

HENRY WOOD

THE STORY OF CHARLES
STRANGE. VOL. 3 (OF 3)

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Mrs. Henry Wood

The Story of Charles Strange: A Novel. Vol. 3 (of 3)

CHAPTER I. ON THE WATCH

MR. SERJEANT STILLINGFAR sat at dinner in his house in Russell Square one Sunday afternoon. A great cause, in which he was to lead, had brought him up from circuit, to which he would return when the *Nisi Prius* trial was over. The cloth was being removed when I entered. He received me with his usual kindly welcome.

"Why not have come to dinner, Charles? Just had it, you say? All the more reason why we might have had it together. Sit down, and help yourself to wine."

Declining the wine, I drew my chair near to his, and told him what I had come about.

A few days had gone on since the last chapter. With the trouble connected with Mrs. Brightman, and the trouble connected with Tom Heriot, I had enough on my mind at that time, if not upon my shoulders. As regarded Mrs. Brightman, no one could help me; but regarding the other—

Was Tom in London, or was he not? How was I to find out? I had again gone prowling about the book-stall and its environs, and had seen no trace of him. Had Leah really seen him, or only some other man who resembled him?

Again I questioned Leah. Her opinion was not to be shaken. She held emphatically to her assertion. It was Tom that she had seen, and none other.

"You may have seen some other sailor, sir; I don't say to the contrary; but the sailor I saw was Captain Heriot," she reiterated. "Suppose I go again to-night, sir? I may, perhaps, have the good luck to see him."

"Should you call it good luck, Leah?"

"Ah well, sir, you know what I mean," she answered. "Shall I go to-night?"

"No, Leah; I am going myself. I cannot rest in this uncertainty."

Rest! I felt more like a troubled spirit or a wandering ghost. Arthur Lake asked what had gone wrong with me, and where I disappeared to of an evening.

Once more I turned out in discarded clothes to saunter about Lambeth. It was Saturday night and the thoroughfares were crowded; but amidst all who came and went I saw no trace of Tom.

Worried, disheartened, I determined to carry the perplexity to my Uncle Stillingfar. That he was true as steel, full of loving-kindness to all the world, no matter what their errors, and that he would aid me with his counsel—if any counsel could avail—I well knew. And thus I found myself at his house on that Sunday afternoon. Of course he had heard about the escape of the convicts; had seen Tom's name in the list; but he did not know that he was suspected of having reached London. I told him of what Leah had seen, and added the little episode about "Miss Betsy."

"And now, what can be done, Uncle Stillingfar? I have come to ask you."

His kindly blue eyes became thoughtful whilst he pondered the question. "Indeed, Charles, I know not," he answered. "Either you must wait in patience until he turns up some fine day—as he is sure to do if he is in London—or you must quietly pursue your search for him, and smuggle him away when you have found him."

"But if I don't find him? Do you think it could be Tom that Leah saw? Is it possible that he can be in London?"

"Quite possible. If a homeward vessel, bound, it may be, for the port of London, picked them up, what more likely than that he is here? Again, who else would call himself Charles Strange, and pass himself off for you? Though I cannot see his motive for doing it."

"Did you ever know any man so recklessly imprudent, uncle?"

"I have never known any man so reckless as Tom Heriot. You must do your best to find him, Charles."

"I don't know how. I thought you might possibly have suggested some plan. Every day increases his danger."

"It does: and the chances of his being recognised."

"It seems useless to search further in Lambeth: he must have changed his quarters. And to look about London for him will be like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay. I suppose," I slowly added, "it would not do to employ a detective?"

"Not unless you wish to put him into the lion's mouth," said the Serjeant. "Why, Charles, it would be his business to retake him. Rely upon it, the police are now looking for him if they have the slightest suspicion that he is here."

At that time one or two private detectives had started in business on their own account, having nothing to do with the police: now they have sprung up in numbers. It was to these I alluded.

Serjeant Stillingfar shook his head. "I would not trust one of them, Charles: it would be too dangerous an experiment. No; what you do, you must do yourself. Once let Government get scent that he is here, and we shall probably find the walls placarded with a reward for his apprehension."

"One thing I am surprised at," I said as I rose to leave: "that if he is here, he should not have let me know it. What can he be doing for money? An escaped convict is not likely to have much of that about him."

Serjeant Stillingfar shook his head. "There are points about the affair that I cannot fathom, Charles. Talking of money—you are well-off now, but if more than you can spare should be needed to get Tom Heriot away, apply to me."

"Thank you, uncle; but I don't think it will be needed. Where would you recommend him to escape to?"

"Find him first," was the Serjeant's answer.

He accompanied me himself to the front door. As we stood, speaking a last word, a middle-aged man, with keen eyes and spare frame, dressed as a workman, came up with a brisk step. Mr. Serjeant Stillingfar met the smile on the man's face as he glanced up in passing.

"Arkwright!" he exclaimed. "I hardly knew you. Some sharp case in hand, I conclude?"

"Just so, Serjeant; but I hope to bring it to earth before the day's over. You know—"

Then the man glanced at me and came to a pause.

"However, I mustn't talk about it now, so good-afternoon, Serjeant." And thus speaking, he walked briskly onwards.

"I wonder what he has in hand? I think he would have told me, Charles, but for your being present," cried my uncle, looking after him. "A keen man is Arkwright."

"*Arkwright!*" I echoed, the name now impressing itself upon me. "Surely not Arkwright the famous detective!"

"Yes, it is. And he has evidently got himself up as a workman to further some case that he has in hand. He knew you, Charles; depend upon that; though you did not know him."

A fear, perhaps a foolish one, fell upon me. "Uncle Stillingfar," I breathed, "can his case be *Tom's*? Think you it is he who is being run to earth?"

"No, no. That is not likely," he answered, after a moment's consideration. "Anyway, you must use every exertion to find him, for his stay in London is full of danger."

It will readily be believed that this incident had not added to my peace of mind. One more visit I decided to pay to the old ground in Lambeth, and after that—why, in truth, whether to turn east, west, north or south, I knew no more than the dead.

Monday was bright and frosty; Monday evening clear, cold and starlight. The gaslights flared away in the streets and shops; the roads were lined with wayfarers.

Sauntering down the narrow pavement on the opposite side of the way, in the purposeless manner that a hopeless man favours, I approached the book-stall. A sailor was standing before it, his head bent over the volumes. Every pulse within me went up to fever heat: for there was that in him that reminded me of Tom Heriot.

I crossed quietly to the stall, stood side by side with him, and took up a handful of penny dreadfuls. Yes, it was he—Tom Heriot.

"Tom," I cried softly. "Tom!"

I felt the start he gave. But he did not move hand or foot; only his eyes turned to scan me.

"Tom," I whispered again, apparently intent upon a grand picture of a castle in flames, and a gentleman miraculously escaping with a lady from an attic window. "Tom, don't you know me?"

"For goodness' sake don't speak to me, Charley!" he breathed in answer, the words barely audible. "Go away, for the love of heaven! I've been a prisoner here for the last three minutes. That policeman yonder would know me, and I dare not turn. His name's Wren."

Three doors off, a policeman was standing at the edge of the pavement, facing the shops, as if waiting to pounce upon someone he was expecting to pass. Even as Tom spoke, he wheeled round to the right, and marched up the street. Tom as quickly disappeared to the left, leaving a few words in my ear.

"I'll wait for you at the other end, Charley; it is darker there than here. Don't follow me immediately."

So I remained where I was, still bending an enraptured gaze upon the burning castle and the gallant knight and damsel escaping from it at their peril.

"Betsy says the account comes to seven shillings, Mr. Strange."

The address gave me almost as great a thrill as the sight of Tom had done. It came from the man Lee, now emerging from his shop. Involuntarily I pulled my hat lower upon my brow. He looked up and down the street.

"Oh, I beg pardon—thought Mr. Strange was standing here," he said. And then I saw my error. He had not spoken to me, but to Tom Heriot. My gaze was still fascinated by the flaming picture.

"Anything you'd like this evening, sir?"

"I'll take this sheet—half a dozen of them," I said, putting down sixpence.

"Thank you, sir. A fine night."

"Yes, very. Were you speaking to the sailor who stood here?" I added carelessly "He went off in that direction, I think," pointing to the one opposite to that Tom had taken.

"Yes," answered the man; "'twas Mr. Strange. He had asked me to look how much his score was for tobacco. I dare say he'll be back presently. Captain Strange, by rights," added Lee chattily.

"Oh! Captain of a vessel?"

"Of his own vessel—a yacht. Not but what he has been about the world in vessels of all sorts, he tells us; one voyage before the mast, the next right up next to the skipper. But for them ups and downs where, as he says, would sailors find their experience?"

"Very true. Well, this is all I want just now. Good-evening."

"Good-evening, sir," replied Caleb Lee.

The end of the street to which Tom had pointed was destitute of shops; the houses were small and poor; consequently, it was tolerably dark. Tom was sauntering along, smoking a short pipe.

"Is there any place at hand where we can have a few words together in tolerable security?" I asked.

"Come along," briefly responded Tom. "You walk on the other side of the street, old fellow; keep me in view."

It was good advice, and I took it. He increased his pace to a brisk walk, and presently turned down a narrow passage, which brought him to a sort of small, triangular green, planted with shrubs and trees. I followed, and we sat down on one of the benches.

"Are you quite mad, Tom?"

"Not mad a bit," laughed Tom. "I say, Charley, did you come to that book-stall to look after me?"

"Ay. And it's about the tenth time I have been there."

"How the dickens did you find me out?"

"Chance one evening took Leah into the neighbourhood, and she happened to see you. I had feared you might be in England."

"You had heard of the wreck of the *Vengeance*, I suppose; and that a few of us had escaped. Good old Leah! Did I give her a fright?"

We were sitting side by side. Tom had put his pipe out, lest the light should catch the sight of any passing stragglers. We spoke in whispers. It was, perhaps, as safe a place as could be found; nevertheless, I sat upon thorns.

Not so Tom. By the few signs that might be gathered—his light voice, his gay laugh, his careless manner—Tom felt as happy and secure as if he had been attending one of her Majesty's levées, in the full glory of scarlet coat and flashing sword-blade.

"Do you know, Tom, you have half killed me with terror and apprehension? How could you be so reckless as to come back to London?"

"Because the old ship brought me," lightly returned Tom.

"I suppose a vessel picked you up—and the comrades who escaped with you?"

"It picked two of us up. The other three died."

"What, in the boat?"

He nodded. "In the open boat at sea."

"How did you manage to escape? I thought convicts were too well looked after."

"So they are, under ordinary circumstances. Shipwrecks form the exception. I'll give you the history, Charley."

"Make it brief, then. I am upon thorns."

Tom laughed, and began:

"We were started on that blessed voyage, a cargo of men in irons, and for some time made a fair passage, and thought we must be nearing the other side. Such a crew, that cargo, Charles! Such an awful lot! Villainous wretches, who wore their guilt on their faces, and suffered their deserts; half demons, most of them. A few amongst them were no doubt like me, innocent enough; wrongfully accused and condemned—"

"But go on with the narrative, Tom."

"I swear I was innocent," he cried, with emotion, heedless of my interruption. "I was wickedly careless, I admit that, but the guilt was another's, not mine. When I put those bills into circulation, Charles, I knew no more they were forged than you did. Don't you believe me?"

"I do believe you. I have believed you throughout."

"And if the trial had not been hurried on I think it could have been proved. It was hurried on, Charles, and when it was on it was hurried over. I am suffering unjustly."

"Yes, Tom. But won't you go on with your story?"

"Where was I? Oh, about the voyage and the shipwreck. After getting out of the south-east trades, we had a fortnight's light winds and calms, and then got into a steady westerly wind, before which we ran quietly for some days. One dark night, it was the fifteenth of November, and thick, drizzling weather, the wind about north-west, we had turned in and were in our first sleep, when

a tremendous uproar arose on deck; the watch shouting and tramping, the officers' orders and the boatswain's mate's shrill piping rising above the din. One might have thought Old Nick had leaped on board and was giving chase. Next came distinctly that fearful cry, 'All hands save ship!' Sails were being clewed up, yards were being swung round. Before we could realize what it all meant, the ship had run ashore; and there she stuck, bumping as if she would knock her bottom out."

"Get on, Tom," I whispered, for he had paused, and seemed to be spinning a long yarn instead of a short one.

"Fortunately, the ship soon made a sort of cradle for herself in the sand, and lay on her starboard bilge. To attempt to get her off was hopeless. So they got us all out of the ship and on shore, and put us under tents made of the sails. The skipper made out, or thought he made out, the island to be that of Tristan d'Acunha: whether it was or not I can't say positively. At first we thought it was uninhabited, but it turned out to have a few natives on it, sixty or eighty in all. In the course of a few days every movable thing had been landed. All the boats were intact, and were moored in a sort of creek, or small natural harbour, their gear, sails and oars in them."

"Hush!" I breathed, "or you are lost!"

A policeman's bull's-eye was suddenly turned upon the grass. By the man's size, I knew him for Tom's friend, Wren. We sat motionless. The light just escaped us, and the man passed on. But we had been in danger.

"If you would only be quicker, Tom. I don't want to know about boats and their gear."

He laughed. "How impatient you are, Charles! Well, to get on ahead. A cargo of convicts cannot be kept as securely under such circumstances as had befallen us as they could be in a ship's hold, and the surveillance exercised was surprisingly lax. Two or three of the prisoners were meditating an escape, and thought they saw their way to effecting it by means of one of the boats. I found this out, and joined the party. But there were almost insurmountable difficulties in the way. It was absolutely necessary that we should put on ordinary clothes—for what vessel, picking us up, but would have delivered us up at the first port it touched at, had we been in convict dress? We marked the purser's slop-chest, which was under a tent, and well filled, and—"

"Do get on, Tom!"

"Here goes, then! One calm, but dark night, when other people were sleeping, we stole down to the creek, five of us, rigged ourselves out in the purser's toggery, leaving the Government uniforms in exchange, unmoored one of the cutters, and got quietly away. We had secreted some bread and salt meat; water there had been already on board. The wind was off the land, and we let the boat drift before it a bit before attempting to make sail. By daylight we were far enough from the island; no chance of their seeing us—a speck on the waters. The wind, hitherto south, had backed to the westward. We shaped a course by the sun to the eastward, and sailed along at the rate of five or six knots. My comrades were not as rough as they might have been; rather decent fellows for convicts. Two of them were from Essex; had been sentenced for poaching only. Now began our lookout: constantly straining our eyes along the horizon for a sail, but especially astern for an outward-bounder, but only saw one or two in the distance that did not see us. What I underwent in that boat as day after day passed, and no sail appeared, I won't enter upon now, old fellow. The provisions were exhausted, and so was the water. One by one three of my companions went crazy and died. The survivor and I had consigned the last of them to the deep on the twelfth day, and then I thought my turn had come; but Markham was worse than I was. How many hours went on, I knew not. I lay at the bottom of the boat, exhausted and half unconscious, when suddenly I heard voices. I imagined it to be a dream. But in a few minutes a boat was alongside the cutter, and two of its crew had stepped over and were raising me up. They spoke to me, but I was too weak to understand or answer; in fact, I was delirious. I and Markham were taken on board and put to bed. After some days, passed in a sort of dreamy, happy delirium, well cared for and attended to, I woke up to the realities of life. Markham was dead: he had never revived, and died of exposure and weakness some hours after the rescue."

"What vessel had picked you up?"

"It was the *Discovery*, a whaler belonging to Whitby, and homeward bound. The captain, Van Hoppe, was Dutch by birth, but had been reared in England and had always sailed in English ships. A good and kind fellow, if ever there was one. Of course, I had to make my tale good and suppress the truth. The passenger-ship in which I was sailing to Australia to seek my fortune had foundered in mid-ocean, and those who escaped with me had died of their sufferings. That was true so far. Captain Van Hoppe took up my misfortunes warmly. Had he been my own brother—had he been *you*, Charley—he could not have treated me better or cared for me more. The vessel had a prosperous run home. She was bound for the port of London; and when I put my hand into Van Hoppe's at parting, and tried to thank him for his goodness, he left a twenty-pound note in it. 'You'll need it, Mr. Strange,' he said; 'you can repay me when your fortune's made and you are rich.'"

"*Strange!*" I cried.

Tom laughed.

"I called myself 'Strange' on the whaler. Don't know that it was wise of me. One day when I was getting better and lay deep in thought—which just then chanced to be of you, Charley—the mate suddenly asked me what my name was. 'Strange,' I answered, on the spur of the moment. That's how it was. And that's the brief history of my escape."

"You have had money, then, for your wants since you landed," I remarked.

"I have had the twenty pounds. It's coming to an end now."

"You ought not to have come to London. You should have got the captain to put you ashore somewhere, and then made your escape from England."

"All very fine to talk, Charley! I had not a sixpence in my pocket, or any idea that he was going to help me. I could only come on as far as the vessel would bring me."

"And suppose he had not given you money—what then?"

"Then I must have contrived to let you know that I was home again, and borrowed from you," he lightly replied.

"Well, your being here is frightfully dangerous."

"Not a bit of it. As long as the police don't suspect I am in England, they won't look after me. It's true that a few of them might know me, but I do not think they would in this guise and with my altered face."

"You were afraid of one to-night."

"Well, *he* is especially one who might know me; and he stood there so long that I began to think he might be watching me. Anyway, I've been on shore these three weeks, and nothing has come of it yet."

"What about that young lady named Betsy? Miss Betsy Lee."

Tom threw himself back in a fit of laughter.

"I hear the old fellow went down to Essex Street one night to ascertain whether I lived there! The girl asked me one day where I lived, and I rapped out Essex Street."

"But, Tom, what have you to do with the girl?"

"Nothing; nothing. On my honour. I have often been in the shop, sometimes of an evening. The father has invited me to some grog in the parlour behind it, and I have sat there for an hour chatting with him and the girl. That's all. She is a well-behaved, modest little girl; none better."

"Well, Tom, with one imprudence and another, you stand a fair chance—"

"There, there! Don't preach, Charley. What you call imprudence, I call fun."

"What do you think of doing? To remain on here for ever in this disguise?"

"Couldn't, I expect, if I wanted to. I must soon see about getting away."

"You must get away at once."

"I am not going yet, Charley; take my word for that; and I am as safe in London, I reckon, as I should be elsewhere. Don't say but I may have to clear out of this particular locality. If that burly

policeman is going to make a permanent beat of it about here, he might drop upon me some fine evening."

"And you must exchange your sailor's disguise, as you call it, for a better one."

"Perhaps so. That rough old coat you have on, Charley, might not come amiss to me."

"You can have it. Why do you fear that policeman should know you, more than any other?"

"He was present at the trial last August. Was staring me in the face most of the day. His name's Wren."

I sighed.

"Well, Tom, it is getting late; we have sat here as long as is consistent with safety," I said, rising.

He made me sit down again.

"The later the safer, perhaps, Charley. When shall we meet again?"

"Ay; when, and where?"

"Come to-morrow evening, to this same spot. It is as good a one as any I know of. I shall remain indoors all day tomorrow. Of course one does not care to run needlessly into danger. Shall you find your way to it?"

"Yes, and will be here; but I shall go now. Do be cautious, Tom. Do you want any money? I have brought some with me."

"Many thanks, old fellow; I've enough to go on with for a day or two. How is Blanche? Did she nearly die of the disgrace?"

"She did not know of it. Does not know it yet."

"No!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "Why, how can it have been kept from her? She does not live in a wood."

"Level has managed it, somehow. She was abroad during the trial, you know. They have chiefly lived there since, Blanche seeing no English newspapers; and, of course, her acquaintances do not gratuitously speak to her about it. But I don't think it can be kept from her much longer."

"But where does she think I am—all this time?"

"She thinks you are in India with the regiment."

"I suppose *he* was in a fine way about it!"

"Level? Yes—naturally; and is still. He would have saved you, Tom, at any cost."

"As you would, and one or two more good friends; but, you see, I did not know what was coming upon me in time to ask them. It fell upon my head like a thunderbolt. Level is not a bad fellow at bottom."

"He is a downright good one—at least, that's my opinion of him."

We stood hand locked in hand at parting. "Where are you staying?" I whispered.

"Not far off. I've a lodging in the neighbourhood—one room."

"Fare you well, then, until to-morrow evening."

"Au revoir, Charley."

CHAPTER II. TOM HERIOT

I FOUND my way straight enough the next night to the little green with its trees and shrubs. Tom was there, and was humming one of our boyhood's songs taught us by Leah:

"Young Henry was as brave a youth
As ever graced a martial story;
And Jane was fair as lovely truth:
She sighed for love, and he for glory.

"To her his faith he meant to plight,
And told her many a gallant story:
But war, their honest joys to blight,
Called him away from love to glory.

"Young Henry met the foe with pride;
Jane followed—fought—ah! hapless story!
In man's attire, by Henry's side,
She died for love, and he for glory."

He was still dressed as a sailor, but the pilot-coat was buttoned up high and tight about his throat, and the round glazed hat was worn upon the front of his head instead of the back of it.

"I thought you meant to change these things, Tom," I said as we sat down.

"All in good time," he answered; "don't quite know yet what costume to adopt. Could one become a negro-melody man, think you, Charley—or a Red Indian juggler with balls and sword-swallowing?"

How light he seemed! how supremely indifferent! Was it real or only assumed? Then he turned suddenly upon me:

"I say, what are you in black for, Charley? For my sins?"

"For Mr. Brightman."

"Mr. Brightman!" he repeated, his tone changing to one of concern. "Is he dead?"

"He died the last week in February. Some weeks ago now. Died quite suddenly."

"Well, well, well!" softly breathed Tom Heriot. "I am very sorry. I did not know it. But how am I likely to know anything of what the past months have brought forth?"

It would serve no purpose to relate the interview of that night in detail. We spent it partly in quarrelling. That is, in differences of opinion. It was impossible to convince Tom of his danger. I told him about the Sunday incident, when Detective Arkwright passed the door of Serjeant Stillingfar, and my momentary fear that he might be looking after Tom. He only laughed. "Good old Uncle Stillingfar!" cried he; "give my love to him." And all his conversation was carried on in the same light strain.

"But you must leave Lambeth," I urged. "You said you would do so."

"I said I might. I will, if I see just cause for doing so. Plenty of time yet. I am not *sure*, you know, Charles, that Wren would know me."

"The very fact of your having called yourself 'Strange' ought to take you away from here."

"Well, I suppose that was a bit of a mistake," he acknowledged. "But look here, brother mine, your own fears mislead you. Until it is known that I have made my way home no one will be likely to look after me. Believing me to be at the antipodes, they won't search London for me."

"They may suspect that you are in London, if they don't actually know it."

"Not they. To begin with, it must be a matter of absolute uncertainty whether we got picked up at all, after escaping from the island; but the natural conclusion will be that, if we were, it was by a vessel bound for the colonies: homeward-bound ships do not take that course. Everyone at all acquainted with navigation knows that. I assure you, our being found by the whaler was the merest chance in the world. Be at ease, Charley. I can take care of myself, and I will leave Lambeth if necessary. One of these fine mornings you may get a note from me, telling you I have emigrated to the Isle of Dogs, or some such enticing quarter, and have become 'Mr. Smith.' Meanwhile, we can meet here occasionally."

"I don't like this place, Tom. It must inevitably be attended with more or less danger. Had I not better come to your lodgings?"

"No," he replied, after a moment's consideration. "I am quite sure that we are safe here, and there it's hot and stifling—a dozen families living in the same house. And I shall not tell you where the lodgings are, Charles: you might be swooping down upon me to carry me away as Mephistopheles carried away Dr. Faustus."

After supplying him with money, with a last handshake, whispering a last injunction to be cautious, I left the triangle, and left him within it. The next moment found me face to face with the burly frame and wary glance of Mr. Policemen Wren. He was standing still in the starlight. I walked past him with as much unconcern as I could muster. He turned to look after me for a time, and then continued his beat.

It gave me a scare. What would be the result if Tom met him unexpectedly as I had done? I would have given half I was worth to hover about and ascertain. But I had to go on my way.

"Can you see Lord Level, sir?"

It was the following Saturday afternoon, and I was just starting for Hastings. The week had passed in anxious labour. Business cares for me, more work than I knew how to get through, for Lennard was away ill, and constant mental torment about Tom. I took out my watch before answering Watts.

"Yes, I have five minutes to spare. If that will be enough for his lordship," I added, laughing, as we shook hands: for he had followed Watts into the room.

"You are off somewhere, Charles?"

"Yes, to Hastings. I shall be back again to-morrow night. Can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing," replied Lord Level. "I came up from Marshdale this morning, and thought I would come round this afternoon to ask whether you have any news."

When Lord Level went to Marshdale on the visit that bore so suspicious an aspect to his wife, he had remained there only one night, returning to London the following day. This week he had been down again, and stayed rather longer—two days, in fact. Blanche, as I chanced to know, was rebelling over it. Secretly rebelling, for she had not brought herself to accuse him openly.

"News?" I repeated.

"Of Tom Heriot."

Should I tell Lord Level? Perhaps there was no help for it. When he had asked me before I had known nothing positively; now I knew only too much.

"Why I should have it, I know not; but a conviction lies upon me that he has found his way back to London," he continued. "Charles, you look conscious. Do you know anything?"

"You are right. He is here, and I have seen him."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Lord Level, throwing himself back in his chair. "Has he really been mad enough to come back to London?"

Drawing my own chair nearer to him, I bent forward, and in low tones gave him briefly the history. I had seen Tom on the Monday and Tuesday nights, as already related to the reader. On the Thursday night I was again at the trysting-place, but Tom did not meet me. The previous night, Friday, I had gone again, and again Tom did not appear.

"Is he taken, think you?" cried Lord Level.

"I don't know: and you see I dare not make any inquiries. But I think not. Had he been captured, it would be in the papers."

"I am not so sure of that. What an awful thing! What suspense for us all! Can *nothing* be done?"

"Nothing," I answered, rising, for my time was up. "We can only wait, and watch, and be silent."

"If it were not for the disgrace reflected upon us, and raking it up again to people's minds, I would say let him be re-taken! It would serve him right for his foolhardiness."

"How is Blanche?"

"Cross and snappish; unaccountably so: and showing her temper to me rather unbearably."

I laughed—willing to treat the matter lightly. "She does not care that you should go travelling without her, I take it."

Lord Level, who was passing out before me, turned and gazed into my face.

"Yes," said he emphatically. "But a man may have matters to take up his attention, and his movements also, that he may deem it inexpedient to talk of to his wife."

He spoke with a touch of haughtiness. "Very true," I murmured, as we shook hands and went out together, he walking away towards Gloucester Place, I jumping into the cab waiting to take me to the station.

Mrs. Brightman was better; I knew that; and showing herself more self-controlled. But there was no certainty that the improvement would be lasting. In truth, the certainty lay rather the other way. Her mother's home was no home for Annabel; and I had formed the resolution to ask her to come to mine.

The sun had set when I reached Hastings, and Miss Brightman's house. Miss Brightman, who seemed to grow less strong day by day, which I was grieved to hear, was in her room lying down. Annabel sat at the front drawing-room window in the twilight. She started up at my entrance, full of surprise and apprehension.

"Oh, Charles! Has anything happened? Is mamma worse?"

"No, indeed; your mamma is very much better," said I cheerfully. "I have taken a run down for the pleasure of seeing you, Annabel."

She still looked uneasy. I remembered the dreadful tidings I had brought the last time I came to Hastings. No doubt she was thinking of it, too, poor girl.

"Take a seat, Charles," she said. "Aunt Lucy will soon be down."

I drew a chair opposite to her, and talked for a little time on indifferent topics. The twilight shades grew deeper, passers-by more indistinct, the sea less bright and shimmering. Silence stole over us—a sweet silence all too conscious, all too fleeting. Annabel suddenly rose, stood at the window, and made some slight remark about a little boat that was nearing the pier.

"Annabel," I whispered, as I rose and stood by her, "you do not know what I have really come down for."

"No," she answered, with hesitation.

"When I last saw you at your own home, you may remember that you were in very great trouble. I asked you to share it with me, but you would not do so."

She began to tremble, and became agitated, and I passed my arm round her waist.

"My darling, I now know all."

Her heart beat violently as I held her. Her hand shook nervously in mine.

"You cannot know all!" she cried piteously.

"I know all; more than you do. Mrs. Brightman was worse after you left, and Hatch sent for me. She and Mr. Close have told me the whole truth."

Annabel would have shrunk away, in the full tide of shame that swept over her, and a low moan broke from her lips.

"Nay, my dear, instead of shrinking from me, you must come nearer to me—for ever. My home must be yours now."

She did not break away from me, and stood pale and trembling, her hands clasped, her emotion strong.

"It cannot, must not be, Charles."

"Hush, my love. It *can* be—and shall be."

"Charles," she said, her very lips trembling, "weigh well what you are saying. Do not suffer the—affection—I must speak fully—the implied engagement that was between us, ere this unhappiness came to my knowledge and yours—do not suffer it to bind you now. It is a fearful disgrace to attach to my poor mother, and it is reflected upon me."

"Were your father living, Annabel, should you say the disgrace was also reflected upon *him*?"

"Oh no, no. I could not do so. My good father! honourable and honoured. Never upon him."

I laughed a little at her want of logic.

"Annabel, my dear, you have yourself answered the question. As I hold you to my heart now, so will I, in as short a time as may be, hold you in my home and at my hearth. Let what will betide, you shall have one true friend to shelter and protect you with his care and love for ever and for ever."

Her tears were falling.

"Oh please, please, Charles! I am sure it ought not to be. Aunt Lucy would tell you so."

Aunt Lucy came in at that moment, and proved to be on my side. She would be going to Madeira at the close of the summer, and the difficulty as to what was to be done then with Annabel had begun to trouble her greatly.

"I cannot take her with me, you see, Charles," she said. "In her mother's precarious state, the child must not absent herself from England. Still less can I leave her to her mother's care. Therefore I think your proposal exactly meets the dilemma. I suppose matters have been virtually settled between you for some little time now."

"Oh, Aunt Lucy!" remonstrated Annabel, blushing furiously.

"Well, my dear, and I say it is all for the best. If you can suggest a better plan I am willing to hear it."

Annabel sat silent, her head drooping.

"I may tell you this much, child: your father looked forward to it and approved it. Not that he would have allowed the marriage to take place just yet had he lived; I am sure of that; but he is not living, and circumstances alter cases."

"I am sure he liked me, Miss Brightman," I ventured to put in, as modestly as I could; "and I believe he would have consented to our marriage."

"Yes, he liked you very much; and so do I," she added, laughing. "I wish I could say as much for Mrs. Brightman. The opposition, I fancy, will come from her."

"You think she will oppose it?" I said—and, indeed, the doubt had lain in my own mind.

"I am afraid so. Of course there will be nothing for it but patience. Annabel cannot marry without her consent."

How a word will turn the scales of our hopes and fears! That Mrs. Brightman would oppose and wither our bright prospects came to me in that moment with the certainty of conviction.

"Come what come may, we will be true to each other," I whispered to Annabel the next afternoon. We were standing at the end of the pier, looking out upon the calm sea, flashing in the sunshine, and I imprisoned her hand momentarily in mine. "If we have to exercise all the patience your Aunt Lucy spoke of, we will still hope on, and put our trust in Heaven."

"Even so, Charles." The evening was yet early when I reached London, and I walked home from the station. St. Mary's was striking half-past seven as I passed it. At the self-same moment, an arm was inserted into mine. I turned quickly, wondering if anyone had designs upon my small hand-bag.

"All right, Charley! I'm not a burglar."

It was only Lake. "Why, Arthur! I thought you had gone to Oxford until Monday!"

"Got news last night that the fellow could not have me: had to go down somewhere or other," he answered, as we walked along arm-in-arm. "I say, I had a bit of a scare just now."

"In what way?"

"I thought I saw Tom pass. Tom Heriot," he added in a whisper.

"Oh, but that's impossible, you know, Lake," I said, though I felt my pulses quicken. "All your fancy."

"It was just under that gas-lamp at the corner of Wellington Street," Lake went on. "He was sauntering along as if he had nothing to do, muffled in a coat that looked a mile too big for him, and a red comforter. He lifted his face in passing, and stopped suddenly, as if he had recognised me, and were going to speak; then seemed to think better of it, turned on his heel and walked back the way he had been coming. Charley, if it was not Tom Heriot, I never saw such a likeness as that man bore to him."

My lips felt glued. "It could not have been Tom Heriot, Lake. You know Tom is at the antipodes. We will not talk of him, please. Are you coming home with me?"

"Yes. I was going on to Barlow's Chambers, but I'll come with you instead."

CHAPTER III. AN EVENING VISITOR

THE spring flowers were showing themselves, and the may was budding in the hedges. I thought how charming it all looked, as I turned, this Monday afternoon, into Mrs. Brightman's grounds, where laburnums drooped their graceful blossoms, and lilacs filled the air with their perfume; how significantly it all spoke to the heart of renewed life after the gloom of winter, the death and decay of nature.

Mrs. Brightman was herself, enjoying the spring-tide. She sat, robed in crape, on a bench amidst the trees, on which the sun was shining. What a refined, proud, handsome face was hers! but pale and somewhat haggard now. No other trace of her recent illness was apparent, except a nervous trembling of the hands.

"This is a surprise," she said, holding out one of those hands to me quite cordially. "I thought you had been too busy of late to visit me in the day-time."

"Generally I am very busy, but I made time to come to-day. I have something of importance to say to you, Mrs. Brightman. Will you hear me?"

She paused to look at me—a searching, doubtful look. Did she fear that I was about to speak to her of her *failing*? The idea occurred to me.

"Certainly," she coldly replied. "Business must, of course, be attended to. Would you prefer to go indoors or to sit out here?"

"I would rather remain here. I am not often favoured with such a combination of velvet lawn and sunshine and sweet scents."

She made room for me beside her. And, with as little circumlocution as possible, I brought out what I wanted—Annabel. When the heart is truly engaged, a man at these moments can only be bashful, especially when he sees it will be an uphill fight; but if the heart has nothing to do with the matter, he can be as cool and suave as though he were merely telling an everyday story.

Mrs. Brightman, hearing me to the end, rose haughtily.

"Surely you do not know what you are saying!" she exclaimed. "Or is it that I fail to understand you? You cannot be asking for the hand of my daughter?"

"Indeed—pardon me—I am, Mrs. Brightman, we—"

"Pardon *me*," she interrupted, "but I must tell you that it is utterly preposterous. Say no more, Mr. Strange; not another word. My daughter cannot marry a professional man. *I* did so, you may reply: yes, and have forfeited my proper place in the world ever since."

"Mr. Brightman would have given Annabel to me."

"Possibly so, though I think not. As Mr. Brightman is no longer here, we may let that supposition alone. And you must allow me to say this much, sir—that it is scarcely seemly to come to me on any such subject so soon after his death."

"But—" I stopped in embarrassment, unable to give my reason for speaking so soon. How could I tell Mrs. Brightman that it was to afford Annabel a home and a protector: that this, her mother's home, was not fitting for a refined and sensitive girl?

But I pressed the suit. I told her I had Annabel's consent, and that I had recently been with her at Hastings. I should like to have added that I had Miss Brightman's, only that it might have done more harm than good. I spoke very slightly of Miss Brightman's projected departure from England, when her house would be shut up and Annabel must leave Hastings. And I added that I wanted to make a home for her by that time.

I am sure she caught my implied meaning, for she grew agitated and her hands shook as they lay on her crape dress. Her diamond rings, which she had not discarded, flashed in the sunlight. But she rallied her strength. All her pride rose up in rebellion.

"My daughter has her own home, sir; her home with me—what do you mean? During my illness, I have allowed her to remain with her aunt, but she will shortly return to me."

And when I would have urged further, and pleaded as for something dearer than life, she peremptorily stopped me.

"I will hear no more, Mr. Strange. My daughter is descended on my side from the nobles of the land—you must forgive me for thus alluding to it—and it is impossible that I can forget that, or allow her to do so. Never, with my consent, will she marry out of that grade: a professional man is, in rank, beneath her. This is my decision, and it is unalterable. The subject is at an end, and I beg of you never again to enter upon it."

There was no chance of my pursuing it then, at any rate. Hatch came from the house, a folded cloak on her arm, and approached her mistress.

"The carriage is at the gate, ma'am."

Mrs. Brightman rose at once: she was going for a drive. After what had just passed, I held out my arm to her with some hesitation. She put the tips of her fingers within it, with a stiff "Thank you," and we walked to the gate in silence. I handed her into the open carriage; Hatch disposed the cloak upon her knees, assisted by the footman. With a cold bow, Mrs. Brightman, who had already as coldly shaken hands with me, drove away.

Hatch, always ready for a gossip, stood within the little iron gate while she spoke to me.

"We be going away for a bit, sir," she began. "Did you know it?"

"No. Mrs. Brightman has not mentioned the matter to me."

"Well, we be, then," continued Hatch; "missis and me and Perry. Mr. Close have got her to consent at last. I don't say that she was well enough to go before; Close thought so, but I didn't. He wants her gone, you see, Mr. Charles, to get that fancy out of her head about master."

"But does she still think she sees him?"

"Not for the past few days," replied Hatch. "She has changed her bedroom, and taken to the best spare one; and she has been better in herself. Oh, she'll be all right now for a bit, if only—"

"If only what?" I asked, for Hatch had paused.

"Well, you know, sir. If only she can control herself. I'm certain she is trying to," added Hatch. "There ain't one of us would be so glad to find it got rid of for good and all as she'd be. She's put about frightfully yet at Miss Annabel's knowing of it."

"And where is it that you are going to?"

"Missis talked of Cheltenham; it was early, she thought, for the seaside; but this morning she got a Cheltenham newspaper up, and saw that amid the company staying there were Captain and Lady Grace Chantrey. 'I'm not going where my brother and that wife of his are,' she says to me in a temper—for, as I dare say you've heard, Mr. Charles, they don't agree. And now she talks of Brighton. Whatever place she fixes on, Perry is to be sent on first to take lodgings."

"Well, Hatch," I said, "the change from home will do your mistress good. She is much better. I trust the improvement will be permanent."

"Ah, if she would but take care! It all lies in that, sir," concluded Hatch, as I turned away from the gate, and she went up the garden.

We must go back for a moment to the previous evening. Leaving behind us the church of St. Clement Danes and its lighted windows, Lake and I turned into Essex Street, arm-in-arm, went down it and reached my door. I opened it with my latch-key. The hall-lamp was not lighted, and I wondered at Watts's neglect.

"Go on up to my room," I said to Lake. "I'll follow you in a moment."

He bounded up the stairs, and the next moment Leah came up from the kitchen with a lighted candle, her face white and terrified.

"It is only myself, Leah. Why is the lamp not alight?"

"Heaven be good to us, sir!" she cried. "I thought I heard somebody go upstairs."

"Mr. Lake has gone up."

She dropped her candlestick upon the slab, and backed against the wall, looking more white and terrified than ever. I thought she was about to faint.

"Mr. Charles! I feel as if I could die! I ought to have bolted the front door."

"But what for?" I cried, intensely surprised. "What on earth is the matter, Leah?"

"He is up there, sir! Up in your front sitting-room. I put out the hall-lamp, thinking the house would be best in darkness."

"Who is up there?" For in the moment's bewilderment I did not glance at the truth.

"Mr. Tom, sir. Captain Heriot."

"*Mr. Tom!* Up there?"

"Not many minutes ago, soon after Watts had gone out to church—for he was late to-night—there came a ring at the doorbell," said Leah. "I came up to answer it, thinking nothing. A rough-looking man stood, in a wide-awake hat, close against the door there. 'Is Mr. Strange at home?' said he, and walked right in. I knew his voice, and I knew him, and I cried out. 'Don't be stupid, Leah; it's only me,' says he. 'Is Mr. Charles upstairs? Nobody with him, I hope.' 'There's nobody to come and put his head in the lion's mouth, as may be said, there at all, sir,' said I; and up he went, like a lamplighter. I put the hall-lamp out. I was terrified out of my senses, and told him you were at Hastings, but I expected you in soon. And Mr. Charles," wound up Leah, "I think he must have gone clean daft."

"Light the lamp again," I replied. "It always *is* alight, you know. If the house is in darkness, you might have a policeman calling to know what was the matter."

Tom was in a fit of laughter when I got upstairs. He had taken off his rough overcoat and broad-brimmed hat, and stood in a worn—very much worn—suit of brown velveteen breeches and gaiters. Lake stared at him over the table, a comical expression on his face.

"Suppose we shake hands, to begin with," said Lake. And they clasped hands heartily across the table.

"Did you know me just now, in the Strand, Lake?" asked Tom Heriot.

"I did," replied Lake, and his tone proved that he meant it. "I said to Charley, here, that I had just seen a fellow very like Tom Heriot; but I knew who it was, fast enough."

"You wouldn't have known me, though, if I hadn't lifted my face to the lamp-light. I forget myself at moments, you see," added Tom, after a pause. "Meeting you unexpectedly, I was about to speak as in the old days, and recollected myself only just in time. I say"—turning himself about in his velveteens—"should you take me for a gamekeeper?"

"No, I should not: you don't look the thing at all," I put in testily, for I was frightfully vexed with him altogether. "I thought you must have been taken up by your especial friend, Wren. Twice have I been to the trysting-place as agreed, but you did not appear."

"No; but I think he nearly had me," replied Tom.

"How was that?"

"I'll tell you," he answered, as we all three took chairs round the fire, and I stirred it into a blaze. "On the Wednesday I did not go out at all; I told you I should not. On the Thursday, after dusk, I went out to meet you, Charley. It was early, and I strolled in for a smoke with Lee and a chat with Miss Betsy. The old man began at once: 'Captain Strange, Policeman Wren has been here, asking questions about you.' It seems old Wren is well known in the neighbourhood—"

"Captain Strange?" cried Lake. "Who is Captain Strange?"

"I am—down there," laughed Tom. "Don't interrupt, please. 'What questions?' I said to Lee. 'Oh, what your name was, and where you came from, and if I had known you long, and what your ship was called,' answered Lee. 'And you told him?' I asked. 'Well, I should have told him, but for Betsy,' he said. 'Betsy spoke up, saying you were a sailor-gentleman that came in to buy tobacco and newspapers; and that was all he got out of us, not your name, captain, or anything. As Betsy said to me afterwards, it was not our place to answer questions about Captain Strange: if the policeman wanted to know anything, let him apply to the captain himself. Which I thought good sense,' concluded Lee. As it was."

"Well, Tom?"

"Well, I thought it about time to go straight home again," said Tom; "and that's why I did not meet you, Charley. And the next day, Friday, I cleared out of my diggings in that quarter of the globe, rigged myself out afresh, and found other lodgings. I am nearer to you now, Charley: vegetating in the wilds over Blackfriars Bridge."

"How could you be so imprudent as to come here to-night? or to be seen in so conspicuous a spot as the Strand?"

"The fit took me to pay you a visit, old fellow. As to the Strand—it is a fine thoroughfare, you know, and I had not set eyes on it since last summer. I walked up and down a bit, listening to the church bells, and looking about me."

"You turn everything into ridicule, Tom."

"Better that, Charley, than into sighing and groaning."

"How did you know that Leah would open the door to you? Watts might have done so."

"I had it all cut-and-dried. 'Is Mrs. Brown at home?' I should have said, in a voice Watts would never have known. 'Mrs. Brown don't live here,' old Watts would have answered; upon which I should have politely begged his pardon and walked off."

"All very fine, Tom, and you may think yourself amazingly clever; but as sure as you are living, you will run these risks once too often."

"Not I. Didn't I give old Leah a scare! You should have heard her shriek."

"Suppose it had been some enemy—some stickler for law and justice—that I had brought home with me to-night, instead of Lake?"

"But it wasn't," laughed Tom. "It was Lake himself. And I guess he is as safe as you are."

"Be sure of that," added Lake. "But what do you think of doing, Heriot? You cannot hide away for ever in the wilds of Blackfriars. I would not answer for your safety there for a day."

"Goodness knows!" said Tom. "Perhaps Charley could put me up here—in one of his top bedrooms?"

Whether he spoke in jest or earnest, I knew not. He might remember that I was running a risk in concealing him even for an hour or two. Were it discovered, the law might make me answer for it.

"I should like something to eat, Charley."

Leaving him with Lake, I summoned Leah, and bade her bring up quickly what she had. She speedily appeared with the tray.

"Good old Leah!" said Tom to her. "That ham looks tempting."

"Mr. Tom, if you go on like this, loitering in the open streets and calling at houses, trouble will overtake you," returned Leah, in much the same tone she had used to reprimand him when a child. "I wonder what your dear, good mother would say to it if she saw you throwing yourself into peril. Do you remember, sir, how often she would beg of you to be good?"

"My mother!" repeated Tom, who was in one of his lightest moods. "Why, you never saw her. She was dead and buried and gone to heaven before you knew anything of us."

"Ah well, Master Tom, you know I mean Mrs. Heriot—afterwards Mrs. Strange. It wouldn't be you, sir, if you didn't turn everything into a jest. She was a good mother to you all."

"That she was, Leah. Excused our lessons for the asking, and fed us on jam."

He was taking his supper rapidly the while; for, of course, he had to be away before church was over and Watts was home again. The man might have been true and faithful; little doubt of it; but it would have added one more item to the danger.

Lake went out and brought a cab; and Tom, his wide-awake low on his brow, his rough coat on, and his red comforter round about his throat, vaulted into it, to be conveyed over Blackfriars Bridge to any point that he might choose to indicate.

"It is an amazing hazard his going about like this," cried Lake, as we sat down together in front of the fire. "He must be got out of England as quickly as possible."

"But he won't go."

"Then, mark my words, Charles, bad will come of it."

CHAPTER IV. RESTITUTION

TIME had gone on—weeks and weeks—though there is little to tell of passing events. Things generally remained pretty much as they had been. The Levels were abroad again. Mrs. Brightman on the whole was better, but had occasional relapses; Annabel spent most of her time at Hastings; and Tom Heriot had not yet been taken.

Tom was now at an obscure fishing village on the coast of Scotland, passing himself off as a fisherman, owning a small boat and pretending to fish. This did not allay our anxiety, which was almost as great as ever. Still, it was something to have him away from London. Out of Great Britain he refused to move.

Does the reader remember George Coney's money, that so strangely disappeared the night of Mr. Brightman's death? From that hour to this nothing has been seen or heard of it: but the time for it was now at hand. And what I am about to relate may appear a very common-place ending to a mystery—though, indeed, it was not yet quite the ending. In my capacity of story-teller I could have invented a hundred romantic incidents, and worked them and the reader up to a high point of interest; but I can only record the incident as it happened, and its termination was a very matter-of-fact one.

I was sitting one evening in the front room: a sitting-room now—I think this has been said before—smoking my after-dinner cigar. The window was open to the summer air, which all day long had been intensely hot. A letter received in the morning from Gloucestershire from Mr. Coney, to which his son had scrawled a postscript: "Has that bag turned up yet?" had set me thinking of the loss, and from that I fell to thinking of the loss of the Clavering will, which had followed close upon it. Edmund Clavering, by the way, had been with me that day to impart some news. He was going to be married—to a charming girl, too—and we were discussing settlements. My Lady Clavering, he said, was figuring at Baden-Baden, and report ran that she was about to espouse a French count with a fierce moustache.

Presently I took up the *Times*, not opened before that day, and was deep in a police case, which had convulsed the court in Marlborough Street with laughter, and was convulsing me, when a vehicle dashed down Essex Street. It was the van of the Parcels Delivery Company.

"Mr. Strange live here?" was the question I heard from the man who had descended from the seat beside the driver, when Watts went out.

"All right," said Watts.

"Here's a parcel for him. Nothing to pay."

The driver whipped up his horse, then turned sharply round, and—overturned the van. It was not the first accident of a similar nature, or the last by many, that I have seen in that particular spot. How it is I don't know, but drivers, especially cabmen, have an unconquerable propensity for pulling their horses round in a perilously short fashion at the bottom of Essex Street, and sometimes the result is that they come to grief. I threw down my newspaper and leaned out at the window watching the fun. The street was covered with parcels, and the driver and his friend were throwing off their consternation in choice language. One hamper could not be picked up: it had contained wine loosely packed, and the broken bottles were lying in a red pool. Where the mob collected from, that speedily arrived to assist, was a marvel. The van at length took its departure up the street, considerably shorn of the triumph with which it had dashed down.

This had taken up a considerable space of time, and it was growing too dark to resume my newspaper. Turning from the window, I proceeded to examine the parcel which Watts had brought up on its arrival and placed on the table. It was about a foot square, wrapped in brown paper, sealed

and tied with string; and, in what Tony Lumpkin would have called a confounded cramped, up-and-down hand, where you could not tell an izzard from an R, was directed "C. Strange, Esquire."

I took out my penknife, cut the string, and removed the paper; and there was disclosed a pasteboard-box with green edges, also sealed. I opened it, and from a mass of soft paper took out a small canvas bag, tied round with tape, and containing thirty golden sovereigns!

From the very depth of my conviction I believed it to be the bag we had lost. It was the bag; for, on turning it round, there were Mr. Coney's initials, S. C., neatly marked with blue cotton, as they had been on the one left by George. It was one of their sample barley bags. I wondered if they were the same sovereigns. Where had it been? Who had taken it? And who had returned it?

I rang the bell, and then called to Watts, who was coming up to answer it, to bring Leah also. It was my duty to tell them, especially Leah, of the money's restitution, as they had been inmates of the house when it was lost.

Watts only stared and ejaculated; but Leah, with some colour, for once, in her pale cheeks, clasped her hands. "Oh, sir, I'm thankful you have found it again!" she exclaimed. "I'm heartily thankful!"

"So am I, Leah, though the mystery attending the transaction is as great as ever; indeed, more so."

It certainly was. They went down again, and I sat musing over the problem. But nothing could I make out of it. One moment I argued that the individual taking it (whomsoever it might be) must have had temporary need of funds, and, the difficulty over, had now restored the money. The next, I wondered whether anyone could have taken the bag inadvertently, and had now discovered it. I locked the bag safely up, wrote a letter to George Coney, and then went out to confide the news to Arthur Lake.

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