

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 to-morrow 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 to-night 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 slyly. “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, to-morrow 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, to-night. 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 to-night, and come to me to-morrow 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 fore-fathers—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 any one 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 sea-weed (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 sand hills, 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 up-stairs 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 down-stairs 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 up-stairs 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 up-stairs, 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 pent-house. 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.¹

“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!

¹ 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 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 to-morrow. 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 to-morrow, 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 to-night—or, if not, I may succeed better to-morrow 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.