at the period of which I am now writing?in the mystery of the Indian Diamond. I had the honour of

an interview, at my own office, with an Oriental stranger of distinguished manners, who was no other, unquestionably, than the chief of the three Indians. Add to this, that I met with the celebrated traveller, Mr. Murthwaite, the day afterwards, and that I held a conversation with him on the subject of the Moonstone, which has a very important bearing on later events. And there you have the statement of my claims to fill the position which I occupy in these pages.

The true story of the broken marriage engagement comes first in point of time, and must therefore take the first place in the present narrative. Tracing my way back along the chain of events, from one end to the other, I find it necessary to open the scene, oddly enough as you will think, at the bedside of my excellent client and friend, the late Sir John Verinder.

Sir John had his share—perhaps rather a large share—of the more harmless and amiable of the weaknesses incidental to humanity. Among these, I may mention as applicable to the matter in hand, an invincible reluctance—so long as he enjoyed his usual good health—to face the responsibility of making his will. Lady Verinder exerted her influence to rouse him to a sense of duty in this matter; and I exerted my influence. He admitted the justice of our views—but he went no further than that, until he found himself afflicted with the illness which ultimately brought him to his grave. Then, I was sent for at last, to take my client's instructions on the subject of his will. They proved to be the simplest instructions I had ever received in the whole of my professional career.

Sir John was dozing, when I entered the room. He roused himself at the sight of me.

“How do you do, Mr. Bruff?” he said. “I shan't be very long about this. And then I'll go to sleep again.” He looked on with great interest while I collected pens, ink, and paper. “Are you ready?” he asked. I bowed and took a dip of ink, and waited for my instructions.

“I leave everything to my wife,” said Sir John. “That's all.” He turned round on his pillow, and composed himself to sleep again.

I was obliged to disturb him.

“Am I to understand,” I asked, “that you leave the whole of the property, of every sort and description, of which you are possessed, absolutely to Lady Verinder?”

“Yes,” said Sir John. “Only, —I— put it shorter. Why can't —you— put it shorter, and let me go to sleep again? Everything to my wife. That's my Will.”

His property was entirely at his own disposal, and was of two kinds. Property in land (I purposely abstain from using technical language), and property in money. In the majority of cases, I am afraid I should have felt it my duty to my client to ask him to reconsider his Will. In the case of Sir John, I knew Lady Verinder to be, not only worthy of

the unreserved trust which her husband had placed in her (all good wives are worthy of that)?but to be also capable of properly administering a trust (which, in my experience of the fair sex, not one in a thousand of them is competent to do). In ten minutes, Sir John's Will was drawn, and executed, and Sir John himself, good man, was finishing his interrupted nap.

Lady Verinder amply justified the confidence which her husband had placed in her. In the first days of her widowhood, she sent for me, and made her Will. The view she took of her position was so thoroughly sound and sensible, that I was relieved of all necessity for advising her. My responsibility began and ended with shaping her instructions into the proper legal form. Before Sir John had been a fortnight in his grave, the future of his daughter had been most wisely and most affectionately provided for.

The Will remained in its fireproof box at my office, through more years than I like to reckon up. It was not till the summer of eighteen hundred and forty-eight that I found occasion to look at it again under very melancholy circumstances.

At the date I have mentioned, the doctors pronounced the sentence on poor Lady Verinder, which was literally a sentence of death. I was the first person whom she informed of her situation; and I found her anxious to go over her Will again with me.

It was impossible to improve the provisions relating to her daughter. But, in the lapse of time, her wishes in regard to certain minor legacies, left to different relatives, had undergone some modification; and it became necessary to add three or four Codicils to the original document. Having done this at once, for fear of accident, I obtained her ladyship's permission to embody her recent instructions in a second Will. My object was to avoid certain inevitable confusions and repetitions which now disfigured the original document, and which, to own the truth, grated sadly on my professional sense of the fitness of things.

The execution of this second Will has been described by Miss Clack, who was so obliging as to witness it. So far as regarded Rachel Verinder's pecuniary interests, it was, word for word, the exact counterpart of the first Will. The only changes introduced related to the appointment of a guardian, and to certain provisions concerning that appointment, which were made under my advice. On Lady Verinder's death, the Will was placed in the hands of my proctor to be 'proved' (as the phrase is) in the usual way.

In about three weeks from that time—as well as I can remember—the first warning reached me of something unusual going on under the surface. I happened to be looking in at my friend the proctor's office, and I observed that he received me with an appearance of greater interest than usual.

'I have some news for you,' he said. 'What do you think I heard at Doctors' Commons this morning? Lady Verinder's Will has been asked for,

and examined, already!?

This was news indeed! There was absolutely nothing which could be contested in the Will; and there was nobody I could think of who had the slightest interest in examining it. (I shall perhaps do well if I explain in this place, for the benefit of the few people who don't know it already, that the law allows all Wills to be examined at Doctors' Commons by anybody who applies, on the payment of a shilling fee.)

'Did you hear who asked for the Will?' I asked.

'Yes; the clerk had no hesitation in telling me. Mr. Smalley, of the firm of Skipp and Smalley, asked for it. The Will has not been copied yet into the great Folio Registers. So there was no alternative but to depart from the usual course, and to let him see the original document. He looked it over carefully, and made a note in his pocket-book. Have you any idea of what he wanted with it?'

I shook my head. 'I shall find out,' I answered, 'before I am a day older.' With that I went back at once to my own office.

If any other firm of solicitors had been concerned in this unaccountable examination of my deceased client's Will, I might have found some difficulty in making the necessary discovery. But I had a hold over Skipp and Smalley which made my course in this matter a comparatively easy one. My common-law clerk (a most competent and excellent man) was a brother of Mr. Smalley's; and, owing to this sort of indirect connection with me, Skipp and Smalley had, for some years past, picked up the crumbs that fell from my table, in the shape of cases brought to my office, which, for various reasons, I did not think it worth while to undertake. My professional patronage was, in this way, of some importance to the firm. I intended, if necessary, to remind them of that patronage, on the present occasion.

The moment I got back I spoke to my clerk; and, after telling him what had happened, I sent him to his brother's office, 'with Mr. Bruff's compliments, and he would be glad to know why Messrs. Skipp and Smalley had found it necessary to examine Lady Verinder's will.'

This message brought Mr. Smalley back to my office in company with his brother. He acknowledged that he had acted under instructions received from a client. And then he put it to me, whether it would not be a breach of professional confidence on his part to say more.

We had a smart discussion upon that. He was right, no doubt; and I was wrong. The truth is, I was angry and suspicious; and I insisted on knowing more. Worse still, I declined to consider any additional information offered me, as a secret placed in my keeping: I claimed perfect freedom to use my own discretion. Worse even than that, I took an unwarrantable advantage of my position. 'Choose, sir,' I said to Mr. Smalley, 'between the risk of losing your client's business and the risk of losing Mine.' Quite indefensible, I admit; an act of tyranny, and nothing less. Like other tyrants, I carried my point. Mr. Smalley chose his alternative, without a moment's hesitation.

He smiled resignedly, and gave up the name of his client:

Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite.

That was enough for me?I wanted to know no more.

Having reached this point in my narrative, it now becomes necessary to place the reader of these lines?so far as Lady Verinder?s Will is concerned?on a footing of perfect equality, in respect of information, with myself.

Let me state, then, in the fewest possible words, that Rachel Verinder had nothing but a life-interest in the property. Her mother?s excellent sense, and my long experience, had combined to relieve her of all responsibility, and to guard her from all danger of becoming the victim in the future of some needy and unscrupulous man. Neither she, nor her husband (if she married), could raise sixpence, either on the property in land, or on the property in money. They would have the houses in London and in Yorkshire to live in, and they would have the handsome income?and that was all.

When I came to think over what I had discovered, I was sorely perplexed what to do next.

Hardly a week had passed since I had heard (to my surprise and distress) of Miss Verinder?s proposed marriage. I had the sincerest admiration and affection for her; and I had been inexpressibly grieved when I heard that she was about to throw herself away on Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite. And now, here was the man?whom I had always believed to be a smooth-tongued impostor?justifying the very worst that I had thought of him, and plainly revealing the mercenary object of the marriage, on his side! And what of that??you may reply?the thing is done every day. Granted, my dear sir. But would you think of it quite as lightly as you do, if the thing was done (let us say) with your own sister?

The first consideration which now naturally occurred to me was this. Would Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite hold to his engagement, after what his lawyer had discovered for him?

It depended entirely on his pecuniary position, of which I knew nothing. If that position was not a desperate one, it would be well worth his while to marry Miss Verinder for her income alone. If, on the other hand, he stood in urgent need of realising a large sum by a given time, then Lady Verinder?s Will would exactly meet the case, and would preserve her daughter from falling into a scoundrel?s hands.

In the latter event, there would be no need for me to distress Miss Rachel, in the first days of her mourning for her mother, by an immediate revelation of the truth. In the former event, if I remained silent, I should be conniving at a marriage which would make her miserable for life.

My doubts ended in my calling at the hotel in London, at which I knew

Mrs. Ablewhite and Miss Verinder to be staying. They informed me that they were going to Brighton the next day, and that an unexpected obstacle prevented Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite from accompanying them. I at once proposed to take his place. While I was only thinking of Rachel Verinder, it was possible to hesitate. When I actually saw her, my mind was made up directly, come what might of it, to tell her the truth.

I found my opportunity, when I was out walking with her, on the day after my arrival.

"May I speak to you," I asked, "about your marriage engagement?"

"Yes," she said, indifferently, "if you have nothing more interesting to talk about."

"Will you forgive an old friend and servant of your family, Miss Rachel, if I venture on asking whether your heart is set on this marriage?"

"I am marrying in despair, Mr. Bruff, on the chance of dropping into some sort of stagnant happiness which may reconcile me to my life."

Strong language! and suggestive of something below the surface, in the shape of a romance. But I had my own object in view, and I declined (as we lawyers say) to pursue the question into its side issues.

"Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite can hardly be of your way of thinking," I said. "His heart must be set on the marriage at any rate?"

"He says so, and I suppose I ought to believe him. He would hardly marry me, after what I have owed to him, unless he was fond of me."

Poor thing! the bare idea of a man marrying her for his own selfish and mercenary ends had never entered her head. The task I had set myself began to look like a harder task than I had bargained for.

"It sounds strangely," I went on, "in my old-fashioned ears?"

"What sounds strangely?" she asked.

"To hear you speak of your future husband as if you were not quite sure of the sincerity of his attachment. Are you conscious of any reason in your own mind for doubting him?"

Her astonishing quickness of perception, detected a change in my voice, or my manner, when I put that question, which warned her that I had been speaking all along with some ulterior object in view. She stopped, and taking her arm out of mine, looked me searchingly in the face.

"Mr. Bruff," she said, "you have something to tell me about Godfrey Ablewhite. Tell it."

I knew her well enough to take her at her word. I told it.

She put her arm again into mine, and walked on with me slowly. I felt her hand tightening its grasp mechanically on my arm, and I saw her getting paler and paler as I went on?but, not a word passed her lips while I was speaking. When I had done, she still kept silence. Her head drooped a little, and she walked by my side, unconscious of my presence, unconscious of everything about her; lost?buried, I might almost say?in her own thoughts.

I made no attempt to disturb her. My experience of her disposition warned me, on this, as on former occasions, to give her time.

The first instinct of girls in general, on being told of anything which interests them, is to ask a multitude of questions, and then to run off, and talk it all over with some favourite friend. Rachel Verinder?s first instinct, under similar circumstances, was to shut herself up in her own mind, and to think it over by herself. This absolute self-dependence is a great virtue in a man. In a woman it has a serious drawback of morally separating her from the mass of her sex, and so exposing her to misconstruction by the general opinion. I strongly suspect myself of thinking as the rest of the world think in this matter?except in the case of Rachel Verinder. The self-dependence in _her_ character, was one of its virtues in my estimation; partly, no doubt, because I sincerely admired and liked her; partly, because the view I took of her connexion with the loss of the Moonstone was based on my own special knowledge of her disposition. Badly as appearances might look, in the matter of the Diamond?shocking as it undoubtedly was to know that she was associated in any way with the mystery of an undiscovered theft?I was satisfied nevertheless that she had done nothing unworthy of her, because I was also satisfied that she had not stirred a step in the business, without shutting herself up in her own mind, and thinking it over first.

We had walked on, for nearly a mile I should say, before Rachel roused herself. She suddenly looked up at me with a faint reflection of her smile of happier times?the most irresistible smile I have ever seen on a woman?s face.

?I owe much already to your kindness,? she said. ?And I feel more deeply indebted to it now than ever. If you hear any rumours of my marriage when you get back to London, contradict them at once, on my authority.?

?Have you resolved to break your engagement?? I asked.

?Can you doubt it?? she returned proudly, ?after what you have told me!?

?My dear Miss Rachel, you are very young?and you may find more difficulty in withdrawing from your present position than you anticipate. Have you no one?I mean a lady, of course?whom you could consult??

?No one,? she answered.

It distressed me, it did indeed distress me, to hear her say that. She was so young and so lonely?and she bore it so well! The impulse to help her got the better of any sense of my own unfitness which I might have felt under the circumstances; and I stated such ideas on the subject as occurred to me on the spur of the moment, to the best of my ability. I have advised a prodigious number of clients, and have dealt with some exceedingly awkward difficulties, in my time. But this was the first occasion on which I had ever found myself advising a young lady how to obtain her release from a marriage engagement. The suggestion I offered amounted briefly to this. I recommended her to tell Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite?at a private interview, of course?that he had, to her certain knowledge, betrayed the mercenary nature of the motive on his side. She was then to add that their marriage, after what she had discovered, was a simple impossibility?and she was to put it to him, whether he thought it wisest to secure her silence by falling in with her views, or to force her, by opposing them, to make the motive under which she was acting generally known. If he attempted to defend himself, or to deny the facts, she was, in that event, to refer him to _me_.

Miss Verinder listened attentively till I had done. She then thanked me very prettily for my advice, but informed me at the same time that it was impossible for her to follow it.

?May I ask,? I said, ?what objection you see to following it??

She hesitated?and then met me with a question on her side.

?Suppose you were asked to express your opinion of Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite?s conduct?? she began.

?Yes??

?What would you call it??

?I should call it the conduct of a meanly deceitful man.?

?Mr. Bruff! I have believed in that man. I have promised to marry that man. How can I tell him he is mean, how can I tell him he has deceived me, how can I disgrace him in the eyes of the world after that? I have degraded myself by ever thinking of him as my husband. If I say what you tell me to say to him?I am owning that I have degraded myself to his face. I can?t do that. After what has passed between us, I can?t do that! The shame of it would be nothing to _him_. But the shame of it would be unendurable to _me_.?

Here was another of the marked peculiarities in her character disclosing itself to me without reserve. Here was her sensitive horror of the bare contact with anything mean, blinding her to every consideration of what she owed to herself, hurrying her into a false position which might compromise her in the estimation of all her friends! Up to this time, I had been a little diffident about the propriety of the advice I had given to her. But, after what she had just said, I had no sort of doubt that it was the best advice that could have been offered; and I felt no sort of hesitation in pressing

it on her again.

She only shook her head, and repeated her objection in other words.

‘He has been intimate enough with me to ask me to be his wife. He has stood high enough in my estimation to obtain my consent. I can’t tell him to his face that he is the most contemptible of living creatures, after that!’

‘But, my dear Miss Rachel,’ I remonstrated, ‘it’s equally impossible for you to tell him that you withdraw from your engagement without giving some reason for it.’

‘I shall say that I have thought it over, and that I am satisfied it will be best for both of us if we part.’

‘No more than that?’

‘No more.’

‘Have you thought of what he may say, on his side?’

‘He may say what he pleases.’

It was impossible not to admire her delicacy and her resolution, and it was equally impossible not to feel that she was putting herself in the wrong. I entreated her to consider her own position. I reminded her that she would be exposing herself to the most odious misconstruction of her motives. ‘You can’t brave public opinion,’ I said, ‘at the command of private feeling.’

‘I can,’ she answered. ‘I have done it already.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘You have forgotten the Moonstone, Mr. Bruff. Have I not braved public opinion, there, with my own private reasons for it?’

Her answer silenced me for the moment. It set me trying to trace the explanation of her conduct, at the time of the loss of the Moonstone, out of the strange avowal which had just escaped her. I might perhaps have done it when I was younger. I certainly couldn’t do it now.

I tried a last remonstrance before we returned to the house. She was just as immovable as ever. My mind was in a strange conflict of feelings about her when I left her that day. She was obstinate; she was wrong. She was interesting; she was admirable; she was deeply to be pitied. I made her promise to write to me the moment she had any news to send. And I went back to my business in London, with a mind exceedingly ill at ease.

On the evening of my return, before it was possible for me to receive my promised letter, I was surprised by a visit from Mr. Ablewhite the elder, and was informed that Mr. Godfrey had got his dismissal? and had

accepted it_?that very day.

With the view I already took of the case, the bare fact stated in the words that I have underlined, revealed Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite?s motive for submission as plainly as if he had acknowledged it himself. He needed a large sum of money; and he needed it by a given time. Rachel?s income, which would have helped him to anything else, would not help him here; and Rachel had accordingly released herself, without encountering a moment?s serious opposition on his part. If I am told that this is a mere speculation, I ask, in my turn, what other theory will account for his giving up a marriage which would have maintained him in splendour for the rest of his life?

Any exultation I might otherwise have felt at the lucky turn which things had now taken, was effectually checked by what passed at my interview with old Mr. Ablewhite.

He came, of course, to know whether I could give him any explanation of Miss Verinder?s extraordinary conduct. It is needless to say that I was quite unable to afford him the information he wanted. The annoyance which I thus inflicted, following on the irritation produced by a recent interview with his son, threw Mr. Ablewhite off his guard. Both his looks and his language convinced me that Miss Verinder would find him a merciless man to deal with, when he joined the ladies at Brighton the next day.

I had a restless night, considering what I ought to do next. How my reflections ended, and how thoroughly well founded my distrust of Mr. Ablewhite proved to be, are items of information which (as I am told) have already been put tidily in their proper places, by that exemplary person, Miss Clack. I have only to add?in completion of her narrative?that Miss Verinder found the quiet and repose which she sadly needed, poor thing, in my house at Hampstead. She honoured us by making a long stay. My wife and daughters were charmed with her; and, when the executors decided on the appointment of a new guardian, I feel sincere pride and pleasure in recording that my guest and my family parted like old friends, on either side.

CHAPTER II

The next thing I have to do, is to present such additional information as I possess on the subject of the Moonstone, or, to speak more correctly, on the subject of the Indian plot to steal the Diamond. The little that I have to tell is (as I think I have already said) of some importance, nevertheless, in respect of its bearing very remarkably on events which are still to come.

About a week or ten days after Miss Verinder had left us, one of my clerks entered the private room at my office, with a card in his hand, and informed me that a gentleman was below, who wanted to speak to me.

I looked at the card. There was a foreign name written on it, which has escaped my memory. It was followed by a line written in English at the

bottom of the card, which I remember perfectly well:

Recommended by Mr. Septimus Luker.

The audacity of a person in Mr. Luker's position presuming to recommend anybody to me, took me so completely by surprise, that I sat silent for the moment, wondering whether my own eyes had not deceived me. The clerk, observing my bewilderment, favoured me with the result of his own observation of the stranger who was waiting downstairs.

He is rather a remarkable-looking man, sir. So dark in the complexion that we all set him down in the office for an Indian, or something of that sort.

Associating the clerk's idea with the line inscribed on the card in my hand, I thought it possible that the Moonstone might be at the bottom of Mr. Luker's recommendation, and of the stranger's visit at my office. To the astonishment of my clerk, I at once decided on granting an interview to the gentleman below.

In justification of the highly unprofessional sacrifice to mere curiosity which I thus made, permit me to remind anybody who may read these lines, that no living person (in England, at any rate) can claim to have had such an intimate connexion with the romance of the Indian Diamond as mine has been. I was trusted with the secret of Colonel Herncastle's plan for escaping assassination. I received the Colonel's letters, periodically reporting himself a living man. I drew his Will, leaving the Moonstone to Miss Verinder. I persuaded his executor to act, on the chance that the jewel might prove to be a valuable acquisition to the family. And, lastly, I combated Mr. Franklin Blake's scruples, and induced him to be the means of transporting the Diamond to Lady Verinder's house. If anyone can claim a prescriptive right of interest in the Moonstone, and in everything connected with it, I think it is hardly to be denied that I am the man.

The moment my mysterious client was shown in, I felt an inner conviction that I was in the presence of one of the three Indians—probably of the chief. He was carefully dressed in European costume. But his swarthy complexion, his long lithe figure, and his grave and graceful politeness of manner were enough to betray his Oriental origin to any intelligent eyes that looked at him.

I pointed to a chair, and begged to be informed of the nature of his business with me.

After first apologising—in an excellent selection of English words—for the liberty which he had taken in disturbing me, the Indian produced a small parcel the outer covering of which was of cloth of gold. Removing this and a second wrapping of some silken fabric, he placed a little box, or casket, on my table, most beautifully and richly inlaid in jewels, on an ebony ground.

“I have come, sir,” he said, “to ask you to lend me some money. And I leave this as an assurance to you that my debt will be paid back.”

I pointed to his card. "And you apply to me," I rejoined, "at Mr. Luker's recommendation?"

The Indian bowed.

"May I ask how it is that Mr. Luker himself did not advance the money that you require?"

"Mr. Luker informed me, sir, that he had no money to lend."

"And so he recommended you to come to me?"

The Indian, in his turn, pointed to the card. "It is written there," he said.

Briefly answered, and thoroughly to the purpose! If the Moonstone had been in my possession, this Oriental gentleman would have murdered me, I am well aware, without a moment's hesitation. At the same time, and barring that slight drawback, I am bound to testify that he was the perfect model of a client. He might not have respected my life. But he did what none of my own countrymen had ever done, in all my experience of them—he respected my time.

"I am sorry," I said, "that you should have had the trouble of coming to me. Mr. Luker is quite mistaken in sending you here. I am trusted, like other men in my profession, with money to lend. But I never lend it to strangers, and I never lend it on such a security as you have produced."

Far from attempting, as other people would have done, to induce me to relax my own rules, the Indian only made me another bow, and wrapped up his box in its two coverings without a word of protest. He rose—this admirable assassin rose to go, the moment I had answered him!

"Will your condescension towards a stranger, excuse my asking one question," he said, "before I take my leave?"

I bowed on my side. Only one question at parting! The average in my experience was fifty.

"Supposing, sir, it had been possible (and customary) for you to lend me the money," he said, "in what space of time would it have been possible (and customary) for me to pay it back?"

"According to the usual course pursued in this country," I answered, "you would have been entitled to pay the money back (if you liked) in one year's time from the date at which it was first advanced to you."

The Indian made me a last bow, the lowest of all—and suddenly and softly walked out of the room.

It was done in a moment, in a noiseless, supple, cat-like way, which a little startled me, I own. As soon as I was composed enough to think, I

arrived at one distinct conclusion in reference to the otherwise incomprehensible visitor who had favoured me with a call.

His face, voice, and manner?while I was in his company?were under such perfect control that they set all scrutiny at defiance. But he had given me one chance of looking under the smooth outer surface of him, for all that. He had not shown the slightest sign of attempting to fix anything that I had said to him in his mind, until I mentioned the time at which it was customary to permit the earliest repayment, on the part of a debtor, of money that had been advanced as a loan. When I gave him that piece of information, he looked me straight in the face, while I was speaking, for the first time. The inference I drew from this was?that he had a special purpose in asking me his last question, and a special interest in hearing my answer to it. The more carefully I reflected on what had passed between us, the more shrewdly I suspected the production of the casket, and the application for the loan, of having been mere formalities, designed to pave the way for the parting inquiry addressed to me.

I had satisfied myself of the correctness of this conclusion?and was trying to get on a step further, and penetrate the Indian?s motives next?when a letter was brought to me, which proved to be from no less a person than Mr. Septimus Luker himself. He asked my pardon in terms of sickening servility, and assured me that he could explain matters to my satisfaction, if I would honour him by consenting to a personal interview.

I made another unprofessional sacrifice to mere curiosity. I honoured him by making an appointment at my office, for the next day.

Mr. Luker was, in every respect, such an inferior creature to the Indian?he was so vulgar, so ugly, so cringing, and so prosy?that he is quite unworthy of being reported, at any length, in these pages. The substance of what he had to tell me may be fairly stated as follows:

The day before I had received the visit of the Indian, Mr. Luker had been favoured with a call from that accomplished gentleman. In spite of his European disguise, Mr. Luker had instantly identified his visitor with the chief of the three Indians, who had formerly annoyed him by loitering about his house, and who had left him no alternative but to consult a magistrate. From this startling discovery he had rushed to the conclusion (naturally enough I own) that he must certainly be in the company of one of the three men, who had blindfolded him, gagged him, and robbed him of his banker?s receipt. The result was that he became quite paralysed with terror, and that he firmly believed his last hour had come.

On his side, the Indian preserved the character of a perfect stranger. He produced the little casket, and made exactly the same application which he had afterwards made to me. As the speediest way of getting rid of him, Mr. Luker had at once declared that he had no money. The Indian had thereupon asked to be informed of the best and safest person to apply to for the loan he wanted. Mr. Luker had answered that the best and safest person, in such cases, was usually a respectable solicitor.

Asked to name some individual of that character and profession, Mr. Luker had mentioned me?for the one simple reason that, in the extremity of his terror, mine was the first name which occurred to him. ?The perspiration was pouring off me like rain, sir,? the wretched creature concluded. ?I didn?t know what I was talking about. And I hope you?ll look over it, Mr. Bruff, sir, in consideration of my having been really and truly frightened out of my wits.?

I excused the fellow graciously enough. It was the readiest way of releasing myself from the sight of him. Before he left me, I detained him to make one inquiry.

Had the Indian said anything noticeable, at the moment of quitting Mr. Luker?s house?

Yes! The Indian had put precisely the same question to Mr. Luker, at parting, which he had put to me; receiving of course, the same answer as the answer which I had given him.

What did it mean? Mr. Luker?s explanation gave me no assistance towards solving the problem. My own unaided ingenuity, consulted next, proved quite unequal to grapple with the difficulty. I had a dinner engagement that evening; and I went upstairs, in no very genial frame of mind, little suspecting that the way to my dressing-room and the way to discovery, meant, on this particular occasion, one and the same thing.

CHAPTER III

The prominent personage among the guests at the dinner party I found to be Mr. Murthwaite.

On his appearance in England, after his wanderings, society had been greatly interested in the traveller, as a man who had passed through many dangerous adventures, and who had escaped to tell the tale. He had now announced his intention of returning to the scene of his exploits, and of penetrating into regions left still unexplored. This magnificent indifference to placing his safety in peril for the second time, revived the flagging interest of the worshippers in the hero. The law of chances was clearly against his escaping on this occasion. It is not every day that we can meet an eminent person at dinner, and feel that there is a reasonable prospect of the news of his murder being the news that we hear of him next.

When the gentlemen were left by themselves in the dining-room, I found myself sitting next to Mr. Murthwaite. The guests present being all English, it is needless to say that, as soon as the wholesome check exercised by the presence of the ladies was removed, the conversation turned on politics as a necessary result.

In respect to this all-absorbing national topic, I happen to be one of the most un-English Englishmen living. As a general rule, political talk appears to me to be of all talk the most dreary and the most profitless. Glancing at Mr. Murthwaite, when the bottles had made their

first round of the table, I found that he was apparently of my way of thinking. He was doing it very dexterously?with all possible consideration for the feelings of his host?but it is not the less certain that he was composing himself for a nap. It struck me as an experiment worth attempting, to try whether a judicious allusion to the subject of the Moonstone would keep him awake, and, if it did, to see what _he_ thought of the last new complication in the Indian conspiracy, as revealed in the prosaic precincts of my office.

?If I am not mistaken, Mr. Murthwaite,? I began, ?you were acquainted with the late Lady Verinder, and you took some interest in the strange succession of events which ended in the loss of the Moonstone??

The eminent traveller did me the honour of waking up in an instant, and asking me who I was.

I informed him of my professional connection with the Herncastle family, not forgetting the curious position which I had occupied towards the Colonel and his Diamond in the bygone time.

Mr. Murthwaite shifted round in his chair, so as to put the rest of the company behind him (Conservatives and Liberals alike), and concentrated his whole attention on plain Mr. Bruff, of Gray?s Inn Square.

?Have you heard anything, lately, of the Indians?? he asked.

?I have every reason to believe,? I answered, ?that one of them had an interview with me, in my office, yesterday.?

Mr. Murthwaite was not an easy man to astonish; but that last answer of mine completely staggered him. I described what had happened to Mr. Luker, and what had happened to myself, exactly as I have described it here. ?It is clear that the Indian?s parting inquiry had an object,? I added. ?Why should he be so anxious to know the time at which a borrower of money is usually privileged to pay the money back??

?Is it possible that you don?t see his motive, Mr. Bruff??

?I am ashamed of my stupidity, Mr. Murthwaite?but I certainly don?t see it.?

The great traveller became quite interested in sounding the immense vacuity of my dulness to its lowest depths.

?Let me ask you one question,? he said. ?In what position does the conspiracy to seize the Moonstone now stand??

?I can?t say,? I answered. ?The Indian plot is a mystery to me.?

?The Indian plot, Mr. Bruff, can only be a mystery to you, because you have never seriously examined it. Shall we run it over together, from the time when you drew Colonel Herncastle?s Will, to the time when the Indian called at your office? In your position, it may be of very serious importance to the interests of Miss Verinder, that you should

be able to take a clear view of this matter in case of need. Tell me, bearing that in mind, whether you will penetrate the Indian's motive for yourself? or whether you wish me to save you the trouble of making any inquiry into it??

It is needless to say that I thoroughly appreciated the practical purpose which I now saw that he had in view, and that the first of the two alternatives was the alternative I chose.

‘Very good,’ said Mr. Murthwaite. ‘We will take the question of the ages of the three Indians first. I can testify that they all look much about the same age—and you can decide for yourself, whether the man whom you saw was, or was not, in the prime of life. Not forty, you think? My idea too. We will say not forty. Now look back to the time when Colonel Herncastle came to England, and when you were concerned in the plan he adopted to preserve his life. I don’t want you to count the years. I will only say, it is clear that these present Indians, at their age, must be the successors of three other Indians (high caste Brahmins all of them, Mr. Bruff, when they left their native country!) who followed the Colonel to these shores. Very well. These present men of ours have succeeded to the men who were here before them. If they had only done that, the matter would not have been worth inquiring into. But they have done more. They have succeeded to the organisation which their predecessors established in this country. Don’t start! The organisation is a very trumpery affair, according to our ideas, I have no doubt. I should reckon it up as including the command of money; the services, when needed, of that shady sort of Englishman, who lives in the byways of foreign life in London; and, lastly, the secret sympathy of such few men of their own country, and (formerly, at least) of their own religion, as happen to be employed in ministering to some of the multitudinous wants of this great city. Nothing very formidable, as you see! But worth notice at starting, because we _may_ find occasion to refer to this modest little Indian organisation as we go on. Having now cleared the ground, I am going to ask you a question; and I expect your experience to answer it. What was the event which gave the Indians their first chance of seizing the Diamond??

I understood the allusion to my experience.

‘The first chance they got,’ I replied, ‘was clearly offered to them by Colonel Herncastle’s death. They would be aware of his death, I suppose, as a matter of course??

‘As a matter of course. And his death, as you say, gave them their first chance. Up to that time the Moonstone was safe in the strongroom of the bank. You drew the Colonel’s Will leaving his jewel to his niece; and the Will was proved in the usual way. As a lawyer, you can be at no loss to know what course the Indians would take (under English advice) after _that_.?’

‘They would provide themselves with a copy of the Will from Doctors’ Commons,’ I said.

‘Exactly. One or other of those shady Englishmen to whom I have

alluded, would get them the copy you have described. That copy would inform them that the Moonstone was bequeathed to the daughter of Lady Verinder, and that Mr. Blake the elder, or some person appointed by him, was to place it in her hands. You will agree with me that the necessary information about persons in the position of Lady Verinder and Mr. Blake, would be perfectly easy information to obtain. The one difficulty for the Indians would be to decide whether they should make their attempt on the Diamond when it was in course of removal from the keeping of the bank, or whether they should wait until it was taken down to Yorkshire to Lady Verinder's house. The second way would be manifestly the safest way?and there you have the explanation of the appearance of the Indians at Frizinghall, disguised as jugglers, and waiting their time. In London, it is needless to say, they had their organisation at their disposal to keep them informed of events. Two men would do it. One to follow anybody who went from Mr. Blake's house to the bank. And one to treat the lower men servants with beer, and to hear the news of the house. These commonplace precautions would readily inform them that Mr. Franklin Blake had been to the bank, and that Mr. Franklin Blake was the only person in the house who was going to visit Lady Verinder. What actually followed upon that discovery, you remember, no doubt, quite as correctly as I do.?

I remembered that Franklin Blake had detected one of the spies, in the street?that he had, in consequence, advanced the time of his arrival in Yorkshire by some hours?and that (thanks to old Betteredge's excellent advice) he had lodged the Diamond in the bank at Frizinghall, before the Indians were so much as prepared to see him in the neighbourhood. All perfectly clear so far. But the Indians being ignorant of the precautions thus taken, how was it that they had made no attempt on Lady Verinder's house (in which they must have supposed the Diamond to be) through the whole of the interval that elapsed before Rachel's birthday?

In putting this difficulty to Mr. Murthwaite, I thought it right to add that I had heard of the little boy, and the drop of ink, and the rest of it, and that any explanation based on the theory of clairvoyance was an explanation which would carry no conviction whatever with it, to _my_ mind.

?Nor to mine either,? said Mr. Murthwaite. ?The clairvoyance in this case is simply a development of the romantic side of the Indian character. It would be refreshment and an encouragement to those men?quite inconceivable, I grant you, to the English mind?to surround their wearisome and perilous errand in this country with a certain halo of the marvellous and the supernatural. Their boy is unquestionably a sensitive subject to the mesmeric influence?and, under that influence, he has no doubt reflected what was already in the mind of the person mesmerising him. I have tested the theory of clairvoyance?and I have never found the manifestations get beyond that point. The Indians don't investigate the matter in this way; the Indians look upon their boy as a Seer of things invisible to their eyes?and, I repeat, in that marvel they find the source of a new interest in the purpose that unites them. I only notice this as offering a curious view of human character, which must be quite new to you. We have nothing whatever to do with

clairvoyance, or with mesmerism, or with anything else that is hard of belief to a practical man, in the inquiry that we are now pursuing. My object in following the Indian plot, step by step, is to trace results back, by rational means, to natural causes. Have I succeeded to your satisfaction so far??

?Not a doubt of it, Mr. Murthwaite! I am waiting, however, with some anxiety, to hear the rational explanation of the difficulty which I have just had the honour of submitting to you.?

Mr. Murthwaite smiled. ?It?s the easiest difficulty to deal with of all,? he said. ?Permit me to begin by admitting your statement of the case as a perfectly correct one. The Indians were undoubtedly not aware of what Mr. Franklin Blake had done with the Diamond?for we find them making their first mistake, on the first night of Mr. Blake?s arrival at his aunt?s house.?

?Their first mistake?? I repeated.

?Certainly! The mistake of allowing themselves to be surprised, lurking about the terrace at night, by Gabriel Betteredge. However, they had the merit of seeing for themselves that they had taken a false step?for, as you say, again, with plenty of time at their disposal, they never came near the house for weeks afterwards.?

?Why, Mr. Murthwaite? That?s what I want to know! Why??

?Because no Indian, Mr. Bruff, ever runs an unnecessary risk. The clause you drew in Colonel Herncastle?s Will, informed them (didn?t it?) that the Moonstone was to pass absolutely into Miss Verinder?s possession on her birthday. Very well. Tell me which was the safest course for men in their position? To make their attempt on the Diamond while it was under the control of Mr. Franklin Blake, who had shown already that he could suspect and outwit them? Or to wait till the Diamond was at the disposal of a young girl, who would innocently delight in wearing the magnificent jewel at every possible opportunity? Perhaps you want a proof that my theory is correct? Take the conduct of the Indians themselves as the proof. They appeared at the house, after waiting all those weeks, on Miss Verinder?s birthday; and they were rewarded for the patient accuracy of their calculations by seeing the Moonstone in the bosom of her dress! When I heard the story of the Colonel and the Diamond, later in the evening, I felt so sure about the risk Mr. Franklin Blake had run (they would have certainly attacked him, if he had not happened to ride back to Lady Verinder?s in the company of other people); and I was so strongly convinced of the worse risk still, in store for Miss Verinder, that I recommended following the Colonel?s plan, and destroying the identity of the gem by having it cut into separate stones. How its extraordinary disappearance that night, made my advice useless, and utterly defeated the Hindoo plot?and how all further action on the part of the Indians was paralysed the next day by their confinement in prison as rogues and vagabonds?you know as well as I do. The first act in the conspiracy closes there. Before we go on to the second, may I ask whether I have met your difficulty, with an explanation which is satisfactory to the mind of a

practical man??

It was impossible to deny that he had met my difficulty fairly; thanks to his superior knowledge of the Indian character?and thanks to his not having had hundreds of other Wills to think of since Colonel Herncastle?s time!

?So far, so good,? resumed Mr. Murthwaite. ?The first chance the Indians had of seizing the Diamond was a chance lost, on the day when they were committed to the prison at Frizinghall. When did the second chance offer itself? The second chance offered itself?as I am in a condition to prove?while they were still in confinement.?

He took out his pocket-book, and opened it at a particular leaf, before he went on.

?I was staying,? he resumed, ?with some friends at Frizinghall, at the time. A day or two before the Indians were set free (on a Monday, I think), the governor of the prison came to me with a letter. It had been left for the Indians by one Mrs. Macann, of whom they had hired the lodging in which they lived; and it had been delivered at Mrs. Macann?s door, in ordinary course of post, on the previous morning. The prison authorities had noticed that the postmark was ?Lambeth,? and that the address on the outside, though expressed in correct English, was, in form, oddly at variance with the customary method of directing a letter. On opening it, they had found the contents to be written in a foreign language, which they rightly guessed at as Hindustani. Their object in coming to me was, of course, to have the letter translated to them. I took a copy in my pocket-book of the original, and of my translation?and there they are at your service.?

He handed me the open pocket-book. The address on the letter was the first thing copied. It was all written in one paragraph, without any attempt at punctuation, thus: ?To the three Indian men living with the lady called Macann at Frizinghall in Yorkshire.? The Hindoo characters followed; and the English translation appeared at the end, expressed in these mysterious words:

?In the name of the Regent of the Night, whose seat is on the Antelope, whose arms embrace the four corners of the earth.

?Brothers, turn your faces to the south, and come to me in the street of many noises, which leads down to the muddy river.

?The reason is this.

?My own eyes have seen it.?

There the letter ended, without either date or signature. I handed it back to Mr. Murthwaite, and owned that this curious specimen of Hindoo correspondence rather puzzled me.

?I can explain the first sentence to you,? he said; ?and the conduct of the Indians themselves will explain the rest. The god of the moon is

represented, in the Hindoo mythology, as a four-armed deity, seated on an antelope; and one of his titles is the regent of the night. Here, then, to begin with, is something which looks suspiciously like an indirect reference to the Moonstone. Now, let us see what the Indians did, after the prison authorities had allowed them to receive their letter. On the very day when they were set free they went at once to the railway station, and took their places in the first train that started for London. We all thought it a pity at Frizinghall that their proceedings were not privately watched. But, after Lady Verinder had dismissed the police-officer, and had stopped all further inquiry into the loss of the Diamond, no one else could presume to stir in the matter. The Indians were free to go to London, and to London they went. What was the next news we heard of them, Mr. Bruff??

?They were annoying Mr. Luker,? I answered, ?by loitering about the house at Lambeth.?

?Did you read the report of Mr. Luker?s application to the magistrate??

?Yes.?

?In the course of his statement he referred, if you remember, to a foreign workman in his employment, whom he had just dismissed on suspicion of attempted theft, and whom he also distrusted as possibly acting in collusion with the Indians who had annoyed him. The inference is pretty plain, Mr. Bruff, as to who wrote that letter which puzzled you just now, and as to which of Mr. Luker?s Oriental treasures the workman had attempted to steal.?

The inference (as I hastened to acknowledge) was too plain to need being pointed out. I had never doubted that the Moonstone had found its way into Mr. Luker?s hands, at the time Mr. Murthwaite alluded to. My only question had been, How had the Indians discovered the circumstance? This question (the most difficult to deal with of all, as I had thought) had now received its answer, like the rest. Lawyer as I was, I began to feel that I might trust Mr. Murthwaite to lead me blindfold through the last windings of the labyrinth, along which he had guided me thus far. I paid him the compliment of telling him this, and found my little concession very graciously received.

?You shall give me a piece of information in your turn before we go on,? he said. ?Somebody must have taken the Moonstone from Yorkshire to London. And somebody must have raised money on it, or it would never have been in Mr. Luker?s possession. Has there been any discovery made of who that person was??

?None that I know of.?

?There was a story (was there not?) about Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite. I am told he is an eminent philanthropist?which is decidedly against him, to begin with.?

I heartily agreed in this with Mr. Murthwaite. At the same time, I felt bound to inform him (without, it is needless to say, mentioning Miss

Verinder's name) that Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite had been cleared of all suspicion, on evidence which I could answer for as entirely beyond dispute.

Very well," said Mr. Murthwaite, quietly, "let us leave it to time to clear the matter up. In the meanwhile, Mr. Bruff, we must get back again to the Indians, on your account. Their journey to London simply ended in their becoming the victims of another defeat. The loss of their second chance of seizing the Diamond is mainly attributable, as I think, to the cunning and foresight of Mr. Luker—who doesn't stand at the top of the prosperous and ancient profession of usury for nothing! By the prompt dismissal of the man in his employment, he deprived the Indians of the assistance which their confederate would have rendered them in getting into the house. By the prompt transport of the Moonstone to his banker's, he took the conspirators by surprise before they were prepared with a new plan for robbing him. How the Indians, in this latter case, suspected what he had done, and how they contrived to possess themselves of his banker's receipt, are events too recent to need dwelling on. Let it be enough to say that they know the Moonstone to be once more out of their reach; deposited (under the general description of "a valuable of great price") in a banker's strong room. Now, Mr. Bruff, what is their third chance of seizing the Diamond? and when will it come?"

As the question passed his lips, I penetrated the motive of the Indian's visit to my office at last!

"I see it!" I exclaimed. "The Indians take it for granted, as we do, that the Moonstone has been pledged; and they want to be certainly informed of the earliest period at which the pledge can be redeemed—because that will be the earliest period at which the Diamond can be removed from the safe keeping of the bank!"

"I told you you would find it out for yourself, Mr. Bruff, if I only gave you a fair chance. In a year from the time when the Moonstone was pledged, the Indians will be on the watch for their third chance. Mr. Luker's own lips have told them how long they will have to wait, and your respectable authority has satisfied them that Mr. Luker has spoken the truth. When do we suppose, at a rough guess, that the Diamond found its way into the money-lender's hands?"

"Towards the end of last June," I answered, "as well as I can reckon it."

"And we are now in the year 'forty-eight. Very good. If the unknown person who has pledged the Moonstone can redeem it in a year, the jewel will be in that person's possession again at the end of June, 'forty-nine. I shall be thousands of miles from England and English news at that date. But it may be worth your while to take a note of it, and to arrange to be in London at the time."

"You think something serious will happen?" I said.

"I think I shall be safer," he answered, "among the fiercest fanatics

of Central Asia than I should be if I crossed the door of the bank with the Moonstone in my pocket. The Indians have been defeated twice running, Mr. Bruff. It's my firm belief that they won't be defeated a third time.?

Those were the last words he said on the subject. The coffee came in; the guests rose, and dispersed themselves about the room; and we joined the ladies of the dinner-party upstairs.

I made a note of the date, and it may not be amiss if I close my narrative by repeating that note here:

June, forty-nine. Expect news of the Indians, towards the end of the month.

And that done, I hand the pen, which I have now no further claim to use, to the writer who follows me next.

THIRD NARRATIVE.

Contributed by Franklin Blake.

CHAPTER I

In the spring of the year eighteen hundred and forty-nine I was wandering in the East, and had then recently altered the travelling plans which I had laid out some months before, and which I had communicated to my lawyer and my banker in London.

This change made it necessary for me to send one of my servants to obtain my letters and remittances from the English consul in a certain city, which was no longer included as one of my resting-places in my new travelling scheme. The man was to join me again at an appointed place and time. An accident, for which he was not responsible, delayed him on his errand. For a week I and my people waited, encamped on the borders of a desert. At the end of that time the missing man made his appearance, with the money and the letters, at the entrance of my tent.

?I am afraid I bring you bad news, sir,? he said, and pointed to one of the letters, which had a mourning border round it, and the address on which was in the handwriting of Mr. Bruff.

I know nothing, in a case of this kind, so unendurable as suspense. The letter with the mourning border was the letter that I opened first.

It informed me that my father was dead, and that I was heir to his great fortune. The wealth which had thus fallen into my hands brought its responsibilities with it, and Mr. Bruff entreated me to lose no time in returning to England.

By daybreak the next morning, I was on my way back to my own country.

The picture presented of me, by my old friend Betteredge, at the time

of my departure from England, is (as I think) a little overdrawn. He has, in his own quaint way, interpreted seriously one of his young mistress's many satirical references to my foreign education; and has persuaded himself that he actually saw those French, German, and Italian sides to my character, which my lively cousin only professed to discover in jest, and which never had any real existence, except in our good Betteredge's own brain. But, barring this drawback, I am bound to own that he has stated no more than the truth in representing me as wounded to the heart by Rachel's treatment, and as leaving England in the first keenness of suffering caused by the bitterest disappointment of my life.

I went abroad, resolved if change and absence could help me to forget her. It is, I am persuaded, no true view of human nature which denies that change and absence do help a man under these circumstances; they force his attention away from the exclusive contemplation of his own sorrow. I never forgot her; but the pang of remembrance lost its worst bitterness, little by little, as time, distance, and novelty interposed themselves more and more effectually between Rachel and me.

On the other hand, it is no less certain that, with the act of turning homeward, the remedy which had gained its ground so steadily, began now, just as steadily, to drop back. The nearer I drew to the country which she inhabited, and to the prospect of seeing her again, the more irresistibly her influence began to recover its hold on me. On leaving England she was the last person in the world whose name I would have suffered to pass my lips. On returning to England, she was the first person I inquired after, when Mr. Bruff and I met again.

I was informed, of course, of all that had happened in my absence; in other words, of all that has been related here in continuation of Betteredge's narrative—one circumstance only being excepted. Mr. Bruff did not, at that time, feel himself at liberty to inform me of the motives which had privately influenced Rachel and Godfrey Ablewhite in recalling the marriage promise, on either side. I troubled him with no embarrassing questions on this delicate subject. It was relief enough to me, after the jealous disappointment caused by hearing that she had ever contemplated being Godfrey's wife, to know that reflection had convinced her of acting rashly, and that she had effected her own release from her marriage engagement.

Having heard the story of the past, my next inquiries (still inquiries after Rachel!) advanced naturally to the present time. Under whose care had she been placed after leaving Mr. Bruff's house? and where was she living now?

She was living under the care of a widowed sister of the late Sir John Verinder—one Mrs. Merridew—whom her mother's executors had requested to act as guardian, and who had accepted the proposal. They were reported to me as getting on together admirably well, and as being now established, for the season, in Mrs. Merridew's house in Portland Place.

Half an hour after receiving this information, I was on my way to

Portland Place?without having had the courage to own it to Mr. Bruff!

The man who answered the door was not sure whether Miss Verinder was at home or not. I sent him upstairs with my card, as the speediest way of setting the question at rest. The man came down again with an impenetrable face, and informed me that Miss Verinder was out.

I might have suspected other people of purposely denying themselves to me. But it was impossible to suspect Rachel. I left word that I would call again at six o'clock that evening.

At six o'clock I was informed for the second time that Miss Verinder was not at home. Had any message been left for me? No message had been left for me. Had Miss Verinder not received my card? The servant begged my pardon?Miss Verinder _had_ received it.

The inference was too plain to be resisted. Rachel declined to see me.

On my side, I declined to be treated in this way, without making an attempt, at least, to discover a reason for it. I sent up my name to Mrs. Merridew, and requested her to favour me with a personal interview at any hour which it might be most convenient to her to name.

Mrs. Merridew made no difficulty about receiving me at once. I was shown into a comfortable little sitting-room, and found myself in the presence of a comfortable little elderly lady. She was so good as to feel great regret and much surprise, entirely on my account. She was at the same time, however, not in a position to offer me any explanation, or to press Rachel on a matter which appeared to relate to a question of private feeling alone. This was said over and over again, with a polite patience that nothing could tire; and this was all I gained by applying to Mrs. Merridew.

My last chance was to write to Rachel. My servant took a letter to her the next day, with strict instructions to wait for an answer.

The answer came back, literally in one sentence.

?Miss Verinder begs to decline entering into any correspondence with Mr. Franklin Blake.?

Fond as I was of her, I felt indignantly the insult offered to me in that reply. Mr. Bruff came in to speak to me on business, before I had recovered possession of myself. I dismissed the business on the spot, and laid the whole case before him. He proved to be as incapable of enlightening me as Mrs. Merridew herself. I asked him if any slander had been spoken of me in Rachel?s hearing. Mr. Bruff was not aware of any slander of which I was the object. Had she referred to me in any way while she was staying under Mr. Bruff?s roof? Never. Had she not so much as asked, during all my long absence, whether I was living or dead? No such question had ever passed her lips. I took out of my pocket-book the letter which poor Lady Verinder had written to me from Frizinghall, on the day when I left her house in Yorkshire. And I pointed Mr. Bruff?s attention to these two sentences in it:

?The valuable assistance which you rendered to the inquiry after the lost jewel is still an unpardoned offence, in the present dreadful state of Rachel?s mind. Moving blindfold in this matter, you have added to the burden of anxiety which she has had to bear, by innocently threatening her secret with discovery through your exertions.?

?Is it possible,? I asked, ?that the feeling towards me which is there described, is as bitter as ever against me now??

Mr. Bruff looked unaffectedly distressed.

?If you insist on an answer,? he said, ?I own I can place no other interpretation on her conduct than that.?

I rang the bell, and directed my servant to pack my portmanteau, and to send out for a railway guide. Mr. Bruff asked, in astonishment, what I was going to do.

?I am going to Yorkshire,? I answered, ?by the next train.?

?May I ask for what purpose??

?Mr. Bruff, the assistance I innocently rendered to the inquiry after the Diamond was an unpardoned offence, in Rachel?s mind, nearly a year since; and it remains an unpardoned offence still. I won?t accept that position! I am determined to find out the secret of her silence towards her mother, and her enmity towards _me_. If time, pains, and money can do it, I will lay my hand on the thief who took the Moonstone!?

The worthy old gentleman attempted to remonstrate?to induce me to listen to reason?to do his duty towards me, in short. I was deaf to everything that he could urge. No earthly consideration would, at that moment, have shaken the resolution that was in me.

?I shall take up the inquiry again,? I went on, ?at the point where I dropped it; and I shall follow it onwards, step by step, till I come to the present time. There are missing links in the evidence, as _I_ left it, which Gabriel Betteredge can supply, and to Gabriel Betteredge I go!?

Towards sunset that evening I stood again on the well-remembered terrace, and looked once more at the peaceful old country house. The gardener was the first person whom I saw in the deserted grounds. He had left Betteredge, an hour since, sunning himself in the customary corner of the back yard. I knew it well; and I said I would go and seek him myself.

I walked round by the familiar paths and passages, and looked in at the open gate of the yard.

There he was?the dear old friend of the happy days that were never to come again?there he was in the old corner, on the old beehive chair, with his pipe in his mouth, and his _Robinson Crusoe_ on his lap, and

his two friends, the dogs, dozing on either side of him! In the position in which I stood, my shadow was projected in front of me by the last slanting rays of the sun. Either the dogs saw it, or their keen scent informed them of my approach; they started up with a growl. Starting in his turn, the old man quieted them by a word, and then shaded his failing eyes with his hand, and looked inquiringly at the figure at the gate.

My own eyes were full of tears. I was obliged to wait a moment before I could trust myself to speak to him.

CHAPTER II

"Betteredge!" I said, pointing to the well-remembered book on his knee, "has Robinson Crusoe informed you, this evening, that you might expect to see Franklin Blake?"

"By the lord Harry, Mr. Franklin!" cried the old man, "that's exactly what Robinson Crusoe has done!"

He struggled to his feet with my assistance, and stood for a moment, looking backwards and forwards between Robinson Crusoe and me, apparently at a loss to discover which of us had surprised him most. The verdict ended in favour of the book. Holding it open before him in both hands, he surveyed the wonderful volume with a stare of unutterable anticipation—as if he expected to see Robinson Crusoe himself walk out of the pages, and favour us with a personal interview.

"Here's the bit, Mr. Franklin!" he said, as soon as he had recovered the use of his speech. "As I live by bread, sir, here's the bit I was reading, the moment before you came in! Page one hundred and fifty-six as follows:—'I stood like one Thunderstruck, or as if I had seen an Apparition.' If that isn't as much as to say: 'Expect the sudden appearance of Mr. Franklin Blake?'—there's no meaning in the English language!" said Betteredge, closing the book with a bang, and getting one of his hands free at last to take the hand which I offered him.

I had expected him, naturally enough under the circumstances, to overwhelm me with questions. But no—the hospitable impulse was the uppermost impulse in the old servant's mind, when a member of the family appeared (no matter how!) as a visitor at the house.

"Walk in, Mr. Franklin," he said, opening the door behind him, with his quaint old-fashioned bow. "I'll ask what brings you here afterwards? I must make you comfortable first. There have been sad changes, since you went away. The house is shut up, and the servants are gone. Never mind that! I'll cook your dinner; and the gardener's wife will make your bed—and if there's a bottle of our famous Latour claret left in the cellar, down your throat, Mr. Franklin, that bottle shall go. I bid you welcome, sir! I bid you heartily welcome!" said the poor old fellow, fighting manfully against the gloom of the deserted house, and receiving me with the sociable and courteous attention of the bygone time.

It vexed me to disappoint him. But the house was Rachel's house, now. Could I eat in it, or sleep in it, after what had happened in London? The commonest sense of self-respect forbade me?properly forbade me?to cross the threshold.

I took Betteredge by the arm, and led him out into the garden. There was no help for it. I was obliged to tell him the truth. Between his attachment to Rachel, and his attachment to me, he was sorely puzzled and distressed at the turn things had taken. His opinion, when he expressed it, was given in his usual downright manner, and was agreeably redolent of the most positive philosophy I know?the philosophy of the Betteredge school.

?Miss Rachel has her faults?I've never denied it,? he began. ?And riding the high horse, now and then, is one of them. She has been trying to ride over _you_?and you have put up with it. Lord, Mr. Franklin, don't you know women by this time better than that? You have heard me talk of the late Mrs. Betteredge??

I had heard him talk of the late Mrs. Betteredge pretty often?invariably producing her as his one undeniable example of the inbred frailty and perversity of the other sex. In that capacity he exhibited her now.

?Very well, Mr. Franklin. Now listen to me. Different women have different ways of riding the high horse. The late Mrs. Betteredge took her exercise on that favourite female animal whenever I happened to deny her anything that she had set her heart on. So sure as I came home from my work on these occasions, so sure was my wife to call to me up the kitchen stairs, and to say that, after my brutal treatment of her, she hadn't the heart to cook me my dinner. I put up with it for some time?just as you are putting up with it now from Miss Rachel. At last my patience wore out. I went downstairs, and I took Mrs. Betteredge?affectionately, you understand?up in my arms, and carried her, holus-bolus, into the best parlour where she received her company. I said ?That's the right place for you, my dear,? and so went back to the kitchen. I locked myself in, and took off my coat, and turned up my shirt-sleeves, and cooked my own dinner. When it was done, I served it up in my best manner, and enjoyed it most heartily. I had my pipe and my drop of grog afterwards; and then I cleared the table, and washed the crockery, and cleaned the knives and forks, and put the things away, and swept up the hearth. When things were as bright and clean again, as bright and clean could be, I opened the door and let Mrs. Betteredge in. ?I've had my dinner, my dear,? I said; ?and I hope you will find that I have left the kitchen all that your fondest wishes can desire.? For the rest of that woman's life, Mr. Franklin, I never had to cook my dinner again! Moral: You have put up with Miss Rachel in London; don't put up with her in Yorkshire. Come back to the house!?

Quite unanswerable! I could only assure my good friend that even _his_ powers of persuasion were, in this case, thrown away on me.

?It's a lovely evening,? I said. ?I shall walk to Frizinghall, and stay

at the hotel, and you must come tomorrow morning and breakfast with me. I have something to say to you.?

Betteredge shook his head gravely.

?I am heartily sorry for this,? he said. ?I had hoped, Mr. Franklin, to hear that things were all smooth and pleasant again between you and Miss Rachel. If you must have your own way, sir,? he continued, after a moment?s reflection, ?there is no need to go to Frizinghall tonight for a bed. It?s to be had nearer than that. There?s Hotherstone?s Farm, barely two miles from here. You can hardly object to _that_ on Miss Rachel?s account,? the old man added silyly. ?Hotherstone lives, Mr. Franklin, on his own freehold.?

I remembered the place the moment Betteredge mentioned it. The farm-house stood in a sheltered inland valley, on the banks of the prettiest stream in that part of Yorkshire: and the farmer had a spare bedroom and parlour, which he was accustomed to let to artists, anglers, and tourists in general. A more agreeable place of abode, during my stay in the neighbourhood, I could not have wished to find.

?Are the rooms to let?? I inquired.

?Mrs. Hotherstone herself, sir, asked for my good word to recommend the rooms, yesterday.?

?I?ll take them, Betteredge, with the greatest pleasure.?

We went back to the yard, in which I had left my travelling-bag. After putting a stick through the handle, and swinging the bag over his shoulder, Betteredge appeared to relapse into the bewilderment which my sudden appearance had caused, when I surprised him in the beehive chair. He looked incredulously at the house, and then he wheeled about, and looked more incredulously still at me.

?I?ve lived a goodish long time in the world,? said this best and dearest of all old servants??but the like of this, I never did expect to see. There stands the house, and here stands Mr. Franklin Blake?and, Damme, if one of them isn?t turning his back on the other, and going to sleep in a lodging!?

He led the way out, wagging his head and growling ominously. ?There?s only one more miracle that _can_ happen,? he said to me, over his shoulder. ?The next thing you?ll do, Mr. Franklin, will be to pay me back that seven-and-sixpence you borrowed of me when you were a boy.?

This stroke of sarcasm put him in a better humour with himself and with me. We left the house, and passed through the lodge gates. Once clear of the grounds, the duties of hospitality (in Betteredge?s code of morals) ceased, and the privileges of curiosity began.

He dropped back, so as to let me get on a level with him. ?Fine evening for a walk, Mr. Franklin,? he said, as if we had just accidentally encountered each other at that moment. ?Supposing you had gone to the

hotel at Frizinghall, sir??

?Yes??

?I should have had the honour of breakfasting with you, tomorrow morning.?

?Come and breakfast with me at Hotherstone?s Farm, instead.?

?Much obliged to you for your kindness, Mr. Franklin. But it wasn?t exactly breakfast that I was driving at. I think you mentioned that you had something to say to me? If it?s no secret, sir,? said Betteredge, suddenly abandoning the crooked way, and taking the straight one, ?I?m burning to know what?s brought you down here, if you please, in this sudden way.?

?What brought me here before?? I asked.

?The Moonstone, Mr. Franklin. But what brings you now, sir??

?The Moonstone again, Betteredge.?

The old man suddenly stood still, and looked at me in the grey twilight as if he suspected his own ears of deceiving him.

?If that?s a joke, sir,? he said, ?I?m afraid I?m getting a little dull in my old age. I don?t take it.?

?It?s no joke,? I answered. ?I have come here to take up the inquiry which was dropped when I left England. I have come here to do what nobody has done yet?to find out who took the Diamond.?

?Let the Diamond be, Mr. Franklin! Take my advice, and let the Diamond be! That cursed Indian jewel has misguided everybody who has come near it. Don?t waste your money and your temper?in the fine spring time of your life, sir?by meddling with the Moonstone. How can _you_ hope to succeed (saving your presence), when Sergeant Cuff himself made a mess of it? Sergeant Cuff!? repeated Betteredge, shaking his forefinger at me sternly. ?The greatest policeman in England!?

?My mind is made up, my old friend. Even Sergeant Cuff doesn?t daunt me. By-the-bye, I may want to speak to him, sooner or later. Have you heard anything of him lately??

?The Sergeant won?t help you, Mr. Franklin.?

?Why not??

?There has been an event, sir, in the police-circles, since you went away. The great Cuff has retired from business. He has got a little cottage at Dorking; and he?s up to his eyes in the growing of roses. I have it in his own handwriting, Mr. Franklin. He has grown the white moss rose, without budding it on the dog-rose first. And Mr. Begbie the gardener is to go to Dorking, and own that the Sergeant has beaten him

at last.?

?It doesn't much matter,? I said. ?I must do without Sergeant Cuff's help. And I must trust to you, at starting.?

It is likely enough that I spoke rather carelessly.

At any rate, Betteredge seemed to be piqued by something in the reply which I had just made to him. ?You might trust to worse than me, Mr. Franklin?I can tell you that,? he said a little sharply.

The tone in which he retorted, and a certain disturbance, after he had spoken, which I detected in his manner, suggested to me that he was possessed of some information which he hesitated to communicate.

?I expect you to help me,? I said, ?in picking up the fragments of evidence which Sergeant Cuff has left behind him. I know you can do that. Can you do no more??

?What more can you expect from me, sir?? asked Betteredge, with an appearance of the utmost humility.

?I expect more?from what you said just now.?

?Mere boasting, Mr. Franklin,? returned the old man obstinately. ?Some people are born boasters, and they never get over it to their dying day. I'm one of them.?

There was only one way to take with him. I appealed to his interest in Rachel, and his interest in me.

?Betteredge, would you be glad to hear that Rachel and I were good friends again??

?I have served your family, sir, to mighty little purpose, if you doubt it!?

?Do you remember how Rachel treated me, before I left England??

?As well as if it was yesterday! My lady herself wrote you a letter about it; and you were so good as to show the letter to me. It said that Miss Rachel was mortally offended with you, for the part you had taken in trying to recover her jewel. And neither my lady, nor you, nor anybody else could guess why.

?Quite true, Betteredge! And I come back from my travels, and find her mortally offended with me still. I knew that the Diamond was at the bottom of it, last year, and I know that the Diamond is at the bottom of it now. I have tried to speak to her, and she won't see me. I have tried to write to her, and she won't answer me. How, in Heaven's name, am I to clear the matter up? The chance of searching into the loss of the Moonstone, is the one chance of inquiry that Rachel herself has left me.?

Those words evidently put the case before him, as he had not seen it yet. He asked a question which satisfied me that I had shaken him.

‘There is no ill-feeling in this, Mr. Franklin, on your side?is there?’

‘There was some anger,’ I answered, ‘when I left London. But that is all worn out now. I want to make Rachel come to an understanding with me?and I want nothing more.’

‘You don’t feel any fear, sir?supposing you make any discoveries?in regard to what you may find out about Miss Rachel?’

I understood the jealous belief in his young mistress which prompted those words.

‘I am as certain of her as you are,’ I answered. ‘The fullest disclosure of her secret will reveal nothing that can alter her place in your estimation, or in mine.’

Betteredge’s last-left scruples vanished at that.

‘If I am doing wrong to help you, Mr. Franklin,’ he exclaimed, ‘all I can say is?I am as innocent of seeing it as the babe unborn! I can put you on the road to discovery, if you can only go on by yourself. You remember that poor girl of ours?Rosanna Spearman?’

‘Of course!’

‘You always thought she had some sort of confession in regard to this matter of the Moonstone, which she wanted to make to you?’

‘I certainly couldn’t account for her strange conduct in any other way.’

‘You may set that doubt at rest, Mr. Franklin, whenever you please.’

It was my turn to come to a standstill now. I tried vainly, in the gathering darkness, to see his face. In the surprise of the moment, I asked a little impatiently what he meant.

‘Steady, sir!’ proceeded Betteredge. ‘I mean what I say. Rosanna Spearman left a sealed letter behind her?a letter addressed to _you_.’

‘Where is it?’

‘In the possession of a friend of hers, at Cobb’s Hole. You must have heard tell, when you were here last, sir, of Limping Lucy?a lame girl with a crutch.’

‘The fisherman’s daughter?’

‘The same, Mr. Franklin.’

‘Why wasn’t the letter forwarded to me?’

?Limping Lucy has a will of her own, sir. She wouldn't give it into any hands but yours. And you had left England before I could write to you.?

?Let's go back, Betteredge, and get it at once!?

?Too late, sir, tonight. They're great savers of candles along our coast; and they go to bed early at Cobb's Hole.?

?Nonsense! We might get there in half an hour.?

?_You_ might, sir. And when you did get there, you would find the door locked.? He pointed to a light, glimmering below us; and, at the same moment, I heard through the stillness of the evening the bubbling of a stream. ?There's the Farm, Mr. Franklin! Make yourself comfortable for tonight, and come to me tomorrow morning?if you'll be so kind??

?You will go with me to the fisherman's cottage??

?Yes, sir.?

?Early??

?As early, Mr. Franklin, as you like.?

We descended the path that led to the Farm.

CHAPTER III

I have only the most indistinct recollection of what happened at Hotherstone's Farm.

I remember a hearty welcome; a prodigious supper, which would have fed a whole village in the East; a delightfully clean bedroom, with nothing in it to regret but that detestable product of the folly of our forefathers?a feather-bed; a restless night, with much kindling of matches, and many lightings of one little candle; and an immense sensation of relief when the sun rose, and there was a prospect of getting up.

It had been arranged over-night with Betteredge, that I was to call for him, on our way to Cobb's Hole, as early as I liked?which, interpreted by my impatience to get possession of the letter, meant as early as I could. Without waiting for breakfast at the Farm, I took a crust of bread in my hand, and set forth, in some doubt whether I should not surprise the excellent Betteredge in his bed. To my great relief he proved to be quite as excited about the coming event as I was. I found him ready, and waiting for me, with his stick in his hand.

?How are you this morning, Betteredge??

?Very poorly, sir.?

?Sorry to hear it. What do you complain of??

?I complain of a new disease, Mr. Franklin, of my own inventing. I don?t want to alarm you, but you?re certain to catch it before the morning is out.?

?The devil I am!?

?Do you feel an uncomfortable heat at the pit of your stomach, sir? and a nasty thumping at the top of your head? Ah! not yet? It will lay hold of you at Cobb?s Hole, Mr. Franklin. I call it the detective-fever; and _I_ first caught it in the company of Sergeant Cuff.?

?Aye! aye! and the cure in this instance is to open Rosanna Spearman?s letter, I suppose? Come along, and let?s get it.?

Early as it was, we found the fisherman?s wife astir in her kitchen. On my presentation by Betteredge, good Mrs. Yolland performed a social ceremony, strictly reserved (as I afterwards learnt) for strangers of distinction. She put a bottle of Dutch gin and a couple of clean pipes on the table, and opened the conversation by saying, ?What news from London, sir??

Before I could find an answer to this immensely comprehensive question, an apparition advanced towards me, out of a dark corner of the kitchen. A wan, wild, haggard girl, with remarkably beautiful hair, and with a fierce keenness in her eyes, came limping up on a crutch to the table at which I was sitting, and looked at me as if I was an object of mingled interest and horror, which it quite fascinated her to see.

?Mr. Betteredge,? she said, without taking her eyes off me, ?mention his name again, if you please.?

?This gentleman?s name,? answered Betteredge (with a strong emphasis on _gentleman_), ?is Mr. Franklin Blake.?

The girl turned her back on me, and suddenly left the room. Good Mrs. Yolland?as I believe?made some apologies for her daughter?s odd behaviour, and Betteredge (probably) translated them into polite English. I speak of this in complete uncertainty. My attention was absorbed in following the sound of the girl?s crutch. Thump-thump, up the wooden stairs; thump-thump across the room above our heads; thump-thump down the stairs again?and there stood the apparition at the open door, with a letter in its hand, beckoning me out!

I left more apologies in course of delivery behind me, and followed this strange creature?limping on before me, faster and faster?down the slope of the beach. She led me behind some boats, out of sight and hearing of the few people in the fishing-village, and then stopped, and faced me for the first time.

?Stand there,? she said, ?I want to look at you.?

There was no mistaking the expression on her face. I inspired her with

the strongest emotions of abhorrence and disgust. Let me not be vain enough to say that no woman had ever looked at me in this manner before. I will only venture on the more modest assertion that no woman had ever let me perceive it yet. There is a limit to the length of the inspection which a man can endure, under certain circumstances. I attempted to direct Limping Lucy's attention to some less revolting object than my face.

'I think you have got a letter to give me,' I began. 'Is it the letter there, in your hand?'

'Say that again,' was the only answer I received.

I repeated the words, like a good child learning its lesson.

'No,' said the girl, speaking to herself, but keeping her eyes still mercilessly fixed on me. 'I can't find out what she saw in his face. I can't guess what she heard in his voice.' She suddenly looked away from me, and rested her head wearily on the top of her crutch. 'Oh, my poor dear!' she said, in the first soft tones which had fallen from her, in my hearing. 'Oh, my lost darling! what could you see in this man?' She lifted her head again fiercely, and looked at me once more. 'Can you eat and drink?' she asked.

I did my best to preserve my gravity, and answered, 'Yes.'

'Can you sleep?'

'Yes.'

'When you see a poor girl in service, do you feel no remorse?'

'Certainly not. Why should I?'

She abruptly thrust the letter (as the phrase is) into my face.

'Take it!' she exclaimed furiously. 'I never set eyes on you before. God Almighty forbid I should ever set eyes on you again.'

With those parting words she limped away from me at the top of her speed. The one interpretation that I could put on her conduct has, no doubt, been anticipated by everybody. I could only suppose that she was mad.

Having reached that inevitable conclusion, I turned to the more interesting object of investigation which was presented to me by Rosanna Spearman's letter. The address was written as follows: 'For Franklin Blake, Esq. To be given into his own hands (and not to be trusted to anyone else), by Lucy Yolland.'

I broke the seal. The envelope contained a letter: and this, in its turn, contained a slip of paper. I read the letter first:

'Sir, if you are curious to know the meaning of my behaviour to you,

whilst you were staying in the house of my mistress, Lady Verinder, do what you are told to do in the memorandum enclosed with this?and do it without any person being present to overlook you. Your humble servant,

?ROSANNA SPEARMAN.?

I turned to the slip of paper next. Here is the literal copy of it, word for word:

?Memorandum:?'To go to the Shivering Sand at the turn of the tide. To walk out on the South Spit, until I get the South Spit Beacon, and the flagstaff at the Coast-guard station above Cobb?'s Hole in a line together. To lay down on the rocks, a stick, or any straight thing to guide my hand, exactly in the line of the beacon and the flagstaff. To take care, in doing this, that one end of the stick shall be at the edge of the rocks, on the side of them which overlooks the quicksand. To feel along the stick, among the seaweed (beginning from the end of the stick which points towards the beacon), for the Chain. To run my hand along the Chain, when found, until I come to the part of it which stretches over the edge of the rocks, down into the quicksand. _And then, to pull the chain._?

Just as I had read the last words?underlined in the original?I heard the voice of Betteredge behind me. The inventor of the detective-fever had completely succumbed to that irresistible malady. ?I can?t stand it any longer, Mr. Franklin. What does her letter say? For mercy?s sake, sir, tell us, what does her letter say??

I handed him the letter, and the memorandum. He read the first without appearing to be much interested in it. But the second?the memorandum?produced a strong impression on him.

?The Sergeant said it!? cried Betteredge. ?From first to last, sir, the Sergeant said she had got a memorandum of the hiding-place. And here it is! Lord save us, Mr. Franklin, here is the secret that puzzled everybody, from the great Cuff downwards, ready and waiting, as one may say, to show itself to _you!_ It?s the ebb now, sir, as anybody may see for themselves. How long will it be till the turn of the tide?? He looked up, and observed a lad at work, at some little distance from us, mending a net. ?Tammie Bright!? he shouted at the top of his voice.

?I hear you!? Tammie shouted back.

?When?s the turn of the tide??

?In an hour?s time.?

We both looked at our watches.

?We can go round by the coast, Mr. Franklin,? said Betteredge; ?and get to the quicksand in that way with plenty of time to spare. What do you say, sir??

?Come along!?

On our way to the Shivering Sand, I applied to Betteredge to revive my memory of events (as affecting Rosanna Spearman) at the period of Sergeant Cuff's inquiry. With my old friend's help, I soon had the succession of circumstances clearly registered in my mind. Rosanna's journey to Frizinghall, when the whole household believed her to be ill in her own room?Rosanna's mysterious employment of the night-time with her door locked, and her candle burning till the morning?Rosanna's suspicious purchase of the japanned tin case, and the two dog's chains from Mrs. Yolland?the Sergeant's positive conviction that Rosanna had hidden something at the Shivering Sand, and the Sergeant's absolute ignorance as to what that something might be?all these strange results of the abortive inquiry into the loss of the Moonstone were clearly present to me again, when we reached the quicksand, and walked out together on the low ledge of rocks called the South Spit.

With Betteredge's help, I soon stood in the right position to see the Beacon and the Coast-guard flagstaff in a line together. Following the memorandum as our guide, we next laid my stick in the necessary direction, as neatly as we could, on the uneven surface of the rocks. And then we looked at our watches once more.

It wanted nearly twenty minutes yet of the turn of the tide. I suggested waiting through this interval on the beach, instead of on the wet and slippery surface of the rocks. Having reached the dry sand, I prepared to sit down; and, greatly to my surprise, Betteredge prepared to leave me.

?What are you going away for?? I asked.

?Look at the letter again, sir, and you will see.?

A glance at the letter reminded me that I was charged, when I made my discovery, to make it alone.

?It's hard enough for me to leave you, at such a time as this,? said Betteredge. ?But she died a dreadful death, poor soul?and I feel a kind of call on me, Mr. Franklin, to humour that fancy of hers. Besides,? he added, confidentially, ?there's nothing in the letter against your letting out the secret afterwards. I'll hang about in the fir-plantation, and wait till you pick me up. Don't be longer than you can help, sir. The detective-fever isn't an easy disease to deal with, under these circumstances.?

With that parting caution, he left me.

The interval of expectation, short as it was when reckoned by the measure of time, assumed formidable proportions when reckoned by the measure of suspense. This was one of the occasions on which the invaluable habit of smoking becomes especially precious and consolatory. I lit a cigar, and sat down on the slope of the beach.

The sunlight poured its unclouded beauty on every object that I could see. The exquisite freshness of the air made the mere act of living and breathing a luxury. Even the lonely little bay welcomed the morning with a show of cheerfulness; and the bared wet surface of the quicksand itself, glittering with a golden brightness, hid the horror of its false brown face under a passing smile. It was the finest day I had seen since my return to England.

The turn of the tide came, before my cigar was finished. I saw the preliminary heaving of the Sand, and then the awful shiver that crept over its surface?as if some spirit of terror lived and moved and shuddered in the fathomless deeps beneath. I threw away my cigar, and went back again to the rocks.

My directions in the memorandum instructed me to feel along the line traced by the stick, beginning with the end which was nearest to the beacon.

I advanced, in this manner, more than half way along the stick, without encountering anything but the edges of the rocks. An inch or two further on, however, my patience was rewarded. In a narrow little fissure, just within reach of my forefinger, I felt the chain. Attempting, next, to follow it, by touch, in the direction of the quicksand, I found my progress stopped by a thick growth of seaweed?which had fastened itself into the fissure, no doubt, in the time that had elapsed since Rosanna Spearman had chosen her hiding-place.

It was equally impossible to pull up the seaweed, or to force my hand through it. After marking the spot indicated by the end of the stick which was placed nearest to the quicksand, I determined to pursue the search for the chain on a plan of my own. My idea was to ?sound? immediately under the rocks, on the chance of recovering the lost trace of the chain at the point at which it entered the sand. I took up the stick, and knelt down on the brink of the South Spit.

In this position, my face was within a few feet of the surface of the quicksand. The sight of it so near me, still disturbed at intervals by its hideous shivering fit, shook my nerves for the moment. A horrible fancy that the dead woman might appear on the scene of her suicide, to assist my search?an unutterable dread of seeing her rise through the heaving surface of the sand, and point to the place?forced itself into my mind, and turned me cold in the warm sunlight. I own I closed my eyes at the moment when the point of the stick first entered the quicksand.

The instant afterwards, before the stick could have been submerged more than a few inches, I was free from the hold of my own superstitious terror, and was throbbing with excitement from head to foot. Sounding blindfold, at my first attempt?at that first attempt I had sounded right! The stick struck the chain.

Taking a firm hold of the roots of the seaweed with my left hand, I laid myself down over the brink, and felt with my right hand under the

overhanging edges of the rock. My right hand found the chain.

I drew it up without the slightest difficulty. And there was the japanned tin case fastened to the end of it.

The action of the water had so rusted the chain, that it was impossible for me to unfasten it from the hasp which attached it to the case. Putting the case between my knees and exerting my utmost strength, I contrived to draw off the cover. Some white substance filled the whole interior when I looked in. I put in my hand, and found it to be linen.

In drawing out the linen, I also drew out a letter crumpled up with it. After looking at the direction, and discovering that it bore my name, I put the letter in my pocket, and completely removed the linen. It came out in a thick roll, moulded, of course, to the shape of the case in which it had been so long confined, and perfectly preserved from any injury by the sea.

I carried the linen to the dry sand of the beach, and there unrolled and smoothed it out. There was no mistaking it as an article of dress. It was a nightgown.

The uppermost side, when I spread it out, presented to view innumerable folds and creases, and nothing more. I tried the undermost side, next?and instantly discovered the smear of the paint from the door of Rachel?s boudoir!

My eyes remained riveted on the stain, and my mind took me back at a leap from present to past. The very words of Sergeant Cuff recurred to me, as if the man himself was at my side again, pointing to the unanswerable inference which he drew from the smear on the door.

?Find out whether there is any article of dress in this house with the stain of paint on it. Find out who that dress belongs to. Find out how the person can account for having been in the room, and smeared the paint between midnight and three in the morning. If the person can?t satisfy you, you haven?t far to look for the hand that took the Diamond.?

One after another those words travelled over my memory, repeating themselves again and again with a wearisome, mechanical reiteration. I was roused from what felt like a trance of many hours?from what was really, no doubt, the pause of a few moments only?by a voice calling to me. I looked up, and saw that Betteredge?s patience had failed him at last. He was just visible between the sandhills, returning to the beach.

The old man?s appearance recalled me, the moment I perceived it, to my sense of present things, and reminded me that the inquiry which I had pursued thus far still remained incomplete. I had discovered the smear on the nightgown. To whom did the nightgown belong?

My first impulse was to consult the letter in my pocket?the letter which I had found in the case.

As I raised my hand to take it out, I remembered that there was a shorter way to discovery than this. The nightgown itself would reveal the truth, for, in all probability, the nightgown was marked with its owner's name.

I took it up from the sand, and looked for the mark.

I found the mark, and read MY OWN NAME.

There were the familiar letters which told me that the nightgown was mine. I looked up from them. There was the sun; there were the glittering waters of the bay; there was old Betteredge, advancing nearer and nearer to me. I looked back again at the letters. My own name. Plainly confronting me my own name.

If time, pains, and money can do it, I will lay my hand on the thief who took the Moonstone. I had left London, with those words on my lips. I had penetrated the secret which the quicksand had kept from every other living creature. And, on the unanswerable evidence of the paint-stain, I had discovered Myself as the Thief.

CHAPTER IV

I have not a word to say about my own sensations.

My impression is that the shock inflicted on me completely suspended my thinking and feeling power. I certainly could not have known what I was about when Betteredge joined me for I have it on his authority that I laughed, when he asked what was the matter, and putting the nightgown into his hands, told him to read the riddle for himself.

Of what was said between us on the beach, I have not the faintest recollection. The first place in which I can now see myself again plainly is the plantation of firs. Betteredge and I are walking back together to the house; and Betteredge is telling me that I shall be able to face it, and he will be able to face it, when we have had a glass of grog.

The scene shifts from the plantation, to Betteredge's little sitting-room. My resolution not to enter Rachel's house is forgotten. I feel gratefully the coolness and shadiness and quiet of the room. I drink the grog (a perfectly new luxury to me, at that time of day), which my good old friend mixes with icy-cold water from the well. Under any other circumstances, the drink would simply stupefy me. As things are, it strings up my nerves. I begin to face it, as Betteredge has predicted. And Betteredge, on his side, begins to face it, too.

The picture which I am now presenting of myself, will, I suspect, be thought a very strange one, to say the least of it. Placed in a situation which may, I think, be described as entirely without parallel, what is the first proceeding to which I resort? Do I seclude myself from all human society? Do I set my mind to analyse the

abominable impossibility which, nevertheless, confronts me as an undeniable fact? Do I hurry back to London by the first train to consult the highest authorities, and to set a searching inquiry on foot immediately? No. I accept the shelter of a house which I had resolved never to degrade myself by entering again; and I sit, tipping spirits and water in the company of an old servant, at ten o'clock in the morning. Is this the conduct that might have been expected from a man placed in my horrible position? I can only answer that the sight of old Betteredge's familiar face was an inexpressible comfort to me, and that the drinking of old Betteredge's grog helped me, as I believe nothing else would have helped me, in the state of complete bodily and mental prostration into which I had fallen. I can only offer this excuse for myself; and I can only admire that invariable preservation of dignity, and that strictly logical consistency of conduct which distinguish every man and woman who may read these lines, in every emergency of their lives from the cradle to the grave.

"Now, Mr. Franklin, there's one thing certain, at any rate," said Betteredge, throwing the nightgown down on the table between us, and pointing to it as if it was a living creature that could hear him. "He's a liar, to begin with."

This comforting view of the matter was not the view that presented itself to my mind.

"I am as innocent of all knowledge of having taken the Diamond as you are," I said. "But there is the witness against me! The paint on the nightgown, and the name on the nightgown are facts."

Betteredge lifted my glass, and put it persuasively into my hand.

"Facts?" he repeated. "Take a drop more grog, Mr. Franklin, and you'll get over the weakness of believing in facts! Foul play, sir!" he continued, dropping his voice confidentially. "That is how I read the riddle. Foul play somewhere—and you and I must find it out. Was there nothing else in the tin case, when you put your hand into it?"

The question instantly reminded me of the letter in my pocket. I took it out, and opened it. It was a letter of many pages, closely written. I looked impatiently for the signature at the end. "Rosanna Spearman."

As I read the name, a sudden remembrance illuminated my mind, and a sudden suspicion rose out of the new light.

"Stop!" I exclaimed. "Rosanna Spearman came to my aunt out of a reformatory? Rosanna Spearman had once been a thief?"

"There's no denying that, Mr. Franklin. What of it now, if you please?"

"What of it now? How do we know she may not have stolen the Diamond after all? How do we know she may not have smeared my nightgown purposely with the paint?"

Betteredge laid his hand on my arm, and stopped me before I could say

any more.

‘You will be cleared of this, Mr. Franklin, beyond all doubt. But I hope you won’t be cleared in that way. See what the letter says, sir. In justice to the girl’s memory, see what it says.’

I felt the earnestness with which he spoke; felt it as a friendly rebuke to me. ‘You shall form your own judgment on her letter,’ I said. ‘I will read it out.’

I began and read these lines:

‘Sir, I have something to own to you. A confession which means much misery, may sometimes be made in very few words. This confession can be made in three words. I love you.’

The letter dropped from my hand. I looked at Betteredge. ‘In the name of Heaven,’ I said, ‘what does it mean?’

He seemed to shrink from answering the question.

‘You and Limping Lucy were alone together this morning, sir,’ he said. ‘Did she say nothing about Rosanna Spearman?’

‘She never even mentioned Rosanna Spearman’s name.’

‘Please to go back to the letter, Mr. Franklin. I tell you plainly, I can’t find it in my heart to distress you, after what you have had to bear already. Let her speak for herself, sir. And get on with your grog. For your own sake, get on with your grog.’

I resumed the reading of the letter.

‘It would be very disgraceful to me to tell you this, if I was a living woman when you read it. I shall be dead and gone, sir, when you find my letter. It is that which makes me bold. Not even my grave will be left to tell of me. I may own the truth; with the quicksand waiting to hide me when the words are written.

‘Besides, you will find your nightgown in my hiding-place, with the smear of the paint on it; and you will want to know how it came to be hidden by me; and why I said nothing to you about it in my life-time? I have only one reason to give. I did these strange things, because I loved you.

‘I won’t trouble you with much about myself, or my life, before you came to my lady’s house. Lady Verinder took me out of a reformatory. I had gone to the reformatory from the prison. I was put in the prison, because I was a thief. I was a thief, because my mother went on the streets when I was quite a little girl. My mother went on the streets, because the gentleman who was my father deserted her. There is no need to tell such a common story as this, at any length. It is told quite often enough in the newspapers.

?Lady Verinder was very kind to me, and Mr. Betteredge was very kind to me. Those two, and the matron at the reformatory, are the only good people I have ever met with in all my life. I might have got on in my place?not happily?but I might have got on, if you had not come visiting. I don?t blame you, sir. It?s my fault?all my fault.

?Do you remember when you came out on us from among the sandhills, that morning, looking for Mr. Betteredge? You were like a prince in a fairy-story. You were like a lover in a dream. You were the most adorable human creature I had ever seen. Something that felt like the happy life I had never led yet, leapt up in me at the instant I set eyes on you. Don?t laugh at this if you can help it. Oh, if I could only make you feel how serious it is to me!

?I went back to the house, and wrote your name and mine in my work-box, and drew a true lovers? knot under them. Then, some devil?no, I ought to say some good angel?whispered to me, ?Go and look in the glass.? The glass told me?never mind what. I was too foolish to take the warning. I went on getting fonder and fonder of you, just as if I was a lady in your own rank of life, and the most beautiful creature your eyes ever rested on. I tried?oh, dear, how I tried?to get you to look at me. If you had known how I used to cry at night with the misery and the mortification of your never taking any notice of me, you would have pitied me perhaps, and have given me a look now and then to live on.

?It would have been no very kind look, perhaps, if you had known how I hated Miss Rachel. I believe I found out you were in love with her, before you knew it yourself. She used to give you roses to wear in your button-hole. Ah, Mr. Franklin, you wore my roses oftener than either you or she thought! The only comfort I had at that time, was putting my rose secretly in your glass of water, in place of hers?and then throwing her rose away.

?If she had been really as pretty as you thought her, I might have borne it better. No; I believe I should have been more spiteful against her still. Suppose you put Miss Rachel into a servant?s dress, and took her ornaments off? I don?t know what is the use of my writing in this way. It can?t be denied that she had a bad figure; she was too thin. But who can tell what the men like? And young ladies may behave in a manner which would cost a servant her place. It?s no business of mine. I can?t expect you to read my letter, if I write it in this way. But it does stir one up to hear Miss Rachel called pretty, when one knows all the time that it?s her dress does it, and her confidence in herself.

?Try not to lose patience with me, sir. I will get on as fast as I can to the time which is sure to interest you?the time when the Diamond was lost.

?But there is one thing which I have got it on my mind to tell you first.

?My life was not a very hard life to bear, while I was a thief. It was only when they had taught me at the reformatory to feel my own degradation, and to try for better things, that the days grew long and

weary. Thoughts of the future forced themselves on me now. I felt the dreadful reproach that honest people—even the kindest of honest people—were to me in themselves. A heart-breaking sensation of loneliness kept with me, go where I might, and do what I might, and see what persons I might. It was my duty, I know, to try and get on with my fellow-servants in my new place. Somehow, I couldn't make friends with them. They looked (or I thought they looked) as if they suspected what I had been. I don't regret, far from it, having been roused to make the effort to be a reformed woman—but, indeed, indeed it was a weary life. You had come across it like a beam of sunshine at first—and then you too failed me. I was mad enough to love you; and I couldn't even attract your notice. There was great misery—there really was great misery in that.

Now I am coming to what I wanted to tell you. In those days of bitterness, I went two or three times, when it was my turn to go out, to my favourite place—the beach above the Shivering Sand. And I said to myself, 'I think it will end here. When I can bear it no longer, I think it will end here.' You will understand, sir, that the place had laid a kind of spell on me before you came. I had always had a notion that something would happen to me at the quicksand. But I had never looked at it, with the thought of its being the means of my making away with myself, till the time came of which I am now writing. Then I did think that here was a place which would end all my troubles for me in a moment or two—and hide me for ever afterwards.

This is all I have to say about myself, reckoning from the morning when I first saw you, to the morning when the alarm was raised in the house that the Diamond was lost.

I was so aggravated by the foolish talk among the women servants, all wondering who was to be suspected first; and I was so angry with you (knowing no better at that time) for the pains you took in hunting for the jewel, and sending for the police, that I kept as much as possible away by myself, until later in the day, when the officer from Frizinghall came to the house.

Mr. Seegrave began, as you may remember, by setting a guard on the women's bedrooms; and the women all followed him upstairs in a rage, to know what he meant by the insult he had put on them. I went with the rest, because if I had done anything different from the rest, Mr. Seegrave was the sort of man who would have suspected me directly. We found him in Miss Rachel's room. He told us he wouldn't have a lot of women there; and he pointed to the smear on the painted door, and said some of our petticoats had done the mischief, and sent us all downstairs again.

After leaving Miss Rachel's room, I stopped a moment on one of the landings, by myself, to see if I had got the paint-stain by any chance on my gown. Penelope Betteredge (the only one of the women with whom I was on friendly terms) passed, and noticed what I was about.

'You needn't trouble yourself, Rosanna,' she said. 'The paint on Miss Rachel's door has been dry for hours. If Mr. Seegrave hadn't set a

watch on our bedrooms, I might have told him as much. I don't know what you think? I was never so insulted before in my life!

Penelope was a hot-tempered girl. I quieted her, and brought her back to what she had said about the paint on the door having been dry for hours.

How do you know that? I asked.

I was with Miss Rachel, and Mr. Franklin, all yesterday morning, Penelope said, mixing the colours, while they finished the door. I heard Miss Rachel ask whether the door would be dry that evening, in time for the birthday company to see it. And Mr. Franklin shook his head, and said it wouldn't be dry in less than twelve hours. It was long past luncheon-time; it was three o'clock before they had done. What does your arithmetic say, Rosanna? Mine says the door was dry by three this morning.

Did some of the ladies go upstairs yesterday evening to see it? I asked. I thought I heard Miss Rachel warning them to keep clear of the door.

None of the ladies made the smear, Penelope answered. I left Miss Rachel in bed at twelve last night. And I noticed the door, and there was nothing wrong with it then.

Oughtn't you to mention this to Mr. Seegrave, Penelope?

I wouldn't say a word to help Mr. Seegrave for anything that could be offered to me!

She went to her work, and I went to mine.

My work, sir, was to make your bed, and to put your room tidy. It was the happiest hour I had in the whole day. I used to kiss the pillow on which your head had rested all night. No matter who has done it since, you have never had your clothes folded as nicely as I folded them for you. Of all the little knick-knacks in your dressing-case, there wasn't one that had so much as a speck on it. You never noticed it, any more than you noticed me. I beg your pardon; I am forgetting myself. I will make haste, and go on again.

Well, I went in that morning to do my work in your room. There was your nightgown tossed across the bed, just as you had thrown it off. I took it up to fold it; and I saw the stain of the paint from Miss Rachel's door!

I was so startled by the discovery that I ran out with the nightgown in my hand, and made for the back stairs, and locked myself into my own room, to look at it in a place where nobody could intrude and interrupt me.

As soon as I got my breath again, I called to mind my talk with Penelope, and I said to myself, Here's the proof that he was in Miss

Rachel's sitting-room between twelve last night, and three this morning!?

I shall not tell you in plain words what was the first suspicion that crossed my mind, when I had made that discovery. You would only be angry?and, if you were angry, you might tear my letter up and read no more of it.

Let it be enough, if you please, to say only this. After thinking it over to the best of my ability, I made it out that the thing wasn't likely, for a reason that I will tell you. If you had been in Miss Rachel's sitting-room, at that time of night, with Miss Rachel's knowledge (and if you had been foolish enough to forget to take care of the wet door) _she_ would have reminded you?_she_ would never have let you carry away such a witness against her, as the witness I was looking at now! At the same time, I own I was not completely certain in my own mind that I had proved my own suspicion to be wrong. You will not have forgotten that I have owned to hating Miss Rachel. Try to think, if you can, that there was a little of that hatred in all this. It ended in my determining to keep the nightgown, and to wait, and watch, and see what use I might make of it. At that time, please to remember, not the ghost of an idea entered my head that _you_ had stolen the Diamond.?

There, I broke off in the reading of the letter for the second time.

I had read those portions of the miserable woman's confession which related to myself, with unaffected surprise, and, I can honestly add, with sincere distress. I had regretted, truly regretted, the aspersion which I had thoughtlessly cast on her memory, before I had seen a line of her letter. But when I had advanced as far as the passage which is quoted above, I own I felt my mind growing bitterer and bitterer against Rosanna Spearman as I went on. ?Read the rest for yourself,? I said, handing the letter to Betteredge across the table. ?If there is anything in it that I _must_ look at, you can tell me as you go on.?

I understand you, Mr. Franklin,? he answered. ?It's natural, sir, in _you_. And, God help us all!? he added, in a lower tone, ?it's no less natural in _her_.?

I proceed to copy the continuation of the letter from the original, in my own possession:?

Having determined to keep the nightgown, and to see what use my love, or my revenge (I hardly know which) could turn it to in the future, the next thing to discover was how to keep it without the risk of being found out.

There was only one way?to make another nightgown exactly like it, before Saturday came, and brought the laundry-woman and her inventory to the house.

I was afraid to put it off till next day (the Friday); being in doubt lest some accident might happen in the interval. I determined to make the new nightgown on that same day (the Thursday), while I could count,

if I played my cards properly, on having my time to myself. The first thing to do (after locking up your nightgown in my drawer) was to go back to your bedroom?not so much to put it to rights (Penelope would have done that for me, if I had asked her) as to find out whether you had smeared off any of the paint-stain from your nightgown, on the bed, or on any piece of furniture in the room.

?I examined everything narrowly, and at last, I found a few streaks of the paint on the inside of your dressing-gown?not the linen dressing-gown you usually wore in that summer season, but a flannel dressing-gown which you had with you also. I suppose you felt chilly after walking to and fro in nothing but your nightdress, and put on the warmest thing you could find. At any rate, there were the stains, just visible, on the inside of the dressing-gown. I easily got rid of these by scraping away the stuff of the flannel. This done, the only proof left against you was the proof locked up in my drawer.

?I had just finished your room when I was sent for to be questioned by Mr. Seegrave, along with the rest of the servants. Next came the examination of all our boxes. And then followed the most extraordinary event of the day?to _me_?since I had found the paint on your nightgown. This event came out of the second questioning of Penelope Betteredge by Superintendent Seegrave.

?Penelope returned to us quite beside herself with rage at the manner in which Mr. Seegrave had treated her. He had hinted, beyond the possibility of mistaking him, that he suspected her of being the thief. We were all equally astonished at hearing this, and we all asked, Why?

??Because the Diamond was in Miss Rachel?s sitting-room,? Penelope answered. ?And because I was the last person in the sitting-room at night!?

?Almost before the words had left her lips, I remembered that another person had been in the sitting-room later than Penelope. That person was yourself. My head whirled round, and my thoughts were in dreadful confusion. In the midst of it all, something in my mind whispered to me that the smear on your nightgown might have a meaning entirely different to the meaning which I had given to it up to that time. ?If the last person who was in the room is the person to be suspected,? I thought to myself, ?the thief is not Penelope, but Mr. Franklin Blake!?

?In the case of any other gentleman, I believe I should have been ashamed of suspecting him of theft, almost as soon as the suspicion had passed through my mind.

?But the bare thought that _you_ had let yourself down to my level, and that I, in possessing myself of your nightgown, had also possessed myself of the means of shielding you from being discovered, and disgraced for life?I say, sir, the bare thought of this seemed to open such a chance before me of winning your good will, that I passed blindfold, as one may say, from suspecting to believing. I made up my mind, on the spot, that you had shown yourself the busiest of anybody in fetching the police, as a blind to deceive us all; and that the hand

which had taken Miss Rachel's jewel could by no possibility be any other hand than yours.

The excitement of this new discovery of mine must, I think, have turned my head for a while. I felt such a devouring eagerness to see you—to try you with a word or two about the Diamond, and to _make_ you look at me, and speak to me, in that way—that I put my hair tidy, and made myself as nice as I could, and went to you boldly in the library where I knew you were writing.

You had left one of your rings upstairs, which made as good an excuse for my intrusion as I could have desired. But, oh, sir! if you have ever loved, you will understand how it was that all my courage cooled, when I walked into the room, and found myself in your presence. And then, you looked up at me so coldly, and you thanked me for finding your ring in such an indifferent manner, that my knees trembled under me, and I felt as if I should drop on the floor at your feet. When you had thanked me, you looked back, if you remember, at your writing. I was so mortified at being treated in this way, that I plucked up spirit enough to speak. I said, "This is a strange thing about the Diamond, sir." And you looked up again, and said, "Yes, it is!" You spoke civilly (I can't deny that); but still you kept a distance—a cruel distance between us. Believing, as I did, that you had got the lost Diamond hidden about you, while you were speaking, your coolness so provoked me that I got bold enough, in the heat of the moment, to give you a hint. I said, "They will never find the Diamond, sir, will they? No! nor the person who took it!" I'll answer for that." I nodded, and smiled at you, as much as to say, "I know!" _This_ time, you looked up at me with something like interest in your eyes; and I felt that a few more words on your side and mine might bring out the truth. Just at that moment, Mr. Betteredge spoilt it all by coming to the door. I knew his footstep, and I also knew that it was against his rules for me to be in the library at that time of day—let alone being there along with you. I had only just time to get out of my own accord, before he could come in and tell me to go. I was angry and disappointed; but I was not entirely without hope for all that. The ice, you see, was broken between us—and I thought I would take care, on the next occasion, that Mr. Betteredge was out of the way.

When I got back to the servants' hall, the bell was going for our dinner. Afternoon already! and the materials for making the new nightgown were still to be got! There was but one chance of getting them. I shammed ill at dinner; and so secured the whole of the interval from then till tea-time to my own use.

What I was about, while the household believed me to be lying down in my own room; and how I spent the night, after shamming ill again at tea-time, and having been sent up to bed, there is no need to tell you. Sergeant Cuff discovered that much, if he discovered nothing more. And I can guess how. I was detected (though I kept my veil down) in the draper's shop at Frizinghall. There was a glass in front of me, at the counter where I was buying the longcloth; and—in that glass—I saw one of the shopmen point to my shoulder and whisper to another. At night again, when I was secretly at work, locked into my room, I heard the

breathing of the women servants who suspected me, outside my door.

It didn't matter then; it doesn't matter now. On the Friday morning, hours before Sergeant Cuff entered the house, there was the new nightgown to make up your number in place of the nightgown that I had got made, wrung out, dried, ironed, marked, and folded as the laundry woman folded all the others, safe in your drawer. There was no fear (if the linen in the house was examined) of the newness of the nightgown betraying me. All your underclothing had been renewed, when you came to our house I suppose on your return home from foreign parts.

The next thing was the arrival of Sergeant Cuff; and the next great surprise was the announcement of what he thought about the smear on the door.

I had believed you to be guilty (as I have owned), more because I wanted you to be guilty than for any other reason. And now, the Sergeant had come round by a totally different way to the same conclusion (respecting the nightgown) as mine! And I had got the dress that was the only proof against you! And not a living creature knew it yourself included! I am afraid to tell you how I felt when I called these things to mind you would hate my memory for ever afterwards.

At that place, Betteredge looked up from the letter.

Not a glimmer of light so far, Mr. Franklin, said the old man, taking off his heavy tortoiseshell spectacles, and pushing Rosanna Spearman's confession a little away from him. Have you come to any conclusion, sir, in your own mind, while I have been reading?

Finish the letter first, Betteredge; there may be something to enlighten us at the end of it. I shall have a word or two to say to you after that.

Very good, sir. I'll just rest my eyes, and then I'll go on again. In the meantime, Mr. Franklin I don't want to hurry you but would you mind telling me, in one word, whether you see your way out of this dreadful mess yet?

I see my way back to London, I said, to consult Mr. Bruff. If he can't help me?

Yes, sir?

And if the Sergeant won't leave his retirement at Dorking?

He won't, Mr. Franklin!

Then, Betteredge as far as I can see now I am at the end of my resources. After Mr. Bruff and the Sergeant, I don't know of a living creature who can be of the slightest use to me.

As the words passed my lips, some person outside knocked at the door of the room.

Betteredge looked surprised as well as annoyed by the interruption.

‘Come in,’ he called out, irritably, ‘whoever you are!’

The door opened, and there entered to us, quietly, the most remarkable-looking man that I had ever seen. Judging him by his figure and his movements, he was still young. Judging him by his face, and comparing him with Betteredge, he looked the elder of the two. His complexion was of a gipsy darkness; his fleshless cheeks had fallen into deep hollows, over which the bone projected like a penthouse. His nose presented the fine shape and modelling so often found among the ancient people of the East, so seldom visible among the newer races of the West. His forehead rose high and straight from the brow. His marks and wrinkles were innumerable. From this strange face, eyes, stranger still, of the softest brown—eyes dreamy and mournful, and deeply sunk in their orbits—looked out at you, and (in my case, at least) took your attention captive at their will. Add to this a quantity of thick closely-curling hair, which, by some freak of Nature, had lost its colour in the most startlingly partial and capricious manner. Over the top of his head it was still of the deep black which was its natural colour. Round the sides of his head—without the slightest gradation of grey to break the force of the extraordinary contrast—it had turned completely white. The line between the two colours preserved no sort of regularity. At one place, the white hair ran up into the black; at another, the black hair ran down into the white. I looked at the man with a curiosity which, I am ashamed to say, I found it quite impossible to control. His soft brown eyes looked back at me gently; and he met my involuntary rudeness in staring at him, with an apology which I was conscious that I had not deserved.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said. ‘I had no idea that Mr. Betteredge was engaged.’ He took a slip of paper from his pocket, and handed it to Betteredge. ‘The list for next week,’ he said. His eyes just rested on me again—and he left the room as quietly as he had entered it.

‘Who is that?’ I asked.

‘Mr. Candy’s assistant,’ said Betteredge. ‘By-the-bye, Mr. Franklin, you will be sorry to hear that the little doctor has never recovered that illness he caught, going home from the birthday dinner. He’s pretty well in health; but he lost his memory in the fever, and he has never recovered more than the wreck of it since. The work all falls on his assistant. Not much of it now, except among the poor. _They_ can’t help themselves, you know. _They_ must put up with the man with the piebald hair, and the gipsy complexion—or they would get no doctoring at all.’

‘You don’t seem to like him, Betteredge?’

‘Nobody likes him, sir.’

‘Why is he so unpopular?’

?Well, Mr. Franklin, his appearance is against him, to begin with. And then there?s a story that Mr. Candy took him with a very doubtful character. Nobody knows who he is?and he hasn?t a friend in the place. How can you expect one to like him, after that??

?Quite impossible, of course! May I ask what he wanted with you, when he gave you that bit of paper??

?Only to bring me the weekly list of the sick people about here, sir, who stand in need of a little wine. My lady always had a regular distribution of good sound port and sherry among the infirm poor; and Miss Rachel wishes the custom to be kept up. Times have changed! times have changed! I remember when Mr. Candy himself brought the list to my mistress. Now it?s Mr. Candy?s assistant who brings the list to me.

I?ll go on with the letter, if you will allow me, sir,? said

Betteredge, drawing Rosanna Spearman?s confession back to him. ?It isn?t lively reading, I grant you. But, there! it keeps me from getting sour with thinking of the past.? He put on his spectacles, and wagged his head gloomily. ?There?s a bottom of good sense, Mr. Franklin, in our conduct to our mothers, when they first start us on the journey of life. We are all of us more or less unwilling to be brought into the world. And we are all of us right.?

Mr. Candy?s assistant had produced too strong an impression on me to be immediately dismissed from my thoughts. I passed over the last unanswerable utterance of the Betteredge philosophy; and returned to the subject of the man with the piebald hair.

?What is his name?? I asked.

?As ugly a name as need be,? Betteredge answered gruffly. ?Ezra Jennings.?

CHAPTER V

Having told me the name of Mr. Candy?s assistant, Betteredge appeared to think that we had wasted enough of our time on an insignificant subject. He resumed the perusal of Rosanna Spearman?s letter.

On my side, I sat at the window, waiting until he had done. Little by little, the impression produced on me by Ezra Jennings?it seemed perfectly unaccountable, in such a situation as mine, that any human being should have produced an impression on me at all!?faded from my mind. My thoughts flowed back into their former channel. Once more, I forced myself to look my own incredible position resolutely in the face. Once more, I reviewed in my own mind the course which I had at last summoned composure enough to plan out for the future.

To go back to London that day; to put the whole case before Mr. Bruff; and, last and most important, to obtain (no matter by what means or at what sacrifice) a personal interview with Rachel?this was my plan of action, so far as I was capable of forming it at the time. There was more than an hour still to spare before the train started. And there

was the bare chance that Betteredge might discover something in the unread portion of Rosanna Spearman's letter, which it might be useful for me to know before I left the house in which the Diamond had been lost. For that chance I was now waiting.

The letter ended in these terms:

'You have no need to be angry, Mr. Franklin, even if I did feel some little triumph at knowing that I held all your prospects in life in my own hands. Anxieties and fears soon came back to me. With the view Sergeant Cuff took of the loss of the Diamond, he would be sure to end in examining our linen and our dresses. There was no place in my room—there was no place in the house—which I could feel satisfied would be safe from him. How to hide the nightgown so that not even the Sergeant could find it? and how to do that without losing one moment of precious time??—these were not easy questions to answer. My uncertainties ended in my taking a way that may make you laugh. I undressed, and put the nightgown on me. You had worn it?and I had another little moment of pleasure in wearing it after you.

The next news that reached us in the servants' hall showed that I had not made sure of the nightgown a moment too soon. Sergeant Cuff wanted to see the washing-book.

I found it, and took it to him in my lady's sitting-room. The Sergeant and I had come across each other more than once in former days. I was certain he would know me again?and I was not certain of what he might do when he found me employed as servant in a house in which a valuable jewel had been lost. In this suspense, I felt it would be a relief to me to get the meeting between us over, and to know the worst of it at once.

He looked at me as if I was a stranger, when I handed him the washing-book; and he was very specially polite in thanking me for bringing it. I thought those were both bad signs. There was no knowing what he might say of me behind my back; there was no knowing how soon I might not find myself taken in custody on suspicion, and searched. It was then time for your return from seeing Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite off by the railway; and I went to your favourite walk in the shrubbery, to try for another chance of speaking to you?the last chance, for all I knew to the contrary, that I might have.

You never appeared; and, what was worse still, Mr. Betteredge and Sergeant Cuff passed by the place where I was hiding?and the Sergeant saw me.

I had no choice, after that, but to return to my proper place and my proper work, before more disasters happened to me. Just as I was going to step across the path, you came back from the railway. You were making straight for the shrubbery, when you saw me?I am certain, sir, you saw me?and you turned away as if I had got the plague, and went into the house.*

* NOTE; by Franklin Blake.?The writer is entirely mistaken, poor

creature. I never noticed her. My intention was certainly to have taken a turn in the shrubbery. But, remembering at the same moment that my aunt might wish to see me, after my return from the railway, I altered my mind, and went into the house.

‘I made the best of my way indoors again, returning by the servants’ entrance. There was nobody in the laundry-room at that time; and I sat down there alone. I have told you already of the thoughts which the Shivering Sand put into my head. Those thoughts came back to me now. I wondered in myself which it would be harder to do, if things went on in this manner—to bear Mr. Franklin Blake’s indifference to me, or to jump into the quicksand and end it for ever in that way?’

‘It’s useless to ask me to account for my own conduct, at this time. I try—and I can’t understand it myself.’

‘Why didn’t I stop you, when you avoided me in that cruel manner? Why didn’t I call out, ‘Mr. Franklin, I have got something to say to you; it concerns yourself, and you must, and shall, hear it?’ You were at my mercy—I had got the whip-hand of you, as they say. And better than that, I had the means (if I could only make you trust me) of being useful to you in the future. Of course, I never supposed that you—a gentleman—had stolen the Diamond for the mere pleasure of stealing it. No. Penelope had heard Miss Rachel, and I had heard Mr. Betteredge, talk about your extravagance and your debts. It was plain enough to me that you had taken the Diamond to sell it, or pledge it, and so to get the money of which you stood in need. Well! I could have told you of a man in London who would have advanced a good large sum on the jewel, and who would have asked no awkward questions about it either.’

‘Why didn’t I speak to you! why didn’t I speak to you!’

‘I wonder whether the risks and difficulties of keeping the nightgown were as much as I could manage, without having other risks and difficulties added to them? This might have been the case with some women—but how could it be the case with me? In the days when I was a thief, I had run fifty times greater risks, and found my way out of difficulties to which _this_ difficulty was mere child’s play. I had been apprenticed, as you may say, to frauds and deceptions—some of them on such a grand scale, and managed so cleverly, that they became famous, and appeared in the newspapers. Was such a little thing as the keeping of the nightgown likely to weigh on my spirits, and to set my heart sinking within me, at the time when I ought to have spoken to you? What nonsense to ask the question! The thing couldn’t be.’

‘Where is the use of my dwelling in this way on my own folly? The plain truth is plain enough, surely? Behind your back, I loved you with all my heart and soul. Before your face—there’s no denying it—I was frightened of you; frightened of making you angry with me; frightened of what you might say to me (though you _had_ taken the Diamond) if I presumed to tell you that I had found it out. I had gone as near to it as I dared when I spoke to you in the library. You had not turned your back on me then. You had not started away from me as if I had got the

plague. I tried to provoke myself into feeling angry with you, and to rouse up my courage in that way. No! I couldn't feel anything but the misery and the mortification of it. 'You're a plain girl; you have got a crooked shoulder; you're only a housemaid'—what do you mean by attempting to speak to me? You never uttered a word of that, Mr. Franklin; but you said it all to me, nevertheless! Is such madness as this to be accounted for? No. There is nothing to be done but to confess it, and let it be.

'I ask your pardon, once more, for this wandering of my pen. There is no fear of its happening again. I am close at the end now.

'The first person who disturbed me by coming into the empty room was Penelope. She had found out my secret long since, and she had done her best to bring me to my senses—and done it kindly too.

'Ah!' she said, 'I know why you're sitting here, and fretting, all by yourself. The best thing that can happen for your advantage, Rosanna, will be for Mr. Franklin's visit here to come to an end. It's my belief that he won't be long now before he leaves the house.'

'In all my thoughts of you I had never thought of your going away. I couldn't speak to Penelope. I could only look at her.

'I've just left Miss Rachel,' Penelope went on. 'And a hard matter I have had of it to put up with her temper. She says the house is unbearable to her with the police in it; and she's determined to speak to my lady this evening, and to go to her Aunt Ablewhite tomorrow. If she does that, Mr. Franklin will be the next to find a reason for going away, you may depend on it!'

'I recovered the use of my tongue at that. 'Do you mean to say Mr. Franklin will go with her?'' I asked.

'Only too gladly, if she would let him; but she won't. _He_ has been made to feel her temper; _he_ is in her black books too—and that after having done all he can to help her, poor fellow! No! no! If they don't make it up before tomorrow, you will see Miss Rachel go one way, and Mr. Franklin another. Where he may betake himself to I can't say. But he will never stay here, Rosanna, after Miss Rachel has left us.'

'I managed to master the despair I felt at the prospect of your going away. To own the truth, I saw a little glimpse of hope for myself if there was really a serious disagreement between Miss Rachel and you. 'Do you know,' I asked, 'what the quarrel is between them?''

'It is all on Miss Rachel's side,' Penelope said. 'And, for anything I know to the contrary, it's all Miss Rachel's temper, and nothing else. I am loth to distress you, Rosanna; but don't run away with the notion that Mr. Franklin is ever likely to quarrel with _her_. He's a great deal too fond of her for that!'

'She had only just spoken those cruel words when there came a call to us from Mr. Betteredge. All the indoor servants were to assemble in the

hall. And then we were to go in, one by one, and be questioned in Mr. Betteredge's room by Sergeant Cuff.

It came to my turn to go in, after her ladyship's maid and the upper housemaid had been questioned first. Sergeant Cuff's inquiries though he wrapped them up very cunningly soon showed me that those two women (the bitterest enemies I had in the house) had made their discoveries outside my door, on the Tuesday afternoon, and again on the Thursday night. They had told the Sergeant enough to open his eyes to some part of the truth. He rightly believed me to have made a new nightgown secretly, but he wrongly believed the paint-stained nightgown to be mine. I felt satisfied of another thing, from what he said, which it puzzled me to understand. He suspected me, of course, of being concerned in the disappearance of the Diamond. But, at the same time, he let me see purposely, as I thought that he did not consider me as the person chiefly answerable for the loss of the jewel. He appeared to think that I had been acting under the direction of somebody else. Who that person might be, I couldn't guess then, and can't guess now.

In this uncertainty, one thing was plain that Sergeant Cuff was miles away from knowing the whole truth. You were safe as long as the nightgown was safe and not a moment longer.

I quite despair of making you understand the distress and terror which pressed upon me now. It was impossible for me to risk wearing your nightgown any longer. I might find myself taken off, at a moment's notice, to the police court at Frizinghall, to be charged on suspicion, and searched accordingly. While Sergeant Cuff still left me free, I had to choose and at once between destroying the nightgown, or hiding it in some safe place, at some safe distance from the house.

If I had only been a little less fond of you, I think I should have destroyed it. But oh! how could I destroy the only thing I had which proved that I had saved you from discovery? If we did come to an explanation together, and if you suspected me of having some bad motive, and denied it all, how could I win upon you to trust me, unless I had the nightgown to produce? Was it wronging you to believe, as I did and do still, that you might hesitate to let a poor girl like me be the sharer of your secret, and your accomplice in the theft which your money-troubles had tempted you to commit? Think of your cold behaviour to me, sir, and you will hardly wonder at my unwillingness to destroy the only claim on your confidence and your gratitude which it was my fortune to possess.

I determined to hide it; and the place I fixed on was the place I knew best the Shivering Sand.

As soon as the questioning was over, I made the first excuse that came into my head, and got leave to go out for a breath of fresh air. I went straight to Cobb's Hole, to Mr. Yolland's cottage. His wife and daughter were the best friends I had. Don't suppose I trusted them with your secret? I have trusted nobody. All I wanted was to write this letter to you, and to have a safe opportunity of taking the nightgown off me. Suspected as I was, I could do neither of those things with any

sort of security, at the house.

And now I have nearly got through my long letter, writing it alone in Lucy Yolland's bedroom. When it is done, I shall go downstairs with the nightgown rolled up, and hidden under my cloak. I shall find the means I want for keeping it safe and dry in its hiding-place, among the litter of old things in Mrs. Yolland's kitchen. And then I shall go to the Shivering Sand?don't be afraid of my letting my footmarks betray me!and hide the nightgown down in the sand, where no living creature can find it without being first let into the secret by myself.

And, when that's done, what then?

Then, Mr. Franklin, I shall have two reasons for making another attempt to say the words to you which I have not said yet. If you leave the house, as Penelope believes you will leave it, and if I haven't spoken to you before that, I shall lose my opportunity forever. That is one reason. Then, again, there is the comforting knowledge?if my speaking does make you angry?that I have got the nightgown ready to plead my cause for me as nothing else can. That is my other reason. If these two together don't harden my heart against the coldness which has hitherto frozen it up (I mean the coldness of your treatment of me), there will be the end of my efforts?and the end of my life.

Yes. If I miss my next opportunity?if you are as cruel as ever, and if I feel it again as I have felt it already?good-bye to the world which has grudged me the happiness that it gives to others. Good-bye to life, which nothing but a little kindness from _you_ can ever make pleasurable to me again. Don't blame yourself, sir, if it ends in this way. But try?do try?to feel some forgiving sorrow for me! I shall take care that you find out what I have done for you, when I am past telling you of it myself. Will you say something kind of me then?in the same gentle way that you have when you speak to Miss Rachel? If you do that, and if there are such things as ghosts, I believe my ghost will hear it, and tremble with the pleasure of it.

It's time I left off. I am making myself cry. How am I to see my way to the hiding-place if I let these useless tears come and blind me?

Besides, why should I look at the gloomy side? Why not believe, while I can, that it will end well after all? I may find you in a good humour tonight?or, if not, I may succeed better tomorrow morning. I sha'n't improve my plain face by fretting?shall I? Who knows but I may have filled all these weary long pages of paper for nothing? They will go, for safety's sake (never mind now for what other reason) into the hiding-place along with the nightgown. It has been hard, hard work writing my letter. Oh! if we only end in understanding each other, how I shall enjoy tearing it up!

I beg to remain, sir, your true lover and humble servant,

ROSANNA SPEARMAN.

The reading of the letter was completed by Betteredge in silence. After carefully putting it back in the envelope, he sat thinking, with his head bowed down, and his eyes on the ground.

"Betteredge," I said, "is there any hint to guide me at the end of the letter?"

He looked up slowly, with a heavy sigh.

"There is nothing to guide you, Mr. Franklin," he answered. "If you take my advice you will keep the letter in the cover till these present anxieties of yours have come to an end. It will sorely distress you, whenever you read it. Don't read it now."

I put the letter away in my pocket-book.

A glance back at the sixteenth and seventeenth chapters of Betteredge's Narrative will show that there really was a reason for my thus sparing myself, at a time when my fortitude had been already cruelly tried. Twice over, the unhappy woman had made her last attempt to speak to me. And twice over, it had been my misfortune (God knows how innocently!) to repel the advances she had made to me. On the Friday night, as Betteredge truly describes it, she had found me alone at the billiard-table. Her manner and language suggested to me and would have suggested to any man, under the circumstances, that she was about to confess a guilty knowledge of the disappearance of the Diamond. For her own sake, I had purposely shown no special interest in what was coming; for her own sake, I had purposely looked at the billiard-balls, instead of looking at her—and what had been the result? I had sent her away from me, wounded to the heart! On the Saturday again—on the day when she must have foreseen, after what Penelope had told her, that my departure was close at hand—the same fatality still pursued us. She had once more attempted to meet me in the shrubbery walk, and she had found me there in company with Betteredge and Sergeant Cuff. In her hearing, the Sergeant, with his own underhand object in view, had appealed to my interest in Rosanna Spearman. Again for the poor creature's own sake, I had met the police-officer with a flat denial, and had declared—loudly declared, so that she might hear me too—that I felt "no interest whatever in Rosanna Spearman." At those words, solely designed to warn her against attempting to gain my private ear, she had turned away and left the place: cautioned of her danger, as I then believed; self-doomed to destruction, as I know now. From that point, I have already traced the succession of events which led me to the astounding discovery at the quicksand. The retrospect is now complete. I may leave the miserable story of Rosanna Spearman—to which, even at this distance of time, I cannot revert without a pang of distress—to suggest for itself all that is here purposely left unsaid. I may pass from the suicide at the Shivering Sand, with its strange and terrible influence on my present position and future prospects, to interests which concern the living people of this narrative, and to events which were already paving my way for the slow and toilsome journey from the darkness to the light.

CHAPTER VI

I walked to the railway station accompanied, it is needless to say, by Gabriel Betteredge. I had the letter in my pocket, and the nightgown safely packed in a little bag—both to be submitted, before I slept that night, to the investigation of Mr. Bruff.

We left the house in silence. For the first time in my experience of him, I found old Betteredge in my company without a word to say to me. Having something to say on my side, I opened the conversation as soon as we were clear of the lodge gates.

‘Before I go to London,’ I began, ‘I have two questions to ask you. They relate to myself, and I believe they will rather surprise you.’

‘If they will put that poor creature’s letter out of my head, Mr. Franklin, they may do anything else they like with me. Please to begin surprising me, sir, as soon as you can.’

‘My first question, Betteredge, is this. Was I drunk on the night of Rachel’s Birthday?’

‘_You_ drunk!’ exclaimed the old man. ‘Why it’s the great defect of your character, Mr. Franklin that you only drink with your dinner, and never touch a drop of liquor afterwards!’

‘But the birthday was a special occasion. I might have abandoned my regular habits, on that night of all others.’

Betteredge considered for a moment.

‘You did go out of your habits, sir,’ he said. ‘And I’ll tell you how. You looked wretchedly ill—and we persuaded you to have a drop of brandy and water to cheer you up a little.’

‘I am not used to brandy and water. It is quite possible?’

‘Wait a bit, Mr. Franklin. I knew you were not used, too. I poured you out half a wineglass-full of our fifty year old Cognac; and (more shame for me!) I drowned that noble liquor in nigh on a tumbler-full of cold water. A child couldn’t have got drunk on it?let alone a grown man!’

I knew I could depend on his memory, in a matter of this kind. It was plainly impossible that I could have been intoxicated. I passed on to the second question.

‘Before I was sent abroad, Betteredge, you saw a great deal of me when I was a boy? Now tell me plainly, do you remember anything strange of me, after I had gone to bed at night? Did you ever discover me walking in my sleep?’

Betteredge stopped, looked at me for a moment, nodded his head, and walked on again.

"I see your drift now, Mr. Franklin!" he said. "You're trying to account for how you got the paint on your nightgown, without knowing it yourself. It won't do, sir. You're miles away still from getting at the truth. Walk in your sleep? You never did such a thing in your life!"

Here again, I felt that Betteredge must be right. Neither at home nor abroad had my life ever been of the solitary sort. If I had been a sleep-walker, there were hundreds on hundreds of people who must have discovered me, and who, in the interest of my own safety, would have warned me of the habit, and have taken precautions to restrain it.

Still, admitting all this, I clung with an obstinacy which was surely natural and excusable, under the circumstances to one or other of the only two explanations that I could see which accounted for the unendurable position in which I then stood. Observing that I was not yet satisfied, Betteredge shrewdly adverted to certain later events in the history of the Moonstone; and scattered both my theories to the wind at once and for ever.

"Let's try it another way, sir," he said. "Keep your own opinion, and see how far it will take you towards finding out the truth. If we are to believe the nightgown—which I don't for one—you not only smeared off the paint from the door, without knowing it, but you also took the Diamond without knowing it. Is that right, so far?"

"Quite right. Go on."

"Very good, sir. We'll say you were drunk, or walking in your sleep, when you took the jewel. That accounts for the night and morning, after the birthday. But how does it account for what has happened since that time? The Diamond has been taken to London, since that time. The Diamond has been pledged to Mr. Luker, since that time. Did you do those two things, without knowing it, too? Were you drunk when I saw you off in the pony-chaise on that Saturday evening? And did you walk in your sleep to Mr. Luker's, when the train had brought you to your journey's end? Excuse me for saying it, Mr. Franklin, but this business has so upset you, that you're not fit yet to judge for yourself. The sooner you lay your head alongside Mr. Bruff's head, the sooner you will see your way out of the dead-lock that has got you now."

We reached the station, with only a minute or two to spare.

I hurriedly gave Betteredge my address in London, so that he might write to me, if necessary; promising, on my side, to inform him of any news which I might have to communicate. This done, and just as I was bidding him farewell, I happened to glance towards the book-and-newspaper stall. There was Mr. Candy's remarkable-looking assistant again, speaking to the keeper of the stall! Our eyes met at the same moment. Ezra Jennings took off his hat to me. I returned the salute, and got into a carriage just as the train started. It was a relief to my mind, I suppose, to dwell on any subject which appeared to be, personally, of no sort of importance to me. At all events, I began the momentous journey back which was to take me to Mr. Bruff, wondering—absurdly enough, I admit—that I should have seen the man with

the piebald hair twice in one day!

The hour at which I arrived in London precluded all hope of my finding Mr. Bruff at his place of business. I drove from the railway to his private residence at Hampstead, and disturbed the old lawyer dozing alone in his dining-room, with his favourite pug-dog on his lap, and his bottle of wine at his elbow.

I shall best describe the effect which my story produced on the mind of Mr. Bruff by relating his proceedings when he had heard it to the end. He ordered lights, and strong tea, to be taken into his study; and he sent a message to the ladies of his family, forbidding them to disturb us on any pretence whatever. These preliminaries disposed of, he first examined the nightgown, and then devoted himself to the reading of Rosanna Spearman's letter.

The reading completed, Mr. Bruff addressed me for the first time since we had been shut up together in the seclusion of his own room.

"Franklin Blake," said the old gentleman, "this is a very serious matter, in more respects than one. In my opinion, it concerns Rachel quite as nearly as it concerns you. Her extraordinary conduct is no mystery _now_. She believes you have stolen the Diamond."

I had shrunk from reasoning my own way fairly to that revolting conclusion. But it had forced itself on me, nevertheless. My resolution to obtain a personal interview with Rachel, rested really and truly on the ground just stated by Mr. Bruff.

"The first step to take in this investigation," the lawyer proceeded, "is to appeal to Rachel. She has been silent all this time, from motives which I (who know her character) can readily understand. It is impossible, after what has happened, to submit to that silence any longer. She must be persuaded to tell us, or she must be forced to tell us, on what grounds she bases her belief that you took the Moonstone. The chances are, that the whole of this case, serious as it seems now, will tumble to pieces, if we can only break through Rachel's inveterate reserve, and prevail upon her to speak out."

"That is a very comforting opinion for _me_," I said. "I own I should like to know???"

"You would like to know how I can justify it," interposed Mr. Bruff. "I can tell you in two minutes. Understand, in the first place, that I look at this matter from a lawyer's point of view. It's a question of evidence, with me. Very well. The evidence breaks down, at the outset, on one important point."

"On what point?"

"You shall hear. I admit that the mark of the name proves the nightgown to be yours. I admit that the mark of the paint proves the nightgown to have made the smear on Rachel's door. But what evidence is there to prove that you are the person who wore it, on the night when the

Diamond was lost??

The objection struck me, all the more forcibly that it reflected an objection which I had felt myself.

?As to this,? pursued the lawyer taking up Rosanna Spearman?s confession, ?I can understand that the letter is a distressing one to _you_. I can understand that you may hesitate to analyse it from a purely impartial point of view. But _I_ am not in your position. I can bring my professional experience to bear on this document, just as I should bring it to bear on any other. Without alluding to the woman?s career as a thief, I will merely remark that her letter proves her to have been an adept at deception, on her own showing; and I argue from that, that I am justified in suspecting her of not having told the whole truth. I won?t start any theory, at present, as to what she may or may not have done. I will only say that, if Rachel has suspected you _on the evidence of the nightgown only_, the chances are ninety-nine to a hundred that Rosanna Spearman was the person who showed it to her. In that case, there is the woman?s letter, confessing that she was jealous of Rachel, confessing that she changed the roses, confessing that she saw a glimpse of hope for herself, in the prospect of a quarrel between Rachel and you. I don?t stop to ask who took the Moonstone (as a means to her end, Rosanna Spearman would have taken fifty Moonstones)?I only say that the disappearance of the jewel gave this reclaimed thief who was in love with you, an opportunity of setting you and Rachel at variance for the rest of your lives. She had not decided on destroying herself, _then_, remember; and, having the opportunity, I distinctly assert that it was in her character, and in her position at the time, to take it. What do you say to that??

?Some such suspicion,? I answered, ?crossed my own mind, as soon as I opened the letter.?

?Exactly! And when you had read the letter, you pitied the poor creature, and couldn?t find it in your heart to suspect her. Does you credit, my dear sir?does you credit!?

?But suppose it turns out that I did wear the nightgown? What then??

?I don?t see how the fact can be proved,? said Mr. Bruff. ?But assuming the proof to be possible, the vindication of your innocence would be no easy matter. We won?t go into that, now. Let us wait and see whether Rachel hasn?t suspected you on the evidence of the nightgown only.?

?Good God, how coolly you talk of Rachel suspecting me!? I broke out. ?What right has she to suspect Me, on any evidence, of being a thief??

?A very sensible question, my dear sir. Rather hotly put?but well worth considering for all that. What puzzles you, puzzles me too. Search your memory, and tell me this. Did anything happen while you were staying at the house?not, of course, to shake Rachel?s belief in your honour?but, let us say, to shake her belief (no matter with how little reason) in your principles generally??

I started, in ungovernable agitation, to my feet. The lawyer's question reminded me, for the first time since I had left England, that something _had_ happened.

In the eighth chapter of Betteredge's Narrative, an allusion will be found to the arrival of a foreigner and a stranger at my aunt's house, who came to see me on business. The nature of his business was this.

I had been foolish enough (being, as usual, straitened for money at the time) to accept a loan from the keeper of a small restaurant in Paris, to whom I was well known as a customer. A time was settled between us for paying the money back; and when the time came, I found it (as thousands of other honest men have found it) impossible to keep my engagement. I sent the man a bill. My name was unfortunately too well known on such documents: he failed to negotiate it. His affairs had fallen into disorder, in the interval since I had borrowed of him; bankruptcy stared him in the face; and a relative of his, a French lawyer, came to England to find me, and to insist upon the payment of my debt. He was a man of violent temper; and he took the wrong way with me. High words passed on both sides; and my aunt and Rachel were unfortunately in the next room, and heard us. Lady Verinder came in, and insisted on knowing what was the matter. The Frenchman produced his credentials, and declared me to be responsible for the ruin of a poor man, who had trusted in my honour. My aunt instantly paid him the money, and sent him off. She knew me better of course than to take the Frenchman's view of the transaction. But she was shocked at my carelessness, and justly angry with me for placing myself in a position, which, but for her interference, might have become a very disgraceful one. Either her mother told her, or Rachel heard what passed?I can't say which. She took her own romantic, high-flown view of the matter. I was 'heartless'; I was 'dishonourable'; I had 'no principle'; there was 'no knowing what I might do next'?in short, she said some of the severest things to me which I had ever heard from a young lady's lips. The breach between us lasted for the whole of the next day. The day after, I succeeded in making my peace, and thought no more of it. Had Rachel reverted to this unlucky accident, at the critical moment when my place in her estimation was again, and far more seriously, assailed? Mr. Bruff, when I had mentioned the circumstances to him, answered the question at once in the affirmative.

'It would have its effect on her mind,' he said gravely. 'And I wish, for your sake, the thing had not happened. However, we have discovered that there _was_ a predisposing influence against you?and there is one uncertainty cleared out of our way, at any rate. I see nothing more that we can do now. Our next step in this inquiry must be the step that takes us to Rachel.'

He rose, and began walking thoughtfully up and down the room. Twice, I was on the point of telling him that I had determined on seeing Rachel personally; and twice, having regard to his age and his character, I hesitated to take him by surprise at an unfavourable moment.

'The grand difficulty is,' he resumed, 'how to make her show her whole mind in this matter, without reserve. Have you any suggestions to

offer??

?I have made up my mind, Mr. Bruff, to speak to Rachel myself.?

?You!? He suddenly stopped in his walk, and looked at me as if he thought I had taken leave of my senses. ?You, of all the people in the world!? He abruptly checked himself, and took another turn in the room. ?Wait a little,? he said. ?In cases of this extraordinary kind, the rash way is sometimes the best way.? He considered the question for a moment or two, under that new light, and ended boldly by a decision in my favour. ?Nothing venture, nothing have,? the old gentleman resumed. ?You have a chance in your favour which I don?t possess?and you shall be the first to try the experiment.?

?A chance in my favour?? I repeated, in the greatest surprise.

Mr. Bruff?s face softened, for the first time, into a smile.

?This is how it stands,? he said. ?I tell you fairly, I don?t trust your discretion, and I don?t trust your temper. But I do trust in Rachel?s still preserving, in some remote little corner of her heart, a certain perverse weakness for _you_. Touch that?and trust to the consequences for the fullest disclosures that can flow from a woman?s lips! The question is?how are you to see her??

?She has been a guest of yours at this house,? I answered. ?May I venture to suggest?if nothing was said about me beforehand?that I might see her here??

?Cool!? said Mr. Bruff. With that one word of comment on the reply that I had made to him, he took another turn up and down the room.

?In plain English,? he said, ?my house is to be turned into a trap to catch Rachel; with a bait to tempt her, in the shape of an invitation from my wife and daughters. If you were anybody else but Franklin Blake, and if this matter was one atom less serious than it really is, I should refuse point-blank. As things are, I firmly believe Rachel will live to thank me for turning traitor to her in my old age. Consider me your accomplice. Rachel shall be asked to spend the day here; and you shall receive due notice of it.?

?When? Tomorrow??

?Tomorrow won?t give us time enough to get her answer. Say the day after.?

?How shall I hear from you??

?Stay at home all the morning and expect me to call on you.?

I thanked him for the inestimable assistance which he was rendering to me, with the gratitude that I really felt; and, declining a hospitable invitation to sleep that night at Hampstead, returned to my lodgings in London.

Of the day that followed, I have only to say that it was the longest day of my life. Innocent as I knew myself to be, certain as I was that the abominable imputation which rested on me must sooner or later be cleared off, there was nevertheless a sense of self-abasement in my mind which instinctively disinclined me to see any of my friends. We often hear (almost invariably, however, from superficial observers) that guilt can look like innocence. I believe it to be infinitely the truer axiom of the two that innocence can look like guilt. I caused myself to be denied all day, to every visitor who called; and I only ventured out under cover of the night.

The next morning, Mr. Bruff surprised me at the breakfast-table. He handed me a large key, and announced that he felt ashamed of himself for the first time in his life.

?Is she coming??

?She is coming today, to lunch and spend the afternoon with my wife and my girls.?

?Are Mrs. Bruff, and your daughters, in the secret??

?Inevitably. But women, as you may have observed, have no principles. My family don't feel my pangs of conscience. The end being to bring you and Rachel together again, my wife and daughters pass over the means employed to gain it, as composedly as if they were Jesuits.?

?I am infinitely obliged to them. What is this key??

?The key of the gate in my back-garden wall. Be there at three this afternoon. Let yourself into the garden, and make your way in by the conservatory door. Cross the small drawing-room, and open the door in front of you which leads into the music-room. There, you will find Rachel?and find her, alone.?

?How can I thank you!?

?I will tell you how. Don't blame me for what happens afterwards.?

With those words, he went out.

I had many weary hours still to wait through. To while away the time, I looked at my letters. Among them was a letter from Betteredge.

I opened it eagerly. To my surprise and disappointment, it began with an apology warning me to expect no news of any importance. In the next sentence the everlasting Ezra Jennings appeared again! He had stopped Betteredge on the way out of the station, and had asked who I was. Informed on this point, he had mentioned having seen me to his master Mr. Candy. Mr. Candy hearing of this, had himself driven over to Betteredge, to express his regret at our having missed each other. He had a reason for wishing particularly to speak to me; and when I was next in the neighbourhood of Frizinghall, he begged I would let him

know. Apart from a few characteristic utterances of the Betteredge philosophy, this was the sum and substance of my correspondent's letter. The warm-hearted, faithful old man acknowledged that he had written 'mainly for the pleasure of writing to me.'

I crumpled up the letter in my pocket, and forgot it the moment after, in the all-absorbing interest of my coming interview with Rachel.

As the clock of Hampstead church struck three, I put Mr. Bruff's key into the lock of the door in the wall. When I first stepped into the garden, and while I was securing the door again on the inner side, I own to having felt a certain guilty doubtfulness about what might happen next. I looked furtively on either side of me; suspicious of the presence of some unexpected witness in some unknown corner of the garden. Nothing appeared, to justify my apprehensions. The walks were, one and all, solitudes; and the birds and the bees were the only witnesses.

I passed through the garden; entered the conservatory; and crossed the
[Truncated]